

Philanthropy Corner – 12-13-09

Article 47 – “The Holiday Season-Like Life Itself-Is About the Joy of Giving”

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The holiday season is full of traditions that have been passed on through the ages and many of us continue family traditions that we experienced when we were children. Philanthropy is one of those traditions. A wonderful way to make your holidays extra-special is to consider incorporating philanthropy into your gift-giving plans and holiday activities. The holidays are also the perfect time to teach children about giving and volunteerism in order to convey the message that life and the holiday season is about giving and experiencing the joy it can provide.

With the holiday season here, many local charities and organizations step up their fund raising activities in fun and exciting ways. Participating in charitable events can keep you in the holiday spirit while supporting organizations that are helping those in need. Many charities especially need extra support now as they continue to struggle from the effects of the economic downturn with more people needing help. Ninety-three percent of charities are feeling the effects of the recession even as a greater number of people are requesting their services.

There are many cost effective and meaningful gift ideas that can keep you in the holiday spirit in this down economy. You can give the gift of your time, energy and expertise by volunteering or delivering a meal for the Metropolitan Community Church Cooking with Love or helping MARC House sell Christmas trees. Children learn about philanthropy by example and encouraging their involvement in holiday gift drives organized by your condo association, church or service club is a good way to teach children the practice of caring and sharing. For those of you who have been a little naughty this year, the Monroe County Public Libraries will waive late fees for overdue materials in exchange for dropping off non-perishable food items at any branch to be distributed to needy families. Plus your pets can be included in your holiday plans while supporting charity. Photos with Santa and pet parades benefit The Xena Fund and Florida Keys SPCA.

Another holiday gift idea is gift certificates in the form of tickets to the movies, a concert, or local playhouse. The Waterfront Playhouse, Red Barn Theater, Key West Pops and Key West Symphony all kick off their season with performances during the holiday season. These activities are a great way to socialize with family, friends and out of town visitors while supporting the local nonprofit community. Memberships and subscriptions with nonprofit organizations such as the Tropic Cinema, Tennessee Williams Theater, and Impromptu Concerts make great gifts that keep on giving throughout the year. A great holiday gift that benefits local nonprofits and restaurants is the Key West Woman’s Club dine-around card that offers two for one dinners at 21 restaurants, income from which is used by the Club to make grants to local nonprofit organizations.

Making gifts to your favorite charity in the names of family, clients and friends makes shopping easy and is a great way to instill a philanthropic culture in your family while helping individuals and other families in need. Donating to charity online is convenient and attractive to many donors. Donors are expected to give \$4 billion online during the holidays, and 60% of people over the age of 65 said they planned to donate online this holiday season. Many charities offer this service on their website or donations may be made through charitable organizations

such as Guidestar. You can donate to more than 30 local nonprofits that have endowments with the community foundation on the www.cffk.org website.

It is still possible to make a year-end gift from your Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Donors who are 71 and over can donate to a charity by asking your IRA administrator to send a check directly to a charity in lieu of taking the annual distribution. Simply notify your IRA administrator with the charity's federal tax ID number and legal name that you wish to make a "qualified charitable distribution" to your nonprofit.

The good will that surrounds the holidays is infectious. So is philanthropy. From the spirit of giving that fills the holiday season, a core family tradition of philanthropy can be created that is passed on from generation to generation. Giving is a way of life and not just a holiday activity that enriches your lives and that of others. On behalf of the Community Foundation of the Florida Keys and the entire nonprofit community that we serve, thank you for living philanthropically and Happy Holidays.