

CHAT ROOM



Kathie O'Donohue

## True spirit of Christmas must endure

Have you noticed the slow but steady disappearance of Christmas? In recent years I have witnessed a trend toward its demise. Some have objected to public nativity displays and Salvation Army bellringers, others to Christmas carols in the marketplace. It seems that Christmas is becoming generic; in schools and the media in particular, the nomenclature has recently been changed to "the holidays," "season of caring and sharing," or "winter vacation," to mention a few.

Christmas appears to have been relegated to the category of things not politically correct, yet simultaneously we have begun to recognize and appreciate concurrent celebrations from other faiths and cultures such as Hanukkah or Kwanzaa. In an atmosphere supposedly open to diversity, how is it Christmas, then, is not included? I see the importance in gaining awareness and understanding of the traditions of others, but not at the expense of my own. Where is the respect and tolerance for those who celebrate this holiday?

### Date unimportant

Perhaps most surprising, even a number of hard-line evangelists Christian friends no longer celebrate Christmas, some believing since it was never directed in the Bible by God to celebrate the birthday of His Son, there's simply no reason. Another argument for opposing its celebration lies with the potentiality that Dec. 25 is neither an accurate date nor perhaps even the correct season.

But whether it's scripturally decreed or on April 12, I believe Christmas must endure forever. I feel this strongly, because if a jingle in the air or the scent of pine can cause even Scrooge to loosen his grip on the almighty dollar, if a single hungry person can eat, coats or blankets can shelter a handful of homeless people, if a family of meager means receives gifts they would not otherwise, if those who suffer loneliness are granted even temporary reprieve, then Christmas - by no other name - is more than worthwhile.

When some perhaps nondescript notion of sentimentality causes one to give to another with no strings attached, who would do away with this goodwill effort, however short-lived? Isn't there enough hopelessness, pain, and anguish never to be even addressed in a million lifetimes?

If families whose usual interactions create nothing but discord can hold their feelings at bay for a time and come together during this season, perhaps blessings will follow. And if a bribe - the prospect of gifts - works to alter a child's behavior for just a while, what's the real harm in that?

### Experience the magic

Without a doubt, there is an extreme amount of commercialism, but intermingled with the lights and decorations are simple but meaningful kindnesses extended for one season. To those who wish to experience the magic, hope reigns supreme in children's eyes, in many hearts. Along with the fantasy is a good measure of excitement, longing, togetherness, warm fuzzy feelings, occasions well served up with forgiveness and love. Christmas can be a time of reconciliation, joy, wonder, promise.

As a Christian, I believe Christmas demonstrates God's greatest gift to humanity: himself in the form of a baby. Through this simple but miraculous human gesture, our Creator was also showing each of us our most significant present to one another - the gift of ourselves. Truly, isn't it a small part of ourselves that we hope to offer with each gift we give?

When Christmas comes, I will light my front yard, wrap gifts, pretend about Santa, worship the Baby-King, hoping to kindle the embers of peace and goodwill that silently echo the true spirit of Christmas. Merry Christmas!

Kathie O'Donohue is a resident of Farmington Hills.

## Pampered pets

### Pooches, kitties remembered in gift giving frenzy

Chicken or beef flavored bottled water, warm winter sweaters and faux antlers, gifts for Fido and Fluffy run the whole gamut.

BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI  
SPECIAL WRITER

Area retailers are letting their businesses go to the dogs ... and they're loving it.



Some people won't stop at anything when it comes to pampering their pets, including buying them chicken and beef flavored bottled water, according to Jerry Prutow, store manager of Pet Supplies Plus in Farmington Hills.

While designer water may seem a little extravagant, buying dog clothes is considered more practical to a lot of people. The outfits come in all sizes and colors and might even keep their furry friends warm on those wintry walks. And no outfit is complete without just the right head gear. Making sure their pets are strutting in style with seasonal wares, owners often take a stroll down the antler and Santa hat aisle at Pet Supplies Plus.

When it comes to filling Fido's and Fluffy's Christmas stockings, there's a lot to choose from including Santa Claus dog and cat toys.

"People with cats are constantly coming in and buying furry mice andinsel balls, because they're always getting lost," Prutow added.

### Pig ears popular

Raw hide and pig ears, which are actual smoked pig ears, are popular treats for the dog who likes everything.

"The pig ears are good in moderation, but they're very fattening and if you give them too many, the dog can



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRIDGES

gain weight," Prutow said. "It's like if we ate a slab of bacon."

An eight-inch trash can filled with dog biscuits is another big seller this year, Prutow added.

Speaking from a decade of watching people buy just about anything for their pets, Prutow, a dog and cat owner himself, understands their sentiment.

"I was outside painting my house this summer and I was looking in the window watching my dog and cat sleeping and I was thinking: 'I want your job,'" he said.

