

Holiday giving: Local charities need help

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www.signonsandiego.com

In a country of plenty and at time of Thanksgiving, the recent headlines are grim.

Nearly half a million people living in San Diego County are under the poverty line. At least 4 in 10 San Diego seniors over 65 are struggling to make ends meet.

And yet, most people say they are committed to helping out those less fortunate.

According to a recent Red Cross poll, 68 percent of Americans believe that because of the economy, it's important to give something to charity. Nearly six in 10 plan on donating to charity between Thanksgiving and the end of December.

For many people, helping those who are less fortunate is an important part of their holiday traditions. While there are many ways to offer meaningful gifts this holiday season, the U-T has compiled a list of charities that are active locally.

For additional resources, call 211 or go to 211sandiego.org. San Diego's 211 system is a free information service for people looking for basic human services such as food, housing and health care.

Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank

The Food Bank distributes over 18 million pounds of food throughout the county each year. You may have missed the Thanksgiving Day Run for the Hungry, but there are still several ways to support the Food Bank this holiday season.

- The Food 4 Kids Backpack Program provides weekend backpacks filled with food to chronically hungry elementary schoolchildren. For more information go to sandiegofoodbank.org
- Jer's Chocolates, a local maker of gourmet peanut butter-chocolate candies, will donate \$5 from the sale of every Holiday Gift Box to the Food Bank. For details, go to jers.com/product/sdfoodbank or call 1-800-540-7265.
- The 2011 Holiday Food Drive continues until Dec. 31. Non-perishable food can be deposited in red barrels at Vons and Stater Bros. supermarkets throughout the county, or delivered directly to the Food Bank warehouse at 9850 Distribution Avenue, San Diego 92121.

Jewish Family Service of San Diego

- The Embrace-a-Family Holiday Gift Basket Program will make Hanukkah or Christmas celebrations a little brighter for many San Diego families. Donation drop off is Dec. 11.

- The Jewish Family Service Foodmobile has been bringing hot, kosher, home-delivered meals to the elderly and homebound since 1971.

For more information contact Melinda Wilkes, Volunteer Services Manager at (858) 637-3050, or go to jfssd.org to donate online.

Feeding America San Diego

- Feeding America's Holiday's Hope Campaign provides food baskets to needy families during the holiday season. Throughout the year, the organization partners with 185 nonprofit organizations and schools to feed more than 400,000 people in San Diego County. For more information go to feedingamericasd.org.

North County Food Bank

- Based in San Marcos, the North County Food Bank has been feeding hungry residents for 20 years. It serves about 18,000 people a month. Go to sdnccs.org to find a food drive near you, or call (760) 761-1140.

Escondido Public Library

- Instead of paying fines on overdue materials, patrons may donate food items that the library will give to Interfaith Community Services in Escondido. The Food for Fines program is in effect from Nov. 28 through Dec. 31. For more information, call (760) 839-4684.

Interfaith Community Services

- Interfaith distributes food to needy families throughout North County. To contribute to Interfaith's annual Holiday Adopt A Family program visit interfaithservices.org/holiday-adoptions.html, or email interfaithholidays2011@gmail.com.

Santee Food Bank

- The Santee Food Bank, which last year served almost 15,000 meals to those in need, is operated under the auspices of the Santee Ministerial Council. For more information, go to santeefoodbank.org, or call (619) 448-4456.

Hearts and Hands Working Together

- Hearts and hands works with some of the poorest of the poor, providing food, shoes and clothing to underserved and at risk individuals and families in the San Ysidro Community. For more information call (619) 662-7592 or visit heartsandhandsworkingtogether.org.

Mama's Kitchen

This non-profit charitable organization delivers food and support to San Diegans affected by AIDS.

- Mama's Kitchen will commemorate World AIDS Day with the 20th annual Tree of Life ceremony on Dec. 1 at 6 p.m. at Village Hillcrest, 3965 Fifth Avenue.

- Through a partnership with Pinery Christmas Trees, you can order your holiday trees, wreaths and pointsettias online at mamaskitchen.org and the proceeds will help Mama's Kitchen provide meals for critically ill neighbors.

Meals-on-Wheels Greater San Diego, Inc.

- For more than 50 years, Meals-on-Wheels has served seniors around the county, relying on volunteers to deliver food seven days a week, including holidays, to the homes of the people in the program. For more information contact meals-on-wheels.org.

Red Cross of San Diego and Imperial Counties

- The Red Cross is asking the public to visit www.redcross.org/gifts to make a donation in the name of the people on their gift list this year. Donations will help provide food and shelter to a victim of disaster or others seeking basic necessities just to get by.

- The Holiday Mail For Heroes program works to collect and distribute holiday cards to American service members, veterans and their families.

For more information, go to sdarc.org

Toys for Tots

The Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots campaign collects new, unwrapped toys and gives them out to needy children in the local community. For more information go to san-diego-ca.toysfortots.org.

- Toys for Tots' Family Day at the USS Midway Museum is Saturday, December 3rd from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, go to midway.org/node/325

- Toys will also be collected at the December 11 Chargers-Bills game and December 21 Poinsettia Bowl at Qualcomm Stadium.

- Donations will be accepted through Christmas Eve at all Toys"R"Us, Babies"R"Us stores in the county. Cash contributions will also be accepted online at Toysrus.com/ToysforTots.

Teddy Bear Drive to benefit Rady Children's Hospital

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the San Diego Regional Law Enforcement Teddy Bear Drive. The collection drive continues through Dec. 12.

- Donations of new, stuffed animals, with tags still attached may be made at police departments in San Diego, Chula Vista, Coronado, Carlsbad, El Cajon, Escondido, La Mesa, as well as at a number of participating San Diego Sheriff's Department stations and businesses. For drop-off locations and more information, go to sandiegoregionalteddybeardrive.com.

Make-A-Wish Foundation of San Diego

For details about how to give to Make-A-Wish and other fundraising events, go to makeawish-sd.org.

- From Dec. 15 to Jan. 15, a portion of proceeds from each Sammy's Woodfired specialty pizza sold will benefit Make-A-Wish. For more information visit sammypizza.com.
- The San Diego County Credit Union Poinsettia Bowl has designated the Make-A-Wish Foundation of San Diego as the beneficiary of the Poinsettia Bowl. One dollar from every game ticket sold will benefit Make-A-Wish. For more information, go to poinsettiabowl.com.
- Through December 24, Macy's will donate \$1 to the Make-A-Wish Foundation for each stamped letter to Santa Claus dropped into special letterboxes at stores countywide

Tips for giving to charities

- Never donate to a charity that you know nothing about.
- Don't feel pressured into giving on the spot or allowing someone to come to your house to pick up the contribution.
- Hang up the telephone on aggressive and harassing solicitors.
- Request written information about the charity, its mission, programs and finances, how your donation will be used, and proof that your contribution is tax deductible.
- Confirm a charity's tax-exempt status with the IRS by calling 1-877-829-5500, or click on the "Search for Charities" link online at irs.gov/charities.
- Check to see that the charity is registered with the California Attorney General's Office at oag.ca.gov/charities.
- Look at charity watchdog sites, such as the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance at give.org, charitynavigator.org or guidestar.org.
- Do not reveal your personal or financial information, including your Social Security number or credit card and bank account numbers, to anyone who solicits a contribution from you.
- Always write a check payable to the charity, not the individual soliciting you, so that you have a record of your donation.