

The list is on the move north

There's a buzz in the air and the Big Guy seems to be the cause. Yes, many folks tune into Santa's thoughts this time of year, despite his not really and truly being the reason for the season, but for me, that doesn't mean he's relegated to the back of the Christmas bus. Most of the message intertwined with Santa is a good one; albeit one that carries a pretty powerful stick instead of a fat juicy carrot. But we'll deal with motivational mindsets later.

My earliest memories of visits with Santa Claus involve an obscure department store in Utah. I always wondered – even as a 3 or 4 year old – why the jolly old elf would agree to have himself shackled up next to the gardening supplies at the back of the store during what was purported to be “his” season, but perhaps that was a hint at the profession I would one day find myself participating in as an adult. The candy canes were there and so were a couple of rather dubiously excited elves; it seemed they were more concerned with collecting my mother's cash than with whether their boss was listening to my Christmas wishes.

While Santa's pretty cool, I really like the way many Mother Lode residents deck their halls, or, rather, their homes. This is the season of lights and as LEDs and other amazing technologies come to the decorations counter, lots of colorful displays hint at spectacular nights to come.

The Calaveras County Historical Society is granting an early

Christmas wish to visitors to its museum on Main Street in San Andreas; admission is free throughout the month of December. And that's not solely for the downtown museum; the Red Barn Museum out at the Government Center on Mountain Ranch Road is also part of the present.

Both of these repositories have amazing collections of memorabilia, mostly collected from Calaveras County families. The upstairs part of the downtown museum traces life in the area from just before the Gold Rush forward, and the jail cells downstairs once housed some pretty infamous characters. Black Bart was tried in the courtroom upstairs.

At the Red Barn Museum, things turn a little more toward machinery and what made people productive as they settled the foothills. A blacksmith shop and a butcher shop are both completely outfitted and there are many kinds of contraptions scattered about outside.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily and the Red Barn Museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays. Stop into the downtown museum and find the perfect gift for the history buff on your list (most everything's on sale for 10 percent off, too!).

As for the big guy with the hearty laugh, he'll be at Ironstone Vineyards on Saturday for two seatings of Breakfast With Santa. Visit with St. Nick to alert him to last-minute wishes and enjoy a breakfast and crafts, too. Maybe with the right

cup of coffee offered to the big crimson elf, your naughty one might receive a reprieve.

You can also hop aboard the wagon for a hayride if the weather cooperates. Venturing around the expansive winery property this time of year is a wintry wonder; drive by during the darker hours to spy the lights atop many of the trees.

Finally, I have to give a little shout out to “Almost, Maine,” which is playing at 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through Dec. 22 at the Black Bart Playhouse in Murphys. My schedule hasn't allowed me to get to the show for a review, but I have it on good authority that it's a cute show. Mary Ann Jackson, who

cheerleads for all of the Mother Lode from the Murphys Visitors Center on Main Street, told me there are several nice vignettes that are part of the show (with only one or two she felt were a “little slow”).

The cast of four does a great job, she assured me. As we scurry and hurry to get everything done, take the time to support live theater in your midst so that it can continue to happen here. Reserve at 728-8842.

And as you begin to tie up those loose ends and wrangle all of your relatives and friends together for some mirth and merriment, sit back and relax in the goodness that

Mike Taylor

Calaveras Sluice Box



springs from your fellow men and women this time of year. We all get stressed and we all need to pause and take in those spectacular lights on the neighbor's house. Make the time your time and make it the best.

Reach Mike Taylor@sierralodestar.com.



Breakfast With Santa

WHEN: 9 and 11 a.m. Saturday

WHERE: Ironstone Vineyards, 1894 Six Mile Road, outside Murphys

TICKETS: \$6.75 to \$11.75 at 728-1251 ext. 11

Officers serve so Olympians can compete

This Christmas I'm trying something different; instead of spending money on gifts, I've decided to donate set amounts to charities each of my family members and friends would care about. We just had “Giving Tuesday” fol-

lowing a holiday about being thankful for what we have. And the generally accepted meaning of Christmas revolves around giving, so why are we so reluctant to give where it really matters?

Tip a Cop fundraiser

WHEN: 4 to 7 p.m. Wednesday

WHERE: Applebee's, 851 Sanguinetti Road, Sonora

MORE INFO: 488-9078, coach_dave20@comcast.net or judy@sonc.org

Busy schedules and other factors make it easy to reason away any form of volunteering or giving of time, but giving small amounts in the moment adds up, like dropping a dollar into Santa's tin bucket while he rings a bell in front of Walmart or paying for one of those pre-packaged meals in bags; or you could always tip a cop.

If you've ever received a ticket, you might look forward to telling a cop what to do without any negative consequences. You'll get your chance Wednesday at Applebee's in Sonora, where various law enforcement officials serve as wait staff from 4 to 7 p.m., collecting

Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



tips and donations for Tuolumne County Special Olympics.

Special Olympics provides athletic activities and friendly competition for those with special needs, teaching them motor and team skills and giving them a sense of pride.

“Sports programs for these athletes are very important,” said Tuolumne County Special Olympics Area Director Dave DeCheney. “They take it wholeheartedly. It's just amazing to see how well they can compete when they get into a setting such as a tour-

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“Christmas Open House”
December 15th • 10am-5pm

Mountain Treasures

13643 Tuolumne Road, Sonora, CA 95370

Come join us for super sales, hot coffee, hot cider and cookies.
Get your Christmas gifts here.
Browse through our 34 Vendors' booths.
You are bound to find the “perfect” gift!

