

Annual Giving Tree needs your support

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As the economy struggled, so too did charitable giving during the past several years.

But those who watch the trends say things are turning around.

In fact, according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, after a drop during the recent Great Recession, “individual giving has been increasing in both current and inflation-adjusted dollars for the last couple years, although it has not recovered to pre-recession levels.”

According to a national report, “Giving USA 2013,” individual giving peaked in 2005, staying relatively level before dropping in the first year of the recession (2008) and again in the following year. Every year since 2009 has seen a gradual increase.

That’s why I am hopeful as we enter this last weekend before our deadline, that the annual Mary Lou Wilson Memorial Giving Tree program will make its goals, though donations are lower than normal this year.

For those not familiar with it, the Giving Tree was launched 24 years ago as The Reporter asked our readers to make the holidays a little brighter for some neighbors in need. It was the brainchild of Mary Lou Wilson, the Reporter’s former features editor who enthusiastically lead The Giving Tree for its first 18 years. When she died of Cancer, we renamed the program in her honor and carry it on today, still helping neighbors in need, though now we help various local programs who are on the front lines each day with local residents in need.

For example, this year we are hoping to give enough funds to help several children in the local Christmas Wish program.

The Vacaville-based organization helps bring a merry Christmas to thousands of children each holiday season.

Also on our list this year are Jimmy and Myrtle Dunlap, an elderly Vacaville couple who have been struggling with medical bills and a vehicle that they use mostly to get to and from doctors appointments. We’re hoping to raise enough funds to help them replace that vehicle with a good used car.

“Senior Voices,” is a new program scheduled to launch early next year that will give seniors 60 years old and older a voice and an opportunity to participate in group discussions over the phone from the comfort of their own home.

“Many of our seniors live in isolation due to lack of transportation, chronic illness and/or mobility issues,” explained Louis Souza-Fuentes, projects manager/volunteer coordinator with Faith in Action. Souza-Fuentes will oversee the program once it begins. “The Senior Voices program will very much act as a lifeline for the isolated elderly of our community. Connecting to others to discuss a variety of issues through the use of a simple phone call will make a world of difference. It is the hope that through this program, new friendships will be developed in addition to participants having a place of their own where people care.”

We hope to help the program with materials for training.

Based in Vacaville, Connections For Life is a nonprofit organization that provides supported living services to adults with significant disabilities, either developmental or intellectual. The organization currently supports 70 such adults and among them there are 20 children under the age of 18 living in some of the homes.

This year, Connections For Life has been nominated to benefit from the Giving Tree to provide its clients with emergency kits, something they found they needed after August’s earthquake.

And last, but in no way least, four local food banks have been selected to receive funding through Giving Tree. They include The Storehouse, Vaca FISH, St. Mary’s Food Locker and the Solano-Contra Costa Food Bank. Giving Tree funds would help all the programs, not just during the holidays but throughout the year.

Currently the Giving Tree effort is at about 60 percent of its goal. It is not too late to help us hit the target. Donations will be accepted through Dec. 18.

Read full stories on our nominees and download a donation coupon from our Mary Lou Wilson Memorial Giving Tree Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Mary-Lou-Wilson-Memorial-Giving-Tree/306764079335034>

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