

The Salvation Army offers a ringing message of compassion and giving

By KRISTEN COUNTS
Special to the Record-Eagle

Over the years, the Salvation Army has given assistance to countless people in need. A true army, with a rich history, the Salvation Army offers a message of giving, compassion and spiritual salvation.

At Christmastime, their volunteers bundle up and ring bells near store entrances, accepting donations in kettles and buckets — a common sight for busy holiday shoppers for as long as anyone can remember.

The Salvation Army started in 1865 in London, England.

"Go for souls and go for the worst," proclaimed founder William Booth, who wanted to reach prostitutes and other destitute people who were living on the streets, their plight ignored.

"It (the Salvation Army) is based upon the Christian church," said Mary Vollink, Christmas coordinator at the Salvation Army in Traverse City and a bell-ringer for 31 years. "This is not a denomination, it envelopes all Christians."

Major Thomas Riggs, commanding officer of Traverse City's Salvation Army, offered some history of bell-ringing in the United States.

"It goes back to San Francisco at the turn of the century. It started with a Salvation Army officer who was concerned with the widows and orphans of mariners. At that point, there was no support for them," said Riggs. "He put a kettle on a tripod, rang the bell, and said, 'Remember the widows and orphans, keep the kettle boiling and give to the Salvation Army.'"

Vollink initially became involved in the Salvation Army by participating in girls' programs and attending church services at the branch in Holland, Michigan.

"I was brought into the Salvation Army at a very young age, at 3 or 4 years old," said Vollink. "I started bell-ringing when I was 13 or 14."

All of her siblings were bell-ringers as well. Over time, Vollink's commitment to the Salvation Army evolved into the position that she holds today.

Vollink's job is to oversee Christmas outreach projects. Funds obtained by bell-ringers provide support for many of these programs, including food gift certificates for people in need. Bell-ringer funds are also put toward spreading holiday cheer to nursing facility residents.

"We give gifts to residents in all nursing homes and most adult foster care homes in the (Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties) area — 792 people, I believe," said Vollink.

Additional use of the funds includes year-round counseling services and a food pantry. Vollink also organizes an adopt-a-family program, "where businesses or families contact us and we match them up with families that have come to us needing help. We also have a toy shop where parents can pick up new toys for their kids."

The toys are collected through the Toys for Tots program, but are also dropped off at the Salvation Army office.

Vollink said that various groups often participate in the annual bell ringing. She said that the police and fire departments in Holland once competed against each other when her husband was a police officer there.

"What I like to see are the little kids who come up, pulling on their mom or dad's jacket, to put money in," said Vollink. "Elderly people come up and say that they remember what the Salvation Army did for them in World War I or II and that they want to give something back."

An obvious challenge to bell-ringing is the weather.

"I have had some pretty cold times when the wind was just whipping and there was a lot of snow," said Vollink. "I've also had pleasant weather. I used to do it from 10 in the morning until 8 at night down in Holland. Once you get numb,



Record-Eagle/John L. Russell
Left, Mary Vollink wears the Salvation Army apron as she rings the bell for the Salvation Army kettle at Sam's Club in Traverse City. Right, Vollink watches as 5-year-old Scott Dietrich of St. Helen puts cash into the kettle. Bottom, a shopper contributes to Vollink's kettle. The longtime Salvation Army bell-ringer says that even if you can't contribute, ringers always appreciate a friendly greeting.



you're okay."

More bothersome than cold weather is the reception she sometimes gets from passersby.

"What's frustrating is just people walking by me like I'm not there," said Vollink. "They don't have to give. If they smile, it makes it all worthwhile."

However, bell-ringing is clearly a good opportunity to people-watch.

When asked what she thinks about as she watches shoppers go in and

out of stores, Vollink replied, "I'm wondering sometimes if they know what's the real meaning of the season."

"As a Christian, I know that Jesus was born into the world to offer the free gift of salvation — the best gift of all at Christmas."

Vollink illustrated this by describing a picture that hangs in Riggs' office.

"It's called 'The Invitation,'" she said. "There's a man in the cold and

snow by a building with two doors open. Inside the building is a banquet where there is food and warmth. Jesus is there. He invites us all to commune with him."

She added, "By ringing bells and by giving at Christmas, we are doing it to show God's love. We are not doing it for ourselves."

Riggs' Christmas message to the community is "Because you care, we can care."

When asked if he thought that

charitable giving might be negatively affected by the current economy, Riggs noted that people in lower income brackets typically give the greatest percentage of their income.

Riggs quoted Charles Dickens, who wrote in "A Christmas Carol;" "It is at this season most when want is felt."

Kristen Counts is a local freelance writer.

Charitable giving brings cheer to many during holidays

By SHEILA GARRETT
Special to the Record-Eagle

With the slow economy, many organizations need monetary and material donations. On the bright side, volunteerism is up. People want to help which is urgently needed as the holidays approach.

