

GRAPEVINE



HAMPER HELP

Like little elves, the daughters and two friends of a Halton Hills Community Support and Information (HHCSI) staffer spent Monday morning packing gift hampers for 74 local families whose Christmas will be much brighter thanks to the hamper program.

The hampers are made to order for the needy families, so the clothes will be the right size and appropriate for the children.

HHCSI staffer Cathy Gerrow said the "elves" were finishing off the hampers by adding donated toys and treats and then they will be delivered, or picked up.

"The community has been so generous and donated so many things for the hampers - we really, really appreciate their support. It is wonderful to be able to help families out at Christmas."

BOUNTIFUL CLINIC

Blood donations were accepted from 65 of the 76 people who attended the Canadian Blood Services clinic last Thursday at the Legion.

"It was a good turnout - thanks Acton," said clinic chair Julia Roehrig, noting special thanks to the Walker Masonic Lodge for paying for the special Christmas goodies for donors.

LITERACY HELP

If you have trouble reading this - Literacy North Halton could help.

The organization provides one-on-one or small class tutoring for people who need help with their reading, spelling, writing, math and basic computer skills.

For more information call 905-873-2200.

NEW SKATES

If new skates are under your tree Christmas morning, you'll want to take advantage of the free public skating next week at Acton arena.

The Rotary Club of Acton is again picking up the tab for all those who want to skate on December 24, and again from December 27 to 31, daily from 1:30 to 2:50 p.m.

Free skating is also scheduled from 1:30 to 2:50 p.m. on Friday, Feb 4 a PA Day, and again for March Break.

MUSIC MONEY

Acton's FoodShare graciously accepted a \$200 donation on behalf of The Music Hall (Halton Hills) and instructor John Hribljan of Acton.

The money was raised at the Sounds of the Season Christmas music recital earlier this month at Knox Presbyterian Church.

CHRISTMAS LORE

Christmas comes from Christ's Mass, from the Christian religion.

The date of Christmas coincides with the winter solstice in the Northern hemisphere, a time of rejoicing among many ancient cultures. Christmas today is mainly celebrated in Western Europe, South and North America and Australia. Eastern Europeans celebrate on January 6.

In the mid-19th Century, Christmas became associated with an increasingly secularized holiday of gift-giving and good cheer.

Christmas cards first appeared in the 1850's.

The Christmas tree tradition is from the Middle Ages in Germany; the Franciscans popularized the manger scene at Bethlehem.



COMFORTING THE NEEDY: Cathy Gerrow and Emma Schnurr of HHCSI Staff recruited four "elves" to assist them in packing gift hampers for toys and clothing for 74 needy families in Acton and area Monday morning at Off The Wall on Mill St. The "elves" were Emma's two daughters and their friends. There were lots of generous people, some of them knit scarves and hats for the hampers, said Cathy. In the photo, left to right are, Cathy Gerrow, Emma Schnurr, Shawna Foster, Katelyn Wingrove, Meghan Schnurr and Mary Schnurr.

Ghosts of Christmas Pasts...

This close to Christmas the frantic activity is over for most of us. I admit to being a last minute shopper. I was going to join the procrastinators club but never got around to it. When the girls were small I'd take the four of them out to shop for "the Bride's" present on Christmas Eve day. Finding the right size or colour was often difficult but I enjoy a challenge.

These days shopping for the right Christmas present is less frantic. I miss their company but my girls are so busy with their own lives that family shopping days are a thing of the past. Things are so organized now. Lists, more detailed than anything ever given Santa, are exchanged. Even I broke down this year and sent out some printed hints. I, however, stopped sort of specifying brand names and suggested retailers.

I notice it's a little harder to ramp up the Christmas spirit every year. Part of the problem seems to be that "the Bride" and I are busier than ever. At the same time, our endurance levels are declining. Obviously, not having little kids around takes some of the edge off Christmas preparations. It's simply not as much fun shopping for presents people want or need as opposed to those that are a surprise.

