

Shower of Love collects \$58,000 in cash, baby supplies

By **RAYMOND CASTILE**
rcastile@yourjournal.com

ST. CHARLES COUNTY

Hundreds of babies have food, diapers and other supplies thanks to the second annual Shower of Love.

The drive collected 7,648 baby care items, including 1,500 jars of baby food, 300 cans of formula, 700 packages of diapers, 26 mattresses and five cribs.

It also collected \$6,200 in cash for a combined total value of \$58,000 in donated money and baby care items. National companies contributed \$18,400 in items. The rest came from local sources.

The Community and Children's Resource Board of St. Charles County organized the drive, more than doubling last year's total of

\$24,000.

The organization collected the donations in April and distributed them to five agencies serving teen parents in St. Charles County: Youth In Need, St. Louis Crisis Nursery, Mary Queen of Angels, Healthy Beginnings and Our Lady's Inn.

Connie Smith, a case worker at Our Lady's Inn, said the drive provided 10 percent of the baby items the organization would need this year. Publicity about the drive also attracted new volunteers, she said.

Located near New Melle, Our Lady's Inn is an emergency home for pregnant women and their children.

"They are usually poor, homeless and pregnant. Some have been kicked out by their parents. They have no other place to go,"

Smith said.

Our Lady's Inn gives the women a place to live while they obtain their GED, find a job and learn parenting skills. Most women stay for about eight months. About 70 infants are born at Our Lady's Inn each year. Smith said the organization operates on a shoestring budget.

Bruce Sowatsky, executive director of the Community and Children's Resource Board, said parents can spend as much as \$12,550 during their child's first year. This creates stress for already financially-strapped families.

"There is high correlation between child abuse and people

experiencing financial stress and poverty," Sowatsky said. "It gets overwhelming for them. When a child is upset and crying, a parent who is already feeling stress is more likely to blow up."

The resource board began planning the Shower of Love program in 2006 in response to recent child beatings and deaths.

The resource board administers the Community Children's Service Fund, established in 2004 when St. Charles County voters approved a 1/8-cent sales tax. Sowatsky said state statistics indicate child abuse in St. Charles County dropped 26 percent from 2005 to 2006.