

# Volunteerism and charity are fine forms of giving

BY LYNDA TWARDOWSKI  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Mary Ellen Black retired after working for AT&T for 20 years and moved up to Traverse City from downstate. But she was still young and suddenly had a lot of time on her hands.

After reading an item in the paper about helping to end sex abuse and domestic violence, she decided to start volunteering with the Women's Resource Center. She's been volunteering there since October of 2000, first in the thrift store and currently at the administration office.

Although at first she was unsure she would be able to provide any real help, Black now knows that every little bit is important.

"Anything that we as volunteers can do to support [the staff] is crucial," she said.

Volunteering as a concept is something very important to Black, and rewarding as well.

"The little that I give, I receive back so much more," she said. "Really, there is no reason why, in the many hours of a week, a little time can't be shared on something so worthwhile."

During the upcoming holiday season, there are many area organizations that depend on volunteers like Black for the success of their holiday programs, from running toy shops to delivering meals to shut-ins. Here is only a limited list of the many opportunities to share the true meaning of the holidays with your neighbor. In all cases, the giving volunteer spirit can be lived throughout the year as well.

## Women's Resource Center

The primary training session for volunteers at the center takes place in the



fall. However, people can still help with the holiday program, said Courtney Miles, community event and volunteer coordinator. The center is partnered with Toys for Tots and volunteers are needed to help donors bring the presents in and help the clients take them out. Household items, furniture, children's clothing, especially winter clothing, and monetary donations are always welcome for the thrift store. For more information, contact Miles at 929-2190.



## Goodwill Inn

Last year, Goodwill Inn passed out over 500 bags stuffed with holiday goodies and daily necessities to area residents. The bags go to individuals who have come through the Inn, and then to anyone who is in need and not already connected with another agency.

This year the number will rise to 700 duffel bags full of items such as fleece blankets, diapers, shampoo and

gloves. A letter was sent out requesting all of the necessary items and the community response has been considerable.

"It's been great. People want to give," said Amy Kostrzewa, holiday program coordinator. "Volunteerism is another outlet for giving."

Volunteers are needed to sort the products and stuff the bags. The bulk of the stuffing will take place from Dec. 8-12. From Dec. 13-20, volunteers are needed to continue stuffing bags and to help distribute them. In conjunction with Toys for Tots, there will also be a Christmas store. Volunteers can help parents pick out presents for their children. The only requirements for volunteers are that they be at least 16 years old and have reliable transportation.

Another way individuals can help is by putting on a toothbrush or blanket drive. Both are items included in all of the bags. For more information, call the Goodwill/GIVS voicemail at 922-4805, ext. 313.

## Father Fred Foundation

Thanks to a generous outpouring from the community, the Father Fred Foundation has already met its volunteer needs for the holiday season, said director Michael Shockley.

However, volunteers are needed beyond the holidays for tasks as varied as sorting clothes at the foundation to driving trucks. In addition, the foundation is always in need of financial assistance, non-perishable food items, clothing, furniture and household goods. Michael Shockley can be reached at 947-2055.

## Salvation Army

One of the sensory staples of the holiday season is the ringing of the Salvation Army's fund-raising bells. This is not the only job for



which the Salvation Army is looking for volunteers. Help is needed to sort and distribute the food raised through various food drives, to distribute toys through their toy store, and in the thrift store.

Major Thomas Riggs points out that many of these services are needed year round. The impact of all of the tasks, from something as simple as sorting food, extends far beyond the immediate task, he said.

"What they're really doing, even though it only feels like physical or manual labor, is they are making it easier for us to get the food out to those families in need. It provides a sense of participation and satisfaction," Riggs said.

Riggs can be reached at 946-4644.

## Community Meals Program

Every Sunday and Monday night, Trinity Lutheran Church works with 10 other churches hold a dinner for the community. For both Thanksgiving and Christmas, they hold special dinners and volunteers are needed to help these come off without a hitch. Help with the Thanksgiving meal is especially needed, said Sandra Svec, holiday coordinator.

Among the many jobs people could volunteer for are: delivering cards to nursing homes, delivering meals on

both holidays, and set-up the day before the dinners. During the meals, items such as gloves, socks, children's coats and flannel jackets will be passed out. Anyone who would like to donate such items should drop them off at Trinity Lutheran as close to the date of the dinners as possible, as the church doesn't have much storage.

Svec said interest in the Sunday/Monday dinners seems to be rising.

