

Column: Kudos to those who tend the Tollgate Preserve

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During this holiday season, it is so nice to hear of goodwill gestures in the community by volunteers who give back day after day without recognition. These unsung heroes are the very people who help an area survive and flourish.

So, hats off to the residents of Tollgate who have been maintaining the Tollgate Wyndham Preserve. This passive park gives plants and animals a safe sanctuary from any building development, and allows a relaxing, peaceful place for neighbors to go for nature walks.

Dave Fuller oversees the preserve, putting in countless hours and finding ways to enhance the area. His wife, Deb, plants flowers there, Jerry Wallace works on the landscaping and Dave Armstrong added accent fences at the entrance. A local arborist even carved a bench out of a tulip poplar tree. John Ross and local Boy Scouts also built benches and a wooden bridge for the preserve. This area has evolved over the years and is a true gem in the neighborhood.

The Community Crisis Center has seen many new families seeking services during these uncertain economic times. The center opened in 1982 and its main mission is to prevent homelessness. Emergency food, help with bills, personal hygiene items and school supplies are available, as well as career clothing.

Although the center is located in Reisterstown next to the Hannah More School, it serves the entire Reisterstown-Owings Mills-Glyndon area. It also houses a food pantry that has partnered with the Maryland Food Bank. Donation dollars to the local Crisis Center can be used to purchase items from the Maryland Food Bank, and these dollars go two to three times further because of this partnership.

Deborah Goff, the director of the Crisis Center, is new at the helm, taking over for Vicki Bibler who recently moved. She is a welcome addition to the center, and is doing a fabulous job.

Food donations are always needed, and local resident Kathy Gambriell has an excellent idea. She suggests that anyone invited to a holiday party this year take canned goods as a hostess gift. These in turn can be donated to a local food pantry in the area. What a great pay-it-forward idea.

The Owings Mills Volunteer Fire Company is having their annual Christmas Tree Sales during the month of December. These trees are freshly cut from Maryland and can be purchased at the fire station across from Chick-Fil-A on Owings Mills Boulevard. Proceeds help to pay for all of the equipment necessary to run a volunteer fire company.

The Ladies Auxiliary of VFW Post 521 hosts its annual Children's Christmas Party on Dec. 12 from 9 a.m. to noon. This will be a Breakfast with Santa --always a fun event -- and is open to children from 1 to 12 years of age.

Then, on New Year's Eve, call the babysitter because there will be a party and dance at this same VFW Post. A dinner of steak and crab cakes is included in the \$40 per person ticket, and there will be an open bar. Favors are provided, so bring your friends and family to ring in 2010 together.

The Post is located at 214 Tollgate Road and tickets can be obtained by calling 410-356-6578.

Are you looking for fresh fruit for the holiday season? Then Cedarmere's Fruit Express can make that wish come true. It rolls into town on Dec. 19 and 20, with pick-up hours from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. All phone orders need to be called in at 410-526-7060 by Dec. 13. Oranges and grapefruits are not only a treat in the cold winter months, but they're good for you, too. Cedarmere Elementary is located at 17 Nicodemus Road.

Owings Mills High School is urging all parents to join the PTSA. Their membership is less than 10 percent and already a third of the school year is over. The lack of funding from membership causes the PTSA to cut programs that they sponsor and the students then need to have multiple fundraisers to support their programs and help fill their needs. If every family at OMHS joined for just \$10, the funding crisis would be nonexistent. Would you consider joining?

December is chock-full of birthdays and special occasions, and Harry Freeman is wished a very happy 56th birthday on Dec. 23, just in time to wish his father, Calvin Freeman, a happy 81st on Dec. 28.

My own family has much to celebrate, too. My husband Billy and I have our 32nd wedding anniversary on Dec. 18, followed by my son's 25th birthday on Dec. 29. Best wishes to the two special guys in my life.