

POINTS OF VIEW

Giving to community makes handling loss easier

Wednesday, Dec. 16, wasn't the best of days.

The worst news was the death that day of our friend, Phil Setta, 45, of Redford. The days that followed included time with his wife, Pam Young, at home and at the funeral. I wrote Phil's obituary, giving it my best.

That same Wednesday, I got the news after work that my dad was at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. He'd been receiving chemotherapy earlier that day and began to have heart problems. He was admitted and kept a couple of days for observation. I thought of Phil when I went with

my husband to the hospital to see my dad. Phil was a physician who graduated from Wayne State University's medical school. His career as a radiologist was cut short by his multiple sclerosis. The diagnosis came when he was a third-year medical student, but he bravely went on, graduating, marrying and leading the best life he could.

My husband, Mark Rembacki, and I will always treasure those days with Phil, especially our two visits to Greenfield Village this past summer. We treasure all of our days with family and friends.

The next day, Thursday, Dec. 17, was a day off for me, and I started by



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visiting former colleague Kevin Brown at his new workplace, Plymouth Township Hall. After that, it was off to the Plymouth Salvation Army. I'd volunteered for a two-hour

shift of bell-ringing at Plymouth Marketplace, to raise money for the Salvation Army.

It went well, and people were most kind and generous. Only my feet got cold, and I enjoyed seeing a different slice of life in my community and enjoyed helping those in need.

The bell-ringing made me feel better about losing a good friend and about seeing those I love suffer. Volunteering helped to take my mind off my troubles, and I think next year I'll call the Salvation Army earlier to volunteer for another bell-ringing shift.

The days that followed included happy visits from family, some as far

away as California. We treasure the time with all of them; the gifts are nice, too, but the time together is what really matters.

We stand now on the brink of a new year. New Year's Eve will be a low-key affair, probably just a trip to the Coffee Studio in Plymouth. I hope and pray that the coming year will be a blessed one for you, full of joy and all the good things.

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Big bucks being spent to solve 'millennium bug' crisis

Here's a New Year's present countless Michigan communities ought to be giving their residents: Clear and forthright information about what they're doing to anticipate the Year 2000 problem.

Often called the "millennium bug," the Year 2K problem arises from the fact that most computer programs have been written for years so that they record the year by the last two digits and, thus, can't tell the difference between 1900 and 2000.

My wife, Kathy, for example, was born in 1944. The computer might tell her she was 44 years old, not 56.

Credit card bills might show they had not been paid for 100 years.

Because the computer bug is so pervasive - it can lurk in little chips embedded in toys or cameras as well as in your ordinary desk top PC or big main frame systems - nobody really knows what problems will crop up at the stroke of midnight of Dec. 31, 1999.

Some experts are very pessimistic; they imagine the entire electric power

grid going down, the banking system in paralysis and the U.S. and Russian ICBM fleets suddenly and unexpectedly going into action. Others are less worried; they expect disruptions, but nothing catastrophic.

A tremendous amount of money is now being spent by the federal government and big businesses to sniff out "non-compliant" computer systems and fix them. This newspaper company, for example, will spend in excess of \$500,000 installing new software and searching out problems.

What is not so certain is how active and focused local communities will be in anticipating problems. Will computer-assisted traffic lights fail to function? Will local court records self-destruct, thus losing track of petty criminals?

A conference held last month at the University of Michigan urged local officials to make public employees aware of the situation, list all possible problems and design and test solutions. One consulting firm found that some 35 percent of all institutions



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and 29 percent of governments hadn't even started preparations. Less than 10 percent had tested their equipment.

Moreover, most local governments are scared to talk about the problem. If they make promises they can't keep, they might be exposed to taxpayer lawsuits.

I'd suggest folks write letters to mayors and members of city councils and township boards. Turn up at meetings. Ask questions. Bug people. Push for answers. For example, do

they have cellular phones and mobile radio backups for emergency services? Ask them if they've had a look at "The Year 2000 Toolkit for Local Governments and School Districts," just put out by the Michigan Department of Management and Budget.

And, just in case, clip out this checklist, prepared by the Gartner Group, a firm that has specialized in consulting about the year 2000 problem all over the world.

■ Don't panic. Prepare for localized failures for limited periods of time, like the aftermath of a really bad snowstorm. Don't take all your money out of the bank or liquidate your investments.

■ Have a week's worth of necessities stored in a safe place: medications, non-perishable food, jugs of water, batteries, flashlights and lanterns, household supplies.

■ Obtain hard (paper) copies of essential financial records: Social Security, pension and savings plans,

maybe even a reconciliation of your check records for the past year. Withdraw enough cash from the bank to sustain your family for a couple of weeks.

■ Fuel up your vehicles. Have an adequate supply of home heating fuel delivered. If you have a fireplace, make sure you have some dry wood.

■ Have your medical and dental checkups well in advance.

■ Send mail and packages early.

■ Pick up your e-mail before midnight.

■ Stay away from hospitals, elevators and airplanes at the stroke of midnight.

And don't forget the bottle of champagne. It won't help fix the millennium bug, but it may help you feel better.

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