"All of a sudden there has been an increase in the number of people coming to the dinners," Svec said.

She invites all those who might be in the area without family to share the holidays with to join them at the dinners. To find out how to volunteer, call Sandra Svec at 263-7130.



## American Red Cross

Though he has only been on the job as chapter director for a couple of weeks, Kip Diotte is clearly proud of the strong volunteer support the Red Cross receives.

"Historically, the Red Cross has been run 99 percent by volunteers," he said.

To serve a six county area, the only paid employees are Diotte and two part-time workers. The rest of the organization, from CPR instructors to disaster response teams, are pulled from a healthy pool of volunteers.

"It's such a caring community," he said. "Volunteers just seem to appear out of nowhere."

Activities are scaled back during the holidays, but Diotte still encourages people to contact the Red Cross about volunteer opportunities. After a training session, volunteers can choose from the areas of safety,

home family services, and disaster response. The latter category might entail bringing coffee and sandwiches to firemen or bringing clothing and hotel vouchers to fire victims.

Kip Diotte can be reached at 947-7286.

## United Way of Northwest Michigan



## Michigan

One way the United Way can help you in your volunteer endeavors is by serving as a gateway to multiple service organizations in the area.

"We work with various agencies or we can refer [individuals]. All of the agencies are always very busy. We always need volunteers," said Barbara Lemcool, YouthFriends regional director and volunteer coordinator. For example, they work with several sites that are hosting holiday dinners and people can help to serve or cook.

People can also take part in several ongoing programs, such as Afghan Angels, where volunteers knit and crochet afghans which are donated to nursing home residents.

Another way people can take the initiative is to make a food drive in their neighborhood, Lemcool said. The United Way can then make sure the food is distributed to the centers where it's needed the most. For more information, contact Barbara Lemcool at 947-3200.

Lynda Twardowski is a local freelance writer.

## HOT

### This year's top toys

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them for children as young as two," said Stiebel, adding that the plush cloth dolls are appealing to school-age kids as well. "They have a long shelf life."

Dandelion carries Groovy Girls accessories and fashionable clothing. What's great about these dolls, Stiebel said, is that "it's real easy to find one that looks like your child."

At \$11 per doll, they are a reasonable gift choice, too, she added.

### A bit more unique

For some shoppers, old-fashioned tried-and-true toys are the best gifts for the children in their life.

"Quality is kind of a broad word, but something that keeps a child's attention for months, something that's not going to break — is what some people want," said Leslie Ansted, manager of Toy Harbor in downtown Traverse City.

And wooden toys meet all

the criteria.

A wooden pirate ship called The Venture — with pirates, cannons and other accessories — is new this year. Also available is a wooden tree house, complete with figurines, furniture and a pulley system. Both are expected to sell well at Toy Harbor, Ansted said.

Perennial store favorites include old-fashioned Jack-in-the-boxes and metal spinning tops, said Ansted.

Dinosaurs are also popular at Toy Harbor. New this year is the Dino Sound Station, which features more than 60 "sound spots" that allow children to place their dinosaur figures on a mat and the pressure creates sounds like roaring and stomping.

Dinosaurs also are big at Dandelion. Mezososaurs, which Stiebel said are "super soft and fuzzy," are popular, especially with boys.

Another new item that Ansted predicted will be a hit with both boys and girls is the wooden stove, oven, refrigerator and sink set. Accessories from dishes to pots and pans to aprons



and chef's hats are also available.

"We got them in this summer and sold them out, so we got them in again," she said of the brightly colored toys. "They're all wood and really nicely done."

At Dandelion, the line of wooden items known as Plan toys are well-received.

"They're very developmentally appropriate and things kids are interested in," Stiebel said.

A geometric sorting board, a fruit and vegetable play set and the classic pounding bench (wooden pegs and hammer) are



Record-Eagle/Jim Bovin

Above left, dinosaurs are a perennial favorite at Traverse City's Toy Harbor. Above, a wooden tree house — ala Swiss Family Robinson — comes with figurines, furniture and a pulley system.

among the most popular wooden toys at the store. A puzzle called the Twisted Form, which prompts children to make shapes out of thick pieces of wood, is also great for kids.

"It's really good for their sense of spatial relations, fine motor skills and a little more of abstract thinking as far as, 'How am I going to turn this piece?' It's kind of neat because

it's not a picture or a recognizable object," said Stiebel.

Heather Johnson Durocher is a local freelance writer.

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