

HOLIDAYS IN PASO ROBLES

The holidays celebrate the caring connections between people, in the lively language of food, fellowship, and brightly wrapped gifts.

Every year in Paso Robles, neighbors pool their resources to give that sense of belonging to hundreds of neighbors in crisis who can't create it alone.

Here are some ways to be part of that.

Adopt a Family

In the Families Helping Families program, you can "adopt" a very low-income family and help them enjoy a special Christmas. Sponsors can be anyone – clubs, businesses, families, and individuals.

Program organizers will match you with a family that has been screened by social-services agencies to ensure there is a genuine need. You'll contact the family and learn their situation, then decide how you want to help. You can deliver an entire Christmas "package" of gifts, tree, and holiday dinner to your adopted family, or meet a special need, or simply donate funds to the program so needy families not adopted will receive gift certificates.

Every year, 50 to 120 families are blessed this way, depending on how many sponsors step up. Contact sponsor coordinator Bill Brocco (805-235-2592; bill@anarchtee.com) to sign up. Families Helping Families is organized by Transitional Food and Shelter, Inc. of Paso Robles.

Help Fill the Red Kettles

The donations you drop in the red Salvation Army kettles this month will stay in the community, financing all the emergency assistance our local office provides in the coming year. The dollars mount up, raising \$30,000 to \$40,000 that will help local seniors and others with utility bills and housing needs.

The campaign relies on volunteers filling 600 two-hour bell-ringing shifts and many supporting roles behind the scenes. To take part, call 238-3010. The Salvation Army Center at 711 Paso Robles Street is open Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. (ph. 238-9591).

Shelter in a Medical Crisis

On Dec. 8, you can do your Christmas shopping to help a local charity that supplies a rare service: Transitional Food and Shelter Inc. provides emergency housing for homeless people suffering a medical crisis, while they recuperate or stabilize.

With ten studio apartments and a motel-room fund financed with a few grants, donations, and occasional small fundraisers, TFS shelters homeless cancer patients, single mothers with gravely ill children, seriously injured and very sick people released from hospitals but too weak for the streets.

"We formed to help people who fall through the cracks," says Pearl Munak, longtime board member of TFS. "They're severely ill or injured and they're homeless. They don't have insurance or financial aid. They could use board and care but they can't pay for it."

To shelter 300-400 people a year, the charity spends more than \$20,000 on apartment rent and \$30,000 to \$50,000 for motel rooms, if they've got that much. This year the motel fund fell to \$24,000 because grants have shrunk.

Local charities work to make the season bright



People Helping People

By Chris Weygandt Alba

At the all-day Needs N Wishes benefit in Los Osos on Saturday, Dec. 8, you can purchase platters of homemade cookies and candy, new toys, and gift items at great prices, along with music and food. Forty percent of the proceeds will go to TFS. It's at the South Bay Community Center, 2180 Palisades Ave.

Make tax-deductible contributions online at nowheretogo.com or mail to TFS Inc., P.O. Box 4471, Paso Robles, CA 93447. For info, call Pearl at 238-7056. TFS also runs the People's Kitchen, serving free suppers to 40 people a night Monday-Friday (5 p.m., Second Baptist Church, 1937 Riverside Ave.).

Christmas for Children

For two decades, a team effort provides toys, warm coats, and a holiday meal to more than 650 struggling families in our area with some 1,500 children. The community raises about \$40,000 for toys and other gifts, plus donations of coats and meals.

The Day of Giving falls on Saturday, Dec. 15, organized by the Toy Bank of Greater Paso Robles, Marine Corps Toys for Tots, Salvation Army, and Coats for Kids.

You can contribute new toys to the collection boxes around town. They appreciate items of \$15 to \$25 for infants to kids aged 14, with gifts for the youngest and oldest always needed, plus stuffed animals, family games, and sports balls.

Or give your time to the cause during the week of Dec. 10-14, when volunteers organize and shop for gifts and decorate the hall at Plymouth Congregational Church. To help, call volunteer coordinator Sally Mello, 238-4841.

Send tax-deductible donations to the Toy Bank, P.O. Box 2801, Paso Robles, CA 93447.

To help the Salvation Army give every family a grocery gift certificate that day, donate directly to the Salvation Army, P.O. Box 2654, Paso Robles, CA 93447.

Coats for Kids collects new or gently used coats of all sizes for every family member. Plaza Cleaners and Paso Robles Cleaners will clean donated coats brought in by Dec. 8. Drop off new and clean coats

at KPRL, Citibank, Idler's, Office Max, Farm Supply, and St. Rose Church through Dec. 12. Or send a donation payable to the Toy Bank with "Coats for Kids" on the memo line, to the Toy Bank address above. For more info, call Barbie Butz, 461-1234.

Women's Shelter Wishes

People in the community make the holidays brighter by donating hams and turkeys, gifts for the kids, and necessities (or gifts) for the moms.

Topping the wish list: prepaid gas cards and monthly bus passes. Also department-store gift cards, prepaid calling cards, movie passes, new women's sleepwear, and new children's gifts (toys, games, clothing). Drop off at the Women's Resource Center, 1030 Vine St., Mon.-

Fri. 8:30-5 p.m. (ph. 461-1338).

Buy Extra Food

The holiday food-drive season is underway, with collection barrels in grocery stores and local businesses. Most needed are soups, meals in a can, canned food with pop-top lids, stews or chili, beans, rice, pasta, peanut butter, cereal, canned fruits, real fruit juices.

The Paso Robles Library lets you "Can Your Fines" to benefit the Food Bank, forgiving \$1 in overdue-book fines (up to \$16) for each listed food item you bring to the front desk until Dec. 31.

Cash donations stretch the farthest.

Loaves and Fishes, P.O. Box 1720, Paso Robles CA 93447; online donations loavesandfishes.paso.org; 2650 Spring St., weekdays 9 a.m.-noon, 2-4 p.m., Tues. /Thurs. 5:30-7 p.m. (ph 238-4742).

Food Bank Coalition: 9 a.m.-4 p.m., 2212 Golden Hill Rd., Paso Robles CA 93446; website donations slofoodbank.org (ph 238-4664).

At the Homeless Shelter

For kids and grown-ups spending the holiday at the North County homeless shelter, deliver unwrapped donations during business hours to EOC Case Management, c/o Loaves and Fishes, 5411 El Camino Real, Atascadero, CA 93422 (ph. 466-5795).

Youngsters: Puzzles, games, modeling dough, model kits, art and science kits, toys, hair decorations, new warm clothes, movie passes.

Adults: Prepaid gas cards, phone cards, monthly bus passes, warm outerwear, new socks and underwear, camping gear, gift cards for fast food, groceries, department stores, hairstyling/haircuts, movie passes.

Voices for Children

Help abused and neglected children at the annual Voices for Children luncheon fundraiser Dec. 5 at Madonna Inn, benefiting Court Appointed Special Advocates. CASA volunteers mentor children being fostered in the court system.

Highlights: live auction of floral arrangements and silent auction of "Jewelry with a Past" featuring jewelry of different eras donated by the community. Advance tickets needed (\$50), online at slocasa.org or phone 541-6542.