

TEXARKANA, Texas — Local firefighters' annual Fill the Boot fundraiser for the Muscular Dystrophy Association will be an all-online event this year.

Firefighters in Texarkana Professional Fire Fighters Association Local 367 normally stand at busy intersections and accept cash donations drivers drop into boots. But because of concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, this year they are asking people to contribute through a website.

"This summer, the program will launch virtually to address social distancing guidelines for the fire fighters and the vulnerable community MDA serves," a news release stated.

To donate, visit filltheboot.donordrive.com/participant/texarkana online.

Texas-side firefighters collected more than \$25,400, a record high, in last year's Fill the Boot effort.

Donations will be accepted through the end of the year, but firefighters hope to reach their goal of setting a new record by Labor Day, local campaign coordinator Craig Hicks said.

"This is totally new so we are not sure how it will go, but we know the citizens of Texarkana will step up and help like they have over the last 30 years," he said.

MDA has partnered with the International Association of Fire Fighters, Local 367's parent union, in Fill the Boot campaigns since 1954.

"IAFF members display an unwavering support for MDA year after year, raising critical funds and awareness to help our families get the care they need," MDA Executive Director April Catarella said.

MDA is the the largest source of funding for neuromuscular disease research outside of the federal government. Since its founding, the organization has committed more than \$1 billion to science and care for people with muscular dystrophy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, often called Lou Gehrig's disease, and other conditions that affect the muscles and their direct nervous system control.