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Good Will Toward Holiday Giving Here at Home

by Debbie Vallejo



FIRST, A PERSONAL STORY. Sir Roger Bannister, a former Olympian and currently Director of the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases in London, once said, “What do we live for if not to make life less difficult for each other?” No one agrees with this more than those with first-hand knowledge of how a financial crisis impacts a family.

My husband’s family understands the meaning of struggle and sacrifice. When my husband was fourteen his father was diagnosed with stage four Hodgkin’s Disease and given a 50/50 chance of survival. My father-in-law was self-employed and my mother-in-law a stay-at-home mom. There was little discretionary income as it was, no health insurance and five children to clothe and feed. With the breadwinner debilitated by illness and chemotherapy, the family had no choice but to lean on others for help. The help came from different sources; friends, family, government and churches. The form of assistance depended on the needs of the family – sometimes food, sometimes transportation, sometimes money.

Ramiro and Lucy Vallejo. Ramiro fought and won his battle with Hodgkin’s Disease in the mid-80s. He passed away of complications from Leukemia in 1999.

photo provided by Debbie Vallejo



wards Men:



*Jill Cumnock & Reverend John Peel, Frisco Family Services;
Rudy Andrea, Thamara DeLeon, Small World;
Kimberly Girard, Frisco Family Services, Janet Maccubbin, City of Frisco
at After All These Years, Downtown Frisco
photo by Steve Gallegos of Lone Star Photography*



Rudy Andrea, Tamara DeLeon, *Small World*
 photo by Steve Gallegos of Lone Star Photography

is high energy prices. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left many families homeless and in need. The powerful storms also struck a blow to energy production, causing those who help the victims of these recent natural disasters to be more financially stretched. With consumers paying more at the pump and anticipating higher utility bills for the winter, there is less discretionary funding for all the fun stuff, let alone charitable donations for others in need. After all, we're all in need, aren't we?

"So, where is the silver lining in this proverbial black cloud? It's in the unwavering, giving hearts of the American people."

In addition to the numbers of individuals left in need by the recent hurricanes, there are also those families hurt by economic downturns and job loss. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average median income fell by 2.4% from the year 2000 to 2002. The loss of employment opportunities alone was the culprit for 80% of the loss of income families encountered in the past four years. Consumer debt is at an all time high. Record credit card debt and mortgage balances have left economists wondering when the ever elusive "bottom" is going to fall out of the housing market and the energy market.

So, where is the silver lining in this proverbial black cloud? It's in the unwavering, giving hearts of the American people. According to Giving USA, Americans giving from their own wallets have represented approximately

My in-laws are strong, proud, hard-working people who found it difficult to rely on others, but understood the necessity of receiving the help in order to take care of their family. They raised five wonderful, hard-working children who now have families of their own and make their own contributions to society. They are a perfect example of how giving to a family in need touches not just the lives of members of the family in crisis, but also the lives of others they will eventually touch and help in the future. My father-in-law made it through the treatment and went into remission a couple of years after his initial diagnosis. What would have happened to my husband's family if no help was avail-

able? Thank God, we'll never know.

LIVING REALITY, GIVING ANYWAY

The "land of the free" can quickly become the land of the financially imprisoned. This year economic forecasters are predicting yet another tight holiday season for retailers. With natural disasters and wars overseas, the U.S. budget is tight to say the least. The "trickle-down" effect is impacting local and city retailers, families and charities. Big retailers are already anticipating the slow season and cutting prices accordingly.

In previous holiday seasons, slow retail sales were the product of a sluggish economy, job layoffs and a lack of new job creations. This year one main culprit



*Small World Recipients
photos provided by Small World*

2% of the gross domestic product for the past four decades. Even in 2001, with all the doom and gloom prospects of the recession, Americans gave more than the previous year. The statistics demonstrate that the giving spirit remains resilient, undefeated by the barrage of economic bad news. Even in the face of potential downturns, the majority of individuals are willing to give to others less fortunate. Good for us.

“Small World assists struggling families in need of food, clothing, school supplies, emergency funds and holiday gifts.”

With the economic struggles of the country, come economic struggles of families who are facing this holiday season with barely enough money to survive day-to-day expenses, let alone the expense of Thanksgiving and Christmas. Frisco citizens generously give to local organizations every year. This year, with hurricane victims now becoming a part of our city, there is an even larger need than in previous holiday seasons.

GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN

There is an increase, each year, of more and more worthy charitable organizations asking for your dollar. Each has a worthy cause, each is asking fellow citizens to lend a hand. Who gets the vote? How do you decide which organization, and by default, person(s), is going to receive your money? Your time? In the spirit of giving, let us ‘give’ information on local charitable organizations making it possible for struggling families and children to have a bright holiday season. Each organization is committed to as-

sisting others and providing for individuals currently in need.

SMALL WORLD

With Love It’s a Small World was founded in 1996 by local schoolteacher, Tamara DeLeon. DeLeon conducted a random survey of her students Christmas of ‘96 and realized many of them would not receive what one would call “a real Christmas.” She scrambled and helped as many students as she could manage that year and the idea for the organization was born.

Small World consists of three programs; the Back to School Program, the Scholarship Program and the Angel (Christmas) Program. In partnership with area schools, companies and the community, Small World assists struggling families in need of food, clothing, school supplies, emergency funds and holiday gifts. The goal is to provide for the basic needs of the family to better enhance a child’s ability to stay in school and focus on his or her education.



Jill Cumnock, Reverend John Peel & Kimberly Girard of Frisco Family Services

photo by Steve Gallegos of Lone Star Photography

The Frisco Independent School District (FISD) provides a large amount of space during the Christmas season to house donations for families involved in Small World. Each year the client list grows and the needs of the organization grow with it. “We are 100% volunteer,” explains Rudy Andrea, vice president of public relations and special events. “We are not compensated for the time we spend on this program. We do it because we believe in helping out our kids.”

Small World is unique because it made the commitment to keep overhead expenses down to nothing. “One hundred percent of donations go to the families,” says Andrea. Understandably, when a non-profit relies solely on volunteers to keep its program running, there is always room for anyone willing to lend a helping hand. “We really need volunteers to help coordinate the resources like the gifts and food. Coor-

inating the gifts has become a monumental task,” explains Andrea.

“Frisco Family Services provides food, rent, or mortgage assistance; help with utility payments and medical expenses, as well as holiday food and gift programs.”

As the Frisco community has grown, so have the number of families in need. Last year Small World served just over 1,100 children. This year the list is growing beyond that number. According to Andrea, some families may not receive

everything they need this holiday season. “We have to cap the number of families we can help every year,” explains Andrea. “Some families may get short-changed because of a lack of funds.”

FRISCO FAMILY SERVICES

Frisco Family Services is a non-profit organization servicing families in the Frisco area. Founded in 1995, the group was created by concerned members of the Frisco community who realized there was no local social service agency to help struggling families. The service provides food, rent or mortgage assistance; help with utility payments and medical expenses, as well as holiday food and gift programs. According to Jill Cumnock, executive director of Frisco Family Services, their client list has grown tremendously over the past few years. “People are doing fine paycheck to paycheck, but then a job layoff



*Shelly and Molly Kinson, summer volunteers
photo provided by Frisco Family Services Center*

explains Michael Ramsey, vice president of marketing for CCA. "These are people that, because of unforeseen circumstances, need temporary help."

"The biggest need we have is for the 'teen' gifts. Boom boxes, make-up, CD players, the kind of things teenagers love to get at Christmas."

Christian Community Action provides meals at Thanksgiving and food from their food pantry for Christmas. They also set up their large community room as a toy store. The store is staffed by volunteers and stocked with toys donated by the community. Parents are able to come and chose gifts for their family and take them home and wrap them up for their children. "The biggest need we have is for the 'teen' gifts. Boom boxes, make-up, CD players, the kinds of things teenagers love to get

or unforeseen medical expenses occur and the trouble hits. We provide relief to those families struggling with changing circumstances."

The holidays can be particularly difficult for families struggling to make ends meet. The food and gift programs help them get through the holidays. Frisco Family Services provides boxes of holiday food for Thanksgiving and Christmas, complete with food for breakfast the next morning. The gift programs are for children and seniors and are provided by community donations. Each family taking part in the holiday gift program is a family in need. "These families are clients of ours, so we know their financial situation," explains Cumnock. The greatest need during the holiday season is gifts for teenagers. "People like to shop for gifts for young children and seniors, but not for the teens," says Cumnock.

