

Volunteerism: It's a very good thing

By SHEILA GARRETT
Special to the Record-Eagle

In spite of the exhilarating round of shopping, card writing and entertaining that precedes each holiday season, many residents are also giving their time to volunteer organizations that we depend upon year-round. More volunteers of all ages are welcome and activities await those with an interest in helping others.

Community Meals

Sandra Svec is hoping to have volunteers in her home working on the 13th annual Community Christmas dinner as early as the day after Thanksgiving. They are needed to make calls to people who were served last year, to check their whereabouts. There is always late office work to be done, she said. Anyone knowing of someone who will be alone on Christmas may give their names to Svec at 263-7130.

Last year the program served more than 900 people. Of those, 605 had Christmas dinners delivered to their homes. Volunteers are needed to prepare, pack and deliver meals, serve those who attend the dinner, drive those who need transportation, monitor halls and clean up. This year's entrees will feature Salisbury steak and ham.

The dinner will be held at Trinity Lutheran Church in Traverse City. Meals will be delivered from 11 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. The public will be served from 1-3 p.m. Donations of money and food are needed. Checks, made payable to "Community Meals Program" with the notation "Christmas Dinner," may be mailed to Emmanuel United Methodist Church, 402 W. Ninth, Traverse City, MI 49684. To volunteer or donate food, call Svec or phone Emmanuel United at 946-4930.

Grand Traverse Pavilions

Volunteers are welcome to give Santa and Mrs. Santa a hand, said

Patty De Agostino, coordinator. For a number of years, elderly residents have dressed up in costume to meet children, have their pictures taken with them and listen to their Christmas wishes. The Clauses also take wish calls from children at 932-ELFS. Their helpers of all ages take photos, hand out candy canes, wrap gifts and sing carols.

Grand Traverse Pavilions is an inter-generational community center involved in community outreach for all ages. Licensed day care is provided for children ages 6 to 12 and there are opportunities for volunteers to work with children. Field trips, like going to see Christmas lights, are popular activities, and help with transportation is always appreciated.

In the Pavilions' Best Friends program, elderly residents who have no family are visited by volunteers. Young people are always welcome to participate.

"They are great. They can be elves, or they can carol or visit," added De Agostino.

Children in the day care center make cards and give presents to the elderly.

In an adult day care program, elderly adults come for the day, giving caregivers time to prepare for the holiday. Visitors are free to participate in arts and crafts, visit with children or stay for caroling, with pianos and organs available.

A year-long program, Love on a Leash, allows volunteers and their pets to visit the residents.

The Pavilions would welcome donations such as video tapes and used books, particularly big print. Anyone wishing to participate should call Patty De Agostino at 932-3020.

United Way

This year United Way is focusing on the Youth Friends Program throughout Antrim, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse and Leelanau counties. The program, which matches up volunteer mentors and students from grades K to 12, is cur-

rently operating in 16 school districts and 72 buildings.

"We believe you can take the time to help kids now, or have problems later," explained spokesperson Barb Lemcool. "We do not target kids at risk, because we believe all kids can use a role model."

The program is school-based, so all volunteers are background checked, but more willing adults are needed. A minimum of one hour a week in the school, before or after the school day, is required. There is a waiting list of children needing mentors. Liason people such as school social workers or teachers match volunteers and students.

"Retired people are most welcome. They are tremendously helpful, because often their own grandchildren live far away and they have a wealth of experience to share," said Lemcool said. "In the Youth Friends program, results can be seen right away, and both the giver and receiver benefit."

For further information, phone 947-3200.

American Red Cross

Lisa Marks, executive director of the Traverse City office of the American Red Cross, is proud of the way area volunteers have helped.

"Volunteerism is up — all have pitched in," she said. "We're only a year old, as far as operating across six counties goes. They are all volunteers, contributing their expertise."

The Red Cross assists in three areas of community need, she said. About 75 people are on call at all times throughout the area in the event of a disaster. They work closely with emergency services, provide sustenance like food and care, for police and firemen. If a major disaster ever occurred, plans are in place to provide shelter on a large scale.

The Red Cross is very involved with Homeland Security, in helping to formulate plans for this area. They are also prepared to help

Munson Hospital in the event of a biological crisis.

A small number of local volunteers assist in the Armed Forces Emergency Services, helping with transportation in the event of such situations as a death in the Service person's family at home.

About 200 volunteers were involved in the Health and Safety program last year. Activities include training in CPR, AED and aquatics safety. Classes are held in schools and other locations in the six counties.

"They can come to the office and discuss what they would like to do," Marks said. "They may choose their regular work, or they may prefer an entirely different activity than what they do in their job. There are a lot of options."

Anyone interested in becoming a volunteer may call 947-7286.

