

Helping hands give the day its light

Homeless men and women line the streets near the Civic Center of San Francisco. I've made a few trips to the area for evening operas and concerts lately. One might easily feel fear in the face of the "shady" types – you see a lot of interesting people in San Francisco. In the past, I would have issued a "bah humbug" with the excuse that there are plenty of homeless shelters and that a lot of homeless people stay on the streets purposely or spend all their money on alcohol. But today I only feel pity, and then, thankfulness.

I know Thanksgiving has passed and the sights and sounds of Christmas have arrived, but Thanksgiving and Christmas seem to go well together. Especially this season, as so many have lost so much to the poor economy. My family has its own share of troubles, but I am incredibly grateful to have a roof over my head and to have parents alive and well who love me. I grew up a spoiled child.

Christmas has always been about Jesus in my family, but a certain element of commercialism has kept us from fully enjoying the spirit of the season. Last year we attempted

to spend less on presents. In my mind, we failed. This year has been a bit more successful, and I am continually convicted to consider giving more instead of getting more, to spend more on family time and less on family gifts. Let me encourage you to do the same.

No matter what holiday you celebrate this winter, consider what you do have and what you can give away, even if all you have to give away is your loving spirit. Gather with friends and family and have a good time catching up, chatting around the tree or in front of the fire. Or attend one of the Christmas dinners. Held on both Christmas Eve and Christmas day, these dinners offer a chance for fellowship with the Tuolumne County community.

The annual Christmas Eve Day Dinner at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds focuses more on providing an experience for the entire community, while the Tuolumne Christmas Day Dinner at the Tuolumne Memorial Hall and the Sonora Christmas Day Dinner at the Sonora Opera Hall focus on reaching out to those in need this Christmas, offering free Christmas meal deliveries. All three events

include Christmas festivities.

"The (Christmas Eve) dinner was started in the early 1980s by two women who worked at the Union Democrat, and were traveling in France," said Cathie Peacock, coordinator for the Christmas Eve dinner. "On Christmas, the two women were feeling the nostalgia and missing their families. As they went around the French village, they came upon a village gathering of family and friends sharing the Christmas Eve potluck meal."

Peacock said the women were warmly invited and included in the gathering. Being moved by this, they thought it would be something worth starting in Tuolumne County. They did, and it continues.

"Over the years this event has morphed from a dinner for the 'needy' only to providing groceries, clothing, toys, etc. and sharing the fellowship, merriment and the meal with community families and friends," Peacock said. "The event has been held at the Sonora Dome, Sonora High School cafeteria, the Grange Hall, Moose Lodge and finally now at the fairgrounds."

Peacock became involved in 1985 as a volunteer and since then

has come to call the dinner a passion of hers. Many people work behind the scenes with Peacock to make the day a success. Helpers at the Tuolumne County Senior Center assist in the cooking of the turkeys, the Kiwanis Club of Sonora lends manpower, Vic's Towing provides and delivers turkeys, Curtis Creek School families and staff gather and provide all the toys, the Sonora Moose Lodge provides all the cooking pots and pans and utensils, several businesses provide services throughout the year to eliminate other costs, and many other individuals and groups contribute as well.

The event has only one fundraiser every April, and because no particular group or organization sponsors the event, Peacock considers it a true community effort. Based on the past three years, Peacock said planners expect to serve about 1,700 meals. They are still looking for volunteers and accepting donations of food and toy items.

James Winters, founder of the Sonora Christmas Day Dinner at the opera hall, said he is still in need of volunteers in addition to baked goods, hygiene products, blankets and children's gifts. This marks the first year Calvary Chapel Sonora, the church indirectly connected with the dinner, has expanded to offer a dinner at the Tuolumne Memorial Hall.

Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



"We're trying to meet all the possible needs," Winters said. "Ours is more of a Christmas day experience, family-oriented feel. It doesn't feel rushed. People stay. We have people on hand to pray with people and just sit and talk."

The Sonora Christmas Eve Dinner is from 12 to 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 24 inside the Sierra Building at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds. The dinner consists of turkey or ham, stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, vegetables, dinner roll, cranberry sauce, dessert and beverage (coffee or water). Santa has toys for children through 12 years old. To volunteer, donate or get more information, call Peacock at 586-4802.

The Christmas day dinners at the Sonora Opera Hall and Tuolumne Memorial Hall are each from 1 to 4 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 25. To arrange for meal delivery or to volunteer or donate items, call Winters at 770-0536 or Justin Flores at 770-7138.

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



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FIRST

Winner!



Christopher Fragapane
from Sutter Creek won the

Bistro Set valued at \$339 from JS West Lumber & Hardware



... and you can win too...

by voting each week during the Best of the Mother Lode 2012

Best Retail Shopping - Online Voting
Best Recreation, Dining & Entertainment - In this issue & online
Best Services - Starting December 28th

It's time to winterize your gear

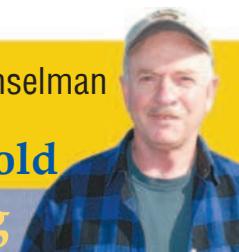
Winter is the time for boat and trailer maintenance; it's also time to clean, protect and even update all of your fishing-related gear so you're ready for next spring. You'll also find many sporting goods stores and tackle shops discounting their stock at this time of year, so you might score a bargain.

I just bought some marine grease, and I've started to winterize all my equipment. I know that winter isn't the most comfortable time to be outside working on our boats, but fishing equipment needs maintenance performed on it every year.

If your boat is parked outside, it might be the first item on your winter task list. Remove as many of your electrical components as you can and bring them inside. This move is to protect them from

William Heinselman

Solid Gold Fishing



the constant moisture and near-freezing conditions experienced in winter. Batteries can be placed in battery boxes and stored inside a shed or the like. Be sure to regularly charge your batteries throughout the winter months to keep them working at full capacity.

Fuel is of the utmost importance, as we all know. Add a small amount of a fuel stabilizer to the fuel tank to help remove any moisture that can damage other sensitive parts in your engine. Replacing your fuel line and con-

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