

# Tradition of giving lights up the holidays for many

By Michaela Kennedy

The holiday season not only marks a time of giving, but also the beginning of a long winter season that poses challenges for many. The cold stretch is dreaded by tens of thousands in our state who don't have enough money to pay for heat or enough food to stave off hunger.

Poverty-stricken families tend not to advertise their plight, however. People often go to their local pastor first for help, notes Matthew Clarke of the Jamestown Lions Club. Professional organizations such as the Lions and the Rotary Club are star players in the drive to help people meet their daily needs, not just during the holidays but throughout the year.

"Our duty is to circulate to anyone in need," Clarke adds. The local Lions Club donates money to the three churches on the island during the Christmas season, giving as much as \$400 to \$500 in secret. The Jamestown Chapter also joins other Lions statewide to throw a Christmas party at Hasbro Children's Hospital. "Every year we make a donation

between \$500 and \$1,000," he says. The club has been known to adopt a family, often anonymous, through teachers at the schools.

The Jamestown Rotary Club, in

collaboration with the Boy Scouts, St. Vincent de Paul Society and St. Mark Church, just finished a project that delivered close to 25 Thanksgiving food baskets to hungry mouths on the island. St. Mark has an ongoing food pantry, a supply of non-perishables, which was recently replenished through the Boy Scouts' canned food drive. Another distribution effort is planned for people who may find themselves house-bound close to Christmas.

In addition, St. Mark has an Advent Giving Tree, mainly for people on the island. "We get information from the schools and seniors about people who make special requests," notes Father William O'Neill, pastor of the church. This year, gift certificates will be included.

From a private perspective, an event that started out as a generous gesture tagged onto a holiday ladies' social gathering has grown in momentum in the last few years. The Sister Hilda Polar Express honors the memory of a Sister of Mercy, Hilda, a kindergarten teacher who groomed connections with many people. "If she knew you needed something, she knew where to find it," says Kristin Kennedy from the Jamestown Shores. "If a family didn't have much to

eat, Sister Hilda knew who to call. She knew how to finagle."

The night before her fiftieth jubilation party celebrating the Catholic nun's lifelong vocation, Sister Hilda pulled her car over to the side of the road and died. "There were a lot of people in the state that felt a deep loss," Kennedy notes.

Kennedy joined forces with her friend, Diane Tanury, from Bristol to help fill the gap left by Hilda's passing. Every Christmas season she hostesses a ladies-only cocktail party, and asks her guests to bring gift cards, anything from supermarkets to video stores.

This year, with increasing numbers of people who can't afford heat, gift certificates from oil companies have become popular. "We distribute these gift cards to places in need," Kennedy said. "We give to the poor only in Rhode Island." She noted that certificates from larger chain stores like Stop & Shop or T.J. Max allow more convenient use for recipients who do not have a car.

The bulk of what the women collect goes to Roger Williams Day Care Center in Providence, established to help people who couldn't afford day care. Over 200 families receive help from the center. "These people are often making minimum wage and trying to feed a family. I don't know how they make ends meet," Tanury notes.

"We have a fun evening," Kennedy adds. For anyone who would like to attend the ladies-only event, call Kristin in the evening at 423-2887, or drop by 18 Luger St. on Dec. 13 between 6 and 8:30 p.m. "Remember, ladies only!" she reminds all.

St. Matthew's Church, in conjunction with the Johnny Cake Center in Wakefield, does a church-wide drive collecting coats for kids. The church's thrift shop, open Tuesday and Saturday morn-

ings, is a popular spot this time of year as well for clothing and household goods donations. We make sure everything gets distributed to where it will be used," says Peter Hoagland.

Central Baptist Church will hold their Christmas sale on Dec. 1. Food and gifts will be sold. All proceeds will go to several different charities, some of which reach world-wide.

Also doing a clothing drive is the Town Hall. The annual collection box is now open to receive new hats, mittens, gloves and scarves, which are then distributed to the Women's Resource Center of Newport and Bristol Counties and others.

Every group involved in charitable efforts resound the same thought: the generosity of Jamestown is unending, and people are generous in material and monetary gifts. The holidays merely give focus to an on-going process that continues all year, volunteers agree. "Give where you think it would be most beneficial," says Mary Beth Martin, secretary at the St. Mark Rectory. "It's the extended family that's so important."

*Editor's note: If your organization is doing something special to help those in need over the holiday season, let us know about it. Write to news@jamestownpress.com with information.*

## Women's shelter benefit Dec. 1

Lucy's Hearth, Newport County's shelter for homeless women and children, is making plans for their seventh annual Designer Christmas Wreath Sale fund-raiser.

This event has been very successful in the past, selling wreaths and tabletop arrangements made and donated by local florists, designers and many talented organizations.


This year's fund-raiser will take place on Saturday, Dec. 1, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m., in the rotunda at Easton's Beach on Memorial Boulevard in Newport.

Lucy's Hearth is a 24-hour

emergency and transitional shelter for mothers and their children who are homeless due to economic hardship, family crisis, divorce, eviction, and severe shortage of safe, affordable housing. The primary goal is to foster independence and help the residents gain the life skills necessary to prevent future chronic homelessness.

In the past 12 months, Lucy's Hearth has sheltered 119 women and children for a total of 7564 bed nights of shelter and served 20,367 meals. This year they will be celebrating their 23rd anniversary.






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