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ment or something like that.” DeCheney said Special Olympics gives participants a purpose in life and something to look forward to, helping them to feel good about themselves. They enjoy the competitions, the next of which will be a bowling tournament on Saturday at Black Oak Lanes at 10 a.m. The public is welcome to come and watch.

DeCheney said holding and traveling to competitions throughout Northern California costs Tuolumne County’s Special Olympics more than \$20,000 a year. With 78 registered athletes involved and the cost of sports equipment factored in, the need for donations remains constant.

“These athletes remind me a lot of myself,” DeCheney said. “They live one day at a time. I’m shown by them on a continuous basis that they appreciate everything I do for them by telling me so, giving me a hug or returning the affection I have for each and every one of them. They are a very special group of people and I know I’m



Courtesy photos

Tim Collie putts perfectly at a Special Olympics golf outing.

making a difference in their lives.”

Applebee’s customers get a taste of the passion DeCheney and others have for Special Olympics at Wednesday’s Tip a Cop fundraiser, or you can call DeCheney at 488-9078 to make a donation.

“Tip a Cop makes it more fun for



Lots of fun is packed into Tuolumne County Special Olympics events.

patrons at Applebee’s,” DeCheney said. “People come to donate a little bit. It gives them a chance to meet the law enforcement. They are just people like you and me. It gives them a chance to mingle with the public. It gives the community a

chance to see law enforcement does a lot of good. They are heavily involved with Special Olympics and it gives athletes a chance to get to know some of the law enforcement people. It means a lot to them.”

For more information on Special

Olympics, visit sonc.org or email coach_dave20@comcast.net.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.



Oakdale Roundup

Melinda Owen

The signs are all around us; houses are aglow with lights and myriad decorations. Some are simple, some elaborate. Holiday gatherings bring friends and workmates together to share in the special foods and beverages of the season. Street and sidewalk traffic all over town has increased as a “tick up” in retail trade sparks hope for merchants that good December business will move their bottom lines into the black.

Oakdale’s cowboy Santa has ridden into and out of town – taking with him the gift wishes of many an Oakdale area child. Churches ready services for the community as congregations prepare to celebrate the real reason for the season, the birth of a child who brought a special promise to the world.

Though her arrival may not change the entire world, our little family rejoices in the birth of a granddaughter, Sydney Adelle Owen on Nov. 28.

Because this grandmother spent a bit of time monitoring this special family event, she let the deadlines for reporting some community events slip by, but there are still

Songs are more special this season

some important and fun events to share with you.

The 31st annual CanTree Breakfast benefiting Oakdale Community Sharing will be held from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

Thursday at the Gene Bianchi Community Center. Silent and live auctions give you the opportunity to snag some very nice items you can use for Christmas giving or a personal treat. Sponsored by the Central Valley Association of Realtors and the Oakdale Realtor Council and Affiliates, this event was started many years ago by Realtor Gladys Lemmons to help those less fortunate in our community. It’s too late for an advance ticket, but you might get one at the door for \$5.

Monetary donations and volunteers are still needed for the Oakdale Lions Club’s annual Children’s Christmas Shopping Tour, which will be held Dec. 20. Last year more than 300 children were accompanied by a number of volunteers who helped them shop for basic clothing at a Kmart. Approximately \$120 was spent on each child. After the shopping excursions, the children are treated to pizza, beverages and cookies at the Oakdale Sportsmen’s Club, where they also receive gifts and photos of themselves with Santa to take home to their parents.

According to event chairman Lion

Greg Rivera (who has spearheaded this project for many years), the plans for this year’s event are on schedule, though more money is always needed. Several events throughout the year raise funds for this project, but the bulk of the cash comes in at the last minute. There always seems to be more children in need than can be served and it is hard to turn them down.

If you’d like to donate to this heartwarming project, call Rivera at 847-3252 or Shelayne Rippe Higgs at 581-3776. Last-minute funds always start the collection for next year.

Christmas in Oakdale would not be complete without special music and again this year, the Remedy and Friends Christmas musical presentation takes place at 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 21 at the Magnolia Avenue School auditorium.

The band’s vocalist, Barbara Findlay, coordinated this event for many years, but turned the reins over to musician Fred Stepp for the 2012 concert.

Greg Rivera’s popular western and rock band, Remedy, enjoys a large following in the valley and mountain areas. Members of the group are often joined by a collection of talented amateur musicians of the area for practice and jam nights each month. This group plays a big part in the Christmas music production,

thus the name of the concert: Remedy and Friends.

Joining Remedy onstage this year will be members of the Oakdale High School Band and Orchestra under the direction of Music Director Ross McGinnis, with assistance from Annette Hutton and David Poteet; vocal and instrumental students from Hutton’s Hamlet School of Music; popular piano virtuoso Dale Himes; the duo Alex

(Lucero) and Johnny (Shatswell); fiddler Fred Stepp and wife, Kathy, who plays the upright bass; and accomplished violinist Karen Dahlstrom, who taught both her protégées – Brian Cogburn and Fred Stepp – their fiddlin’ skills. The trio will perform some triple fiddle Christmas songs, too. Last but not least is guitarist and

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Merry Christmas

from Firefall Jewelers

Angels Camp
1529 S. Main St.
736-1550

Copperopolis
135 Stone St.
785-7888

Valley Springs
1906 Vista Del Lago, Ste. E
772-7388



www.firefalljewelers.com