Women's Resource Center

Community Events and Volunteer Coordinator Courtney Miles said that volunteers are needed to collect gifts presented by donors, and to distribute them to clients.

Some extra help is also greatly appreciated in wrapping gifts, Miles said. Adults and teens have all wrapped packages in the past. Area schools and Scout chapters have contributed their time.

"With a lot of willing people, it can be done in three to six hours, instead of several days," Miles added. "And it's a fun activity."

Poinsettias for Peace, operated through Plantmasters of Suttons Bay, is a program that benefits the



Photo courtesy of Grand Traverse Pavilions

Santa stops by for a visit with residents at the Grand Traverse Pavilions.

Women's Resource Center. It is a fundraising event, with volunteers needed for only one day, to distribute plants to those who have purchased them.

The Women's Resource Center has offices in Traverse City, Kalkaska, Benzie and Leelanau counties and is the sponsor of Helen's House, the Traverse City shelter for women and children who have been victims of domestic violence. For further information, phone Courtney Miles, 941-1210.

The Women's Resource Center Thrift Shoppe

Help is needed all the time, according to Carol Rose, who has been helping there for 15 years. Throughout the holiday season, there is a particular need for people who are willing to work on the selling floor, rearranging racks and doing display. Busy cashiers need help with bagging purchases, and anyone wanting to be a cashier is welcome to take extra training. Those who prefer to work behind

the scenes may help with sorting and sizing. To volunteer, call Rose at 946-4180.

Salvation Army

Major Thomas Riggs said his organization is currently taking applications for volunteers. Candidates are interviewed about their interests so that, in helping others, they are able to further expand their own horizons, he said.

The Salvation Army will be collecting food, toys and clothing, and also screening those interested in "adopting" a family. The family, or perhaps an elderly person, will then compose a wish list, and the donors will try to fill it. Names of recipients are kept anonymous.

Some people and organizations may want to continue helping their adopted families or persons three to four times a year, Major Riggs said. For further information, phone 946-4644.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.

True gift for grandparents is both personal and thoughtful

By DANA GEORGE
Special to the Record-Eagle

So, Grandma and Grandpa's house is full to the brim of knickknacks and dust catchers. They've lived rich, full lives and now own everything they desire. The challenge has become what to give the grandparents who already have everything. Maybe one of these ideas will spark your imagination:

The gift of relaxation

Always a nice surprise after the hustle and bustle of the holidays, why not prepay for a gift certificate at an area salon? Grandma or Grandpa can splurge and enjoy a full-body massage, facial, manicure, pedicure or haircut. Why not check out one of the holiday gifts sets available at local salons? Many put together packages for men and women, from the younger set to the grandparents.

The gift that keeps giving

Make a coupon book, good for things like, "One free leaf raking," or "One free gutter cleaning." These are jobs around the grandparent's house that need doing anyway. What a relief for them to know they can count on you.

The gift of company

Sometimes the best gift is just knowing your family cares. Set time aside every month to accompany Grandma and Grandpa to the theater or an afternoon in the park. Or, you can take in a play like Old Town Playhouse's "The Lion In Winter," set to begin at the end of January. Make it a family priority. It's one the grandparents are sure to value.

Movie madness

Prepay the video store near your grandparent's house for movie rentals. Blockbuster and Family Video both offer gift cards in various amounts. For example, a \$20 gift card will pay for six new releases at Blockbuster and eight new releases at Family Video. Or, if Grandma and Grandpa prefer older movies, that \$20 gift card will cover the rental of 20 movies at either store. Take the grandparents to the video store or find out what they'd like to see and pick it up for them. Make a special occasion of watching the movies together.

A ticket to ride

Getting away to see that old friend or favorite relative can be tough for those on a fixed income. How about buying a ticket for Grandma or Grandpa to take a trip down memory lane? If you travel frequently yourself, consider using

frequent flyer miles to purchase the tickets. Regardless of the mode of travel, you can keep the cost down by buying the tickets in advance. Whether it's a plane, train or bus ticket, they're sure to appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Calling all snowbirds

Do the grandparents get away from the snow a few months each year, or live permanently in another part of the country? Buy a prepaid calling card and let them know you'd like to hear from them while they're gone. The deals on prepaid calling cards are endless. Various cards are available at Sam's Club, Wal-Mart, Target and other area retailers. Or, call your long distance carrier and ask about any specials they have on calling cards.

Scrapbook memories

This will work if you can get your hands on some of your grandpar-

ent's old photographs. There are tons of creative aids on the market to help you put together a scrapbook, featuring the times of their lives. If you're not sure how to get started, check out one of the local scrapbook businesses like Pages in Time, or Stamp'n & Scrap'n.

Dana George is a local freelance writer.

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