Thanksgiving and Holiday sponsorship applications online providing information on how to become involved in the program.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ACTION

Founded in 1973, Christian Commu-

nity Action (CCA) is a poverty outreach non-profit organization providing monetary assistance, food and medical help to families in crisis. They are located in Denton and Lewisville, but serve surrounding cities such as Frisco and The Colony. The organization serves more than 12,000 people a year through its medical center, food pantry and housing programs. CCA has the largest food pantry in North Texas and provides food for approximately 600 families each week. After they receive their first donations, families are required to participate in training programs in order to receive more assistance from CCA. "We are not just giving a hand out, but a handup,"



at Christmas,” says Ramsey. “We also need lots of batteries. Many people donate these terrific toys, but then the family can’t afford to go out and purchase batteries for all of them.”

Along with the holiday season comes an increased need for volunteers. There is plenty of room for anyone seeking to make a difference during the holidays. Ramsey sees many families coming in to donate their time together. “A lot of people volunteer as a family to teach their kids the importance of giving and tithing,” says Ramsey. “We have a mother-daughter team that came in to volunteer for the first time three years ago and have made it an annual event since.”

HOPE'S DOOR

According to the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, studies reveal that violence occurs in two million families in the United States. This number is considered conservative since many victims do not report abuse until it is life threatening.

The holiday season can be especially difficult for families struggling financially, but for victims of domestic violence the holidays are even harder to bear. Hope’s Door is a shelter and counseling center for victims of domestic violence and their families. Founded in 1986, the agency operated a crisis hotline but did not have space for a shelter. Clients were housed in local area hotels until the shelter was opened in 1989. Since the beginning in 1989, the agency has housed more than 3,500 women and their children. Services include an emergency shelter, an emergency hotline, individual and group counseling, outreach counseling, educational programs and a men’s counseling program.

The need for volunteers at Hope’s

Door, as with all other charitable organizations, is year round. “Hope’s Door has a very active volunteer program and provides training to anyone interested,” explains Tammy Taylor, director of education and public relations for Hope’s Door. There are also several ways to

dren to sit on Santa’s lap. Funds are raised through ticket sales and the silent auction.

ASSISTANCE CENTER OF COLLIN COUNTY

The Assistance Center of Collin County provides a variety of services to families and individuals in need. Established in 1977 to provide information to members of the community, the center processes 24,000 calls and assists over 17,000 people annually. In addition to providing material and financial assistance, the center partners with other agencies and churches to administer special projects and relief funds. The Assistance Center links struggling individuals to the appropriate source to meet individual needs.

During the holidays, the center receives many calls from families needing help through the holidays. They work with Plano Santa’s and other groups to bring food and gifts to struggling families. “We bring Christmas to families who would not ordinarily have a Christmas,” explains Jackie Hall, a representative

of the Assistance Center.

“The need for volunteer’s is year round. Hope’s Door has a very active volunteer program and provides training to anyone interested.”



Janet Maccubbin of the City of Frisco

photo by Steve Gallegos of Lone Star Photography

participate financially. The Adopt a Family program allows families living in the shelter to be adopted by other families willing to help during a time of crisis. Donor families provide gifts and other needs for the women and their children.

A unique way for families to contribute to a charitable holiday event and a fun way to spend time together is volunteering to raise money for “A Date With Santa.” “A Date With Santa” is being held on December 10th for Hope’s Door and includes a silent auction, food, and of course, the opportunity for chil-

VOLUNTEER CONTACT INFORMATION

With Love It's a Small World
www.smallworldwithlove.org
972.740.0154.

Frisco Family Services Center
www.friscocenter.org
972.335.9495.

Christian Community Action
www.ccahelps.org
972.219.4341.

Hope's Door
www.hopesdoorinc.org.

Assistance Center
of Collin County
www.assistancecenter.org
972.422.1850.



GIVING FROM THE DEPTHS

Without sounding too philosophical, no one is immune to the knocks of life. The stormy seas that come out of nowhere and "rock the boat" so to speak can happen to anyone. There are always those in need and the holidays remind us of how the greatest gift of all is giving to another. Whether giving to a church organization, a local charity, a national charity such as the Salvation Army or Red Cross, or to one of the agencies above, it is important to remember during the holiday season that while we

are all in need, there are always those "in need" more.

Oscar Wilde once wrote, "People are very fond of giving away what they need most themselves. It is what I call the depth of generosity." I'm not one to quote Oscar, yet this quote seems remarkably telling. Isn't it interesting that, according to Giving USA, those considered 'poor' in America give away the highest percentage of their income?

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