"After 9/11, many organizations were affected financially," said Lisa Marks of Traverse City's American Red Cross. "A lot of money went out of the community. Everyone across the state has suffered terribly."

She pointed out that the Red Cross receives no government support, though a portion of the Traverse City office expenses are funded by United Way.

"People count on Red Cross," she said, "in times of trouble, they want to know the Red Cross is there."

Donors may send a check to the Red Cross, with a portion designated for local use. For more information, contact the Red Cross at 947-7286.

Major Thomas Riggs of the Salvation Army also said that donations are lagging a bit, compared to last year. He has confidence that the community will rise to the occasion.

"The spirit of giving is strong in the Grand Traverse area," he said. "They came through with flying colors last year."

The Salvation Army always needs items for their thrift store, located in Traverse City. Although they do not accept large appliances, all other types of household items and clothing are welcome.

"We can always use coats, gloves, boots and hats for everyone," said Riggs. "Men's working clothes are particularly needed."

Usable items may be brought to the Salvation Army in Tra-

verse City. They will be sold at a low cost, or, in the cases of those who have no resources, arrangements will be made to help them get what they need for free, said Riggs. The thrift store is open Monday - Saturday. Call 946-5194 for further information.

There is still a need for bell-ringers and volunteers to deliver toys to children. Anyone wishing to participate may phone Mary Vollink, coordinator of volunteers at the Salvation Army, at 946-4644.

"Our service area is so big, it takes in all of Northern Michigan," said Jim Carruthers, executive director of the HIV/AIDS Wellness Network. "We usually get Christmas baskets and we need help, and not just in Traverse City, in transporting them."

Carruthers said his organization could also use more assistance and supplies in the office. People can call and see what they can do best, he said.

Supplies such as non-perishables, instant meals, laundry and bath soap, and items for personal hygiene, such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, are useful.

Their office could use color and white copy paper, envelopes and pens.

Welcome holiday gifts are Meijer gift cards, which allow recipients to choose items for themselves, and also gas cards.

"Used automobiles are also very welcome," added Carruthers.

HIV/AIDS Wellness Network is dedicated to providing support to individuals affected by the AIDS virus and their families. The organization also sponsors preventative education programs. Anyone wishing to help may phone Carruthers at 933-0279. Donations may be left at the Wellness office in Traverse City.

This year, the staff at the Goodwill Inn is attempting to

serve people in a more empowering way. Their new program will allow client families to "shop" for each other with the help of volunteers, and to have some choice in what they give and receive.

The Inn's aim is to provide "basic needs and a few delights" with the help of other community agencies and the Toys for Tots program.

A list of items needed for the approximately 500 persons they hope to aid this year has been compiled. Diaper bags for babies and duffel bags for men, women, teens and children are needed, since many homeless persons have all their possessions in plastic bags. Basic necessities, such as soap, toothpaste, disposable razors, hats, gloves and sheets and blankets are needed.

Goodwill suggests that donors purchase gift cards from local department stores so that items they are lacking can be purchased. Phone cards, coupons to Burger King or McDonalds, and movie gift certificates could brighten someone's holiday.

Donations in memory of a loved one or in lieu of a Christmas gift to the boss are suggested. Phone Cindy Witkowski or Lois Lannin at 922-4890 for more information.

There is no problem this Christmas with animal adoptions, said Sharon Waterman at the Cherryland Humane Society, as people are continuing to share their lives with homeless animals. She added, however, that the Society could use more volunteers and supplies.

The Humane Society Wish List includes Puppy and Dog Chow, Cat and Kitten Chow, washable cat toys, treats for dogs and cats, and kitty litter. Paper towels, rugs, laundry detergent and bleach are useful. Office supplies are a welcome donation.

The Cherryland Humane Society has a relatively new location at 1750 Ahlberg Rd., Traverse City and can be reached at 946-5116.

The Father Fred Foundation is in good shape for winter clothes this year. However, there is a pressing need for funds to help people pay their utilities.

"We need to get the power back on," said Mike Shockley, foundation coordinator.

The Foundation food pantry serves 40 to 50 families each day. Items with a long shelf life, such as cereal, pork and beans, canned soups and stews and mixed vegetables are especially useful, as are personal grooming products such as shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, diapers and laundry soap.

All pantry items and furniture received are given away; none are sold.

Shockley said the Foundation could use more volunteers to help sort donations and to work on specific events, such as the Frostbite Food Drive in February, when there is a major collection in front of Gordie Howe's Tavern & Eatery in Traverse City. Anyone of any religious background needing help, or wishing to make a donation or to volunteer, may call 947-2055 from Tues. - Fri., 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The United Way Volunteer Center is collecting needed items for local food pantries and Toys for Tots. Toys, warm socks, boots, hats and mittens may be dropped off at community collection points or at the Volunteer Center in Traverse City. Also needed are canned goods and other non-perishable foods, personal products such as soap, toothpaste and shampoo. For more information, call 947-3200.

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.

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