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Export date: Thu Mar 28 17:20:21 2024 / +0000 GMT

# Concentrate on doing what you love best

by Mark Pavilons

This past holiday season was uneventful at best, almost void of spirituality at worst.

Perhaps it was the lack of snow. Maybe it was the lack of holiday ?goodness.? I felt a bit down and reading the news headlines over the Christmas break offered little comfort, given the amount of tragedies, crimes and awful events.

Everything went smoothly on the home front, but there was something missing ? something in the air that lacked a certain je ne sais quoi. A quick poll of co-workers came to the same conclusion.

I?noticed news stories about the record amount of holiday spending and the record number of travelers passing through Pearson Airport this season.

To me, this means every thing's great when it comes to personal wealth and a robust economy.

But then I noticed a sad reciprocal decline in the amount Canadians give to charity.

The Salvation Army Kettle campaign fell some $5.3 million short of its goal by

Christmas.

Every dollar donated helps The Salvation Army continue its vital work during

Christmas and throughout the year.

With a national $21-million fundraising goal, the Christmas Kettle Campaign enables local Salvation Army units in 400 communities across Canada to help individuals and families with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing and shelter. Contributions also allow The Salvation Army to continue operating its life-changing programs, such as substance abuse recovery, housing supports, job and skills training, and budgeting and education classes, which help people find a way out of poverty, permanently. Every donation to a

Christmas kettle remains in the community in which it was given, in order to help local people in need. Last year, The Salvation Army helped over 1.7 million people.

The Army's ?kettles??are iconic, almost synonymous with Christmas itself. To me, the holidays aren't the same without Army members at malls ringing their bells.

The international Christian organization began its work in Canada in 1882 and has grown to become one of the largest direct providers of social services in the country. For over 130 years, The Salvation Army has given hope and support to vulnerable people in 400 communities across Canada and in 131 countries around the world. The Salvation Army offers practical assistance for children and families, often tending to the basic necessities of life, providing shelter for homeless people and rehabilitation for people who have lost control of their lives to an addiction. When you give to The Salvation Army, you are investing in the future of marginalized and overlooked people in your community.

I?can't recall when the Army fell short of its goal in recent years. I?find that

a little distressing.

What's more, charitable contributions buy Canadians is down more than 30% since

2006, according to a study by the Fraser Institute.

And Canadians remain far less generous than Americans.

?Canadians continue to donate less and less every year, which means charities face greater challenges to help those in need this holiday season and throughout the year,? said Jason Clemens, Fraser Institute executive vice-president.

The study, ?Generosity in Canada and the United States: The 2018 Generosity

Index,? finds that only about one-in-five Canadian tax-filers (20.4 per cent) claimed charitable donations on their tax return in 2016, the latest year of available data. That's a decline of 16.9 per cent since 2006.

South of the border, however, almost one-in-four (24.8 per cent) of Americans claimed donations on their tax returns in 2016.

Likewise, the total average amount of income donated by Canadians dropped from

0.78 per cent in 2006 to 0.53 per cent in 2016. Americans, by comparison, gave

1.46 per cent of their income in 2016?nearly three times the percentage

Canadians claimed.

Notably, of the 15 least-generous jurisdictions in North America, 12 are

Canadian.

I don't get it. On the one hand we had record retail sales, record online sales and record holiday flights, but a drop in charitable donations.

To me, giving is a major part of the season.?As our hearts filled with the joy of celebration and fellowship, our pockets should have been opened for all. I realize that there are likely more charities and causes than ever before, competing for the pool of shrinking funds.

I?have been involved in fundraising for many years and locally I have helped many of King's causes. I?acted as MC for this year's Sip &?Savour fundraiser for the King?Township Food Bank.

I?started a gofundme campaign for my daughter Lexie, who's off to Rwanda for 6 weeks this year on a mission

(https://www.gofundme.com/help-local-volunteer-help-others-in-rwanda). We're