One advantage to this stage in life is you do have the time to reflect on past Christmases. As a boy I can remember eagerly visiting Santa at Eaton's Toyland. The old store was insufferably hot and you'd begin to sweat as you rode the klackity wooden escalator up to wonderland. There, rows upon rows of fantastic toys that we mere mortals could only dream about. It must have been frustrating for my mother since she would know our family's modest circumstances wouldn't allow her to indulge my fantasies. Not that I didn't have wonderful Christmases. As the first grandchild I was pretty well spoiled until my brother and sister horned in to spilt the loot.

We always went to Eaton's. I knew there was a "Santa" at Simpson's but he was a snooty, stuck-up elf. Simpson's was where the well-to-do business types shopped. Eaton's was

The Way I See It

with
Mike O'Leary



the store for common folk. We kids discussed it at length and decided the real Santa was at Eaton's.

I vividly remember the Christmas windows stretching up and down Young St. each year, the two department store giants would stage a competition to see who could capture the children's hearts and their mother's pocketbooks. The costumes on the mannequins were fantastic and the animation captivating. I recall one year when I announced that Simpson's windows were better than Eaton's. My mom looked at me like I was such a traitor. I can imagine her weeping to my father that they had messed-up my upbringing. I can't prove it, but I've always had the feeling that faux-pas cost me Christmas morning and I never made the same mistake again. I tell you friends, the annual Christmas window sweepstakes was a serious affair. Remember, this was in the days before malls, specialty shops and outlet stores so Eaton's and Simpson's was pretty much the whole deal.

Today's children have no problem picking out a favourite toy. If T.V. wasn't bad enough, the malls are full of displays and enough specialty stores to satisfy any desire. While there were two catalogues in my youth there was nothing like the catalogues and flyers that fill up our blue box these days. My mother, of course, would never shop from catalogues. We were city folk and catalogues were for farmers. Or so the story went.

Our children were in an advertising transition age. I can recall our daughter Colleen starting right after Halloween sitting on the floor paging through a catalogue while watching T.V. her eyes would dance from page to screen all the while saying "I want one of those, and one of those. I need that and two of those". She subscribed to the theory that you ask

for the moon and you're bound to end up ahead of the game.

When I was a tad of a lad I don't recall any licenced product. We had Lionel trains and CCM bikes but certainly no Power Rangers or Ninja Turtles. I think these items put too much pressure on parents today. Remember the Tickle-Me-Elmo debacle of a few years ago? Parents paying almost anything for a doll that would be discarded in a month or so! That said, I also recall "the Bride" leaving at 6:00 a.m. to drive to Kitchener where a friend of hers had arranged for two Cabbage Patch dolls to be reserved. Parents are basically nuts, probably always have been.

I'd like to think that as our children grow older it's not the presents received that make Christmas memories, but rather the traditions and family times. We, for instance, go to mass Christmas Eve and then come home to assorted nibbles and conversation. It's a quiet time, perfect for telling old stories and enjoying each other's company. Christmas morning, after the presents, I make omelettes for brunch and then get down to the serious business of barb-b-queing the turkey. These are the things I think our children will incorporate into their traditions and remember long after "the Bride" and I are gone. The presents are soon forgotten but Christmas becomes a way of life.

I envy those of you with young children at this time of year. Capture their excitement and enjoy their delight. Treasure those images in your heart because this time of childish innocence flashes by in a heartbeat. All too soon you'll need to pull these days from your soul to warm your Christmas spirit. It's easy advice to give but whatever minor disasters occur, and occur they will, don't over react and let your Christmas memories tarnish, or worse, tarnish those of others.

From our house to yours, the O'Leary's wish you the joy, the warmth and the love of this Christmastime. If religious, may the light of the world brighten your life. If not, may the peace of Christmas warm your hearth.

So Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.



CAN I HAVE A...: Megan and Riley had the opportunity to tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas recently at the year end party for the students of the Fairy Lake Boathouse Preschool Playshop. - Daniella McIsaac photo.