Eddie Kohen, president of Joe's Feed & Pet Supply in Farmington Hills, also likes to spritz his dog, a 120 pound chocolate Labrador, Teddy, who has a spot on the bed and his favorite furniture.

When asked what limits pet owners will go to for their pets, Kohen said: "What won't they buy?"

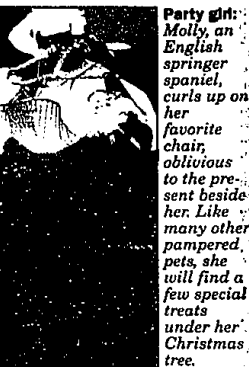
"The big thing that people get here are the all natural human-grade treats (not rejects of ingredients that a lot of dog biscuits are made of)," he said.

Biscuits and jerky treats are popular, too.

"That's how our customers pamper their pets, by buying them quality food that you or I would eat," Kohen added.

Kohen, who said he has never boarded his dog, might find Shari Majewski's business, Pet Au Pair, useful. Majewski pet sits for animals in their homes in Farmington, Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Novi and Northville.

She goes into her clients' homes and takes care of their pets when they're



Party girl: Molly, an English springer spaniel, curls up on her favorite chair, oblivious to the present beside her. Like many other pampered pets, she will find a few special treats under her Christmas tree.

out of town.

"If they're dogs, I take them for a walk - I try to keep it like if the owner was home and what they would do," said Majewski, explaining that she likes to meet the customers and the animals before her work begins.

She charges from \$10 to \$12.50 a visit and can be reached by calling (248) 407-9300.

"Cats are easy," she said. "You feed them and clean their litter. Some cats are real friendly and they want to be petted."

The height of extravagance? Some cat owners splurge for a \$200 electronic litter box that does all the work for them. An average box costs about \$10.

"You don't have to scoop or get near the (electronic) litter box," Prutow said;

## Business owner works hard for kids

BY JOANNE PORRETTA  
SPECIAL WRITER

The children of the St. Vincent and

Sarah Fisher Home have someone watching over them. Someone who cares about their future and thinks

about their basic needs.

This benefactor, Judy Dunn, doesn't stop at caring and thinking about the center's children. She helps to raise funds for them.

As co-chair of the Capital Campaign which recently raised \$4 million, Dunn has added on to twelve years worth of successful volunteer fund-raising events.

Dunn is the owner of a wine import business - Decanter Imports of Lyon Township - and has exercised her talents in marketing, business sense and networking finesse to help the children of St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Home.

She has also woven her interest in wine into auctioning rare imports at events and utilizing her contacts among wine retailers and suppliers toward the benefit of the center.

Dunn has a great amount of respect for the staff's devotion in administering daily care; and acknowledges other supporters such as United Way, and Mary Fisher, daughter of Sarah Fisher, who also guaranteed the success of the Capital Campaign by way of a generous donation. Dunn remembers one conversation with Sister Mary Patricia some 12 years ago.

### Major changes made

"There was a cultural change that occurred," explained Dunn. "These children, they're acting out, they're frustrated and upset. So today there are 10 bedrooms in each cottage, all individual little rooms for the children.

"There are individual bathrooms, individual showers. The whole concept of the cottages had to change."

To assure the campaign's success, Dunn made a personal \$50,000 contribution, a contribution that helped bring the total to \$4 million.

In addition to the Capital Campaign, Dunn has been involved in the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Garden Party - an annual food and wine celebration/fundraiser that takes place on the center grounds in early June.

After participating in the first Garden Party 12 years ago, Dunn asked for a tour in order to learn more about the center.

She began a Garden Party "pre-party," a dinner hosted in her own home in which she sends special committees gathered to raise funds to help cover the costs of the Garden Party;

thus, all the funds raised the next day would go to the children.

### Pre-party fundraiser

This pre-party has evolved as a successful fundraiser to the point where her home-based dinner party - netting an impressive \$5,000 its first year, made \$90,000 dollars in 1999. In fact, the event has gotten so large it was moved to the grounds of Sarah Fisher this past June, and included a swing band and wine auction.

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### Early reflections

"I saw these kids that really have been rejected by society. And they were cute little kids. There were some five year old kids in there and Sister Mary Patricia, who was the executive director at the time, said to me, 'there's only one thing that we can give these children, and that is hope.'"

"I said, what do you mean, hope? She told me - you know what, when they're out in the world, and they're faced with a decision, good or bad, if we can give them something here, and it will make them do something right versus wrong, we've done our job. She said, that's all we can give, is hope."

"And I was just really struck by that. We can't guarantee them success - we can just hope that something that has occurred will stick with them - maybe it's a staff member, maybe it's the other children they're with, maybe it's the love they may get at Christmas time."

Currently the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center is looking for babysitters, age 18 or older, and professional volunteers to serve on special events committees. To volunteer for either job, call Michelle Mill at 626-7527, ext. 3372.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRIDGES

Volunteer: Judy Dunn in front of her business, Decanter Imports.