

# Lifestyles

## Christmas can be quite the stress-fest

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

*The Champion*

**R**elaxing visits with family, enjoyable trips to the mall and general merriment are just some of things associated with the holiday season.

At least they are for those living in an ideal world. For others — who tend to reside in a more heavily-populated group — Christmas can be quite the stress-fest. Stretched budgets and seemingly endless social obligations leave many people at their wits' end.

And for some, the anxiety can be just too much to handle.

To that end, the Canadian Mental Health Association's Halton chapter is holding its inaugural 'Do You Have The Holiday Blahs?' seminar in an effort to curb those Yuletide blues.

Slated for December 11 from 7:30 to 9 p.m. at the Milton Seniors' Activity Centre, the presentation will focus on stress management and budgeting.



**Priya Rana**

Shortcomings in this latter department can lead to an anxiety-rich holiday season, said Priya Rana, executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association's Halton branch.

"It's important to know your spending limits," she said. "It's not necessary to buy a really expensive gift to show someone that you love them."

Chipping in for gifts with family members or friends and explaining to children that even Santa Claus has a budget, she suggested, are among the ways to avoid turning the holidays into a money pit.

And while it may seem outrageous to many, she added that some people even advise against using credit cards for Christmas shopping.

"Christmas doesn't have to involve putting a big hole in your pocket."

That should be particularly relevant for those who — due to the recent economic downturn — are already cash-strapped or for those like Milton's newest homeowners who've already made a significant purchase this year.

Agreed public education coordinator Tracey Hall, "There's other ways of celebrating the holidays than buying gifts."

Owning up to economic troubles, she admitted, can be difficult — but is often easier when surrounded by those with similar problems.

While finances are no doubt the front-running stress trigger at holiday time, it's not the only one.

Family obligations, social engagements and depression from either a recent break-up or past traumatic experience can all be especially tough to deal with.

"Christmas can be a depressing time of year if you've just gone through a romantic break-up or have lost a loved one," said Ms Rana. "In those circumstances, it's important to know your limits and realize that you don't necessarily have to participate in every event. Be realistic."

She and Ms Hall agreed that the key is to avoid aiming for the perfect holiday and not try to be all things to all people.

The holiday stress management and budgeting seminar — who Ms Hall and Doug Riding of the Investment Planning Counsel of Canada will co-host — costs \$5 at the door, although pre-registration can be done by calling (905) 693-4270.

Said Ms Hall, "We just want people to know that there is support and resources out there to help them deal with distress."



## Here's my 10-second course for teens on how to handle the public

The lady stood in front of me at the large fast food restaurant counter and shook her head slowly in disbelief as she watched the teenage help struggle to perform a simple task.

"That's why I wouldn't let my kids work here," I told her. "A place like this breeds incompetence."

She laughed and told me that she wouldn't let her kids work there either.

I'm no teen basher, in fact through being in contact over the years with my daughters' friends, I'm almost always impressed. They're much more poised, responsible and intelligent than when I was a teenager.

But recently at a coffee place, outside of Milton, I walked in just in time to hear a



with **MURRAY TOWNSEND**

### On the loose

teenage girls mention quite loudly that she was bleeping tired. And the actual word wasn't bleeping. Nice.

Often, the teenage help at a lot of places aren't even looking at you when you order. Recently, I can't count the number of times

I've had to wait until after they've stopped talking to a co-worker before they'd pay attention to me.

And another trend is that they don't even look at you or say anything when they give you your order or change. So, I don't say anything either. Sometimes, when they hand back the change without bothering to look at me, I'll move my hand slightly so that the change drops on the counter or on the ground.

It's a small message, and more effective than saying something. If I were to lecture them it wouldn't do any good. I would be characterized as a grumpy customer and laughed at as soon as I left.

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