

### **After the Holidays**

With the holiday season over, most of our thoughts have turned to the new year and many of us are engaged in setting new goals or simply trying to figure out how we will pay for the holiday gift-giving. During the holidays, we all seem to put a great deal of focus on how we can help each other. We all certainly appreciate the many folks in El Dorado County who pitched in to help others in need.

During the early days of December the Child Development programs operated by the El Dorado County Office of Education prepared over 150 food baskets for families in their programs. The baskets were much more than just your turkey and stuffing dinners. Although turkey and stuffing may be a wonderful meal, the baskets also included enough groceries for several days so families could have pancakes on Christmas morning and leftovers at night. Both staff and children in the programs benefited by learning more about how it feels to give to others. So many members of the community contributed to this effort by providing funds and volunteering their time to deliver food across the county. We also know that there were many other efforts that occurred with other groups, churches, and the food bank that made an incredible difference for so many families.

This year, with the economy down and unemployment up, we have a number of families who are dealing with adversity that did not end on December 31<sup>st</sup>. The need for a helping

hand and the basics of food may still be ongoing issue for many families. That is why schools countywide participated in the “We Can” food drive and collected canned food that was picked up and distributed to families in need. This project has proven to be so successful that for the balance of the school year, each of the schools in the county will be signing up for a week or more when it will be their turn to be responsible for collecting food for the Food Bank. We are turning this into an ongoing project that goes far beyond just a holiday event.

So, you might ask, how does this make any difference? Trust me, please, it does. I remember in high school when our school did a food drive just before the holidays. I helped collect the food for a selected family. Because I was so involved, I was asked to deliver the food to their home. To this day, I remember going to the house and seeing the look of joy and appreciation on the faces of the family members. I remember my joy in being a part of that family’s happiness, if only for a few brief moments. Being involved in helping someone else makes a lifelong impression.

We often take for granted what we have. This year has been a year of understanding what we have on a material basis is not necessarily permanent. Situations change. Economies boom and sometimes bust. What we had, or thought we had yesterday, is not necessarily what we have today. It’s taken a toll on our pocketbooks, certainly, but it’s affected us in a variety of other ways as well.

I saw an ad on TV this week. What caught my attention were the comments about eating meat loaf and playing Jenga having replaced the fancy restaurant and a night on the town. Watching TV together perhaps has taken the place of theater trips and individual DVD players. We've moaned about the losses, but have we considered what we've gained? Perhaps what we've actually realized is that we have more time with our children, a sense of the needs of others, an understanding of how we can help each other, and maybe more of an awareness of community. And, the children of El Dorado County are participating in a great opportunity to learn just a few of these life lessons.

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