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Charity looking to fill 400 Xmas packages

BY SANDRATHOMAS, VANCOUVER COURIER DECEMBER 7, 2011

I started writing a Christmas "charity in need" column several years ago after some readers accused Courier editorial staff of being pagan due to a photograph of a pair of men's underwear, emblazoned with the image of Jesus Christ, in our annual Dreck the Halls edition.

Since then I've enjoyed highlighting the good work various non-profit groups and organizations do, particularly at this time of year. And since it's that time again, allow me to introduce the staff and volunteers of the Greater Vancouver Community Services Society (GVCSS).

The society formed 40 years ago as a sixmonth work project in Kitsilano and today has 2,500 clients registered for its home support services. Since 2008, the society has delivered Christmas care/gift packages to their clients most in need, including single parents with a disability, shut-ins and forgotten parents and grandparents. This year, the GVCSS has the lofty goal of delivering 400 packages, up from the 100 donated annually in the past.

Through the society, I heard about an elderly woman living in the Downtown Eastside who last year wept after receiving Purdy's chocolates. The woman told the volunteer who dropped off her gift that while she'd heard about Purdy's chocolates all her life, she never had the opportunity to try one.

Society executive director Ron McLeod told me such stories remind us how such a small gesture can mean so much to someone in need.

"When you think of the basic needs, they include food to live, but rarely are there luxury items," says McLeod. "It makes us happy to be able to provide a few extras to our clients who can't afford them."

Each year, the gift packages include one such luxury gift. This year that special present is a warm robe donated by several hotels, which means very soon dozens of Downtown Eastside seniors and residents living with a disability will soon be wrapped in dressing gowns embroidered with The Fairmont, Pan Pacific or Four Seasons logos.

McLeod said that for many recipients their gift pack and Christmas card

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from GVCSS will be the only ones they receive during the holidays. Besides the one special gift, the packages include basic necessities, including soup, coffee, tea, mugs, socks, hats, gloves and toothpaste. This year donated items to the project include 400 bars of soap from Rocky Mountain Soap Company, 400 signature toques from The Bay and supplies from Shoppers Drug Mart. The Simon Fraser University Young Women in Business collected toothbrushes and toothpaste from students at SFU campuses, while local Girl Guide troops are running a Chunky Soup can drive.

But of course cash is king and as is the case with most non-profit groups, money donated to the GVCSS can be spread a long way with the organization's ability to buy from wholesale suppliers. A donation of \$40 will fill a gift package.


McLeod stresses 100 per cent of the donations to the GVCSS Christmas program are distributed to elderly clients. The society is still taking donations and the gift packages are being put together this week for distribution over the next two weeks.

To make a donation of cash or goods to the society towards a Christmas care package, check out gvcss.bc.ca or call Laura Johnson at 6047143517 to arrange for drop-off or pick-up.

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