

What Are You Thankful for This Thanksgiving?

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Sun Shines on Pohick Church Christmas Mart

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Anita Stribling of Lorton (left) and Connie Myers of Springfield (right), in charge of the wait staff and kitchen staff respectively, take a breather after serving 300 guests at the 55th Pohick Church Christmas Mart on Thursday, Nov. 20.

No Hunger Games

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PHOTO BY TIM PETERSON/THE CONNECTION

COMMUNITY Proof of Purchase

County-wide nonprofits offer gift ideas and civic engagement.

By TIM PETERSON
THE CONNECTION

Over 20 years as manager of Burke Lake Park, Charlie Reagle has seen a lot of benches installed. So many in fact that he's running out of water view locations. And though many people choose to honor deceased family members with a bench, he's had plenty donated in tribute to the living. One pair of sisters gave a bench as a birthday gift to their mother; it had two plaques, one of which was at ground level so the mother's dog could see it.

"Each one, working with a donor, I know the story with it," said Reagle. "Going out, going around the trail, you wind up spending several hours with them over this whole time."

While water view space may be drying up at Burke Lake, there are plenty of scenic plots available throughout the 420-odd parks around Fairfax County. And there's a collaborative effort underway to help populate that with tax-deductible gifts. It's part of the county's Office of Public Private Partnerships (OP3) "12 Ways of Giving" initiative.

In this instance, citizens can donate a new bench (around \$2,000 for the installation), adopt an existing bench with a plaque (\$800) or have a two-to-three-inch-caliber landscape tree planted. The donations to the parks go through the nonprofit Fairfax County Park Foundation. OP3 is encouraging the public to help address civic issues by making charitable donations as gifts.

"The idea is it's to be very easy, very engaging," said Wendy Lemieux, a spokesperson with OP3. A single web page is a portal to donate to 12 different organizations that each satisfy a county goal for the environment, education, animals or domestic violence. "As you dive deeper, you can get involved and knock someone off your Christmas list as well," Lemieux said.

Charitable giving has become a major factor in the economy: "Donations, in the country as a whole, are now a \$335 billion enterprise," said Alan Abramson, director of the GMU Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy and Policy.

He cited the latest report from Giving USA, a semi-annual public service analysis.

Abramson attributes a gain in giving over the past several years in part to the regrowth of the economy, but that it's also "a creative time for giving," he said. "With more online giving, more people are thinking about loans instead of gifts. These are new creative approaches to engage people in helping."

Which is where 12 Ways comes in. Now in its fourth year linking citizens with nonprofits and county-wide issues like disadvantaged students from minority groups underperforming in schools, the gift-giving angle is paying off. "We've seen groups have up to a 150 percent increase in giving," said Lemieux.

"We've come to realize that addressing social problems is not just going to be government's responsibility," said Abramson. "We need all sectors, individuals, families and communities coming together if we're going to get something done."

To learn more about the nearly 500 nonprofits registered in Northern Virginia, visit www.connectnorthernvirginia.org.

Opportunities to Help

***Our Daily Bread** has been contracted by Fairfax County to provide holiday assistance with half of the 3,000 referrals of families in need from county social workers.

Gift: \$50 donation for gift cards for clients or adopt a family.

"It's an opportunity to connect people with people," said ODB executive director Lisa Whetzel, "neighbors to neighbors. You see there are people who live around the corner that are living without a lot of the amenities that they live with. It's eye-opening."

♦ REFOREST FAIRFAX AND FAIRFAX RELEAF project to plant trees that maintain canopy cover around the county, help with stormwater management and soil retention. The project is responsible for many of the trees along the Fairfax County Parkway, as well as a big replanting after construc-



Ina Fernández, director of the Fairfax County Office for Women & Domestic and Sexual Violence Services and Fairfax County Police Department Chief Edwin Roessler were at the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors meeting Sept. 23 for the declaration of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.



Kay Fowler, executive director of Fairfax ReLeaf, plants a tree at South Run Park.

tion at Bonnie Brae Elementary School.

Gift: \$35 donation for multiple native trees in a group planting somewhere in the county.

"Eighty percent plantable space is on private land in Fairfax

County," said Jim McGlone, urban forest conservationist of the Virginia Department of Forestry. "Trying to expand or improve the coverage, we really have to engage the public and get individuals planting trees."



Captain II Willie Bailey (left), Erin McMullin with Operation Warm (center) and Niko Chakos with FOCUS North America (right) distributed 2,200 pair of shoes and 2,000 coats Oct. 28 at Fire Station 11 with Firefighters and Friends to the Rescue.



Michelle Opdahl (left), Kalle (center) and Tom Bowser (right) enjoy time on a bench at Burke Lake Park.

♦ FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK FOUNDATION

Gift: \$2,000 for a new bench or \$800 to adopt an existing bench; \$1,000 for a new tree donation or \$500 to adopt.

"It does keep on giving," said Roberta Longworth, executive director of the Park Foundation. "Our wooden benches are guaranteed for five years and steel for ten."

♦ FRIENDS OF FAIRFAX COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

Gift: Donations of various sizes help with surgeries, medication, collars, tags and the microchip program.

"It's an open access shelter that takes in every animal that comes to the door," said Kristen Auerbach, a spokesperson for the Fairfax

County Animal Shelter. Annually, that number is about 5,000 dogs, cats, reptiles and other furry creatures. "It's the largest jurisdiction in the United States with a placement rate above 90 percent. We're about 95 percent this year."

♦ FAIRFAX LIBRARY FOUNDATION

Gift: Add a book to a specific library's collection, such as the Richard Byrd location, through their Amazon wish list and put the gift recipient's name first on the list to check it out.

"They're supporting the community overall, based on their interests," said Susan Harman, executive director of the Fairfax Library Foundation. "That's helpful, and they can do it from their desktop."



Our Daily Bread volunteers fill food crates at the Complete the Circle collection and distribution event held at Fairfax High School Nov. 9.

♦ FIREFIGHTERS AND FRIENDS TO THE RESCUE:

works with churches, shelters and schools to provide toys, coats and shoes to children. Fifteen years ago, the organization helped 50 kids; today they reach over 3,000 in a single donation event, usually held at Fire Station 11 in Alexandria.

Gift: Donations of various sizes help purchase toys, bicycles and coats for children for the holidays.

"With 180 schools in the county, 50 to 70 are coming to us," said Captain II Willie Bailey with the Fairfax Fire and Rescue Department. "And one out of four kids living below the poverty line, that's a big need. The station looks like Toys 'R' Us for a few hours."

♦ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES: working with the nonprofit A Way Forward to provide basic house and emergency needs for people leaving shelters to start new homes. The county has offices in 11 locations, including the South County Human Services building.

Gift: Donations of various sizes help purchase goods like bed in a bag, kitchen in a bag, door locks, mattresses, as well as holiday-specific items like toys, games and books.

"We're raising funds to give families the extras they just don't have the money or resources to provide during the holiday season," said Sandy Bromley, Fairfax County-wide domestic violence coordinator, "give victims the chance to really celebrate the holidays."

For the complete 12 Ways of Giving nonprofit list and donation portal, visit http://www.fairfaxcountypartnerships.org/news/Ways_to_give_1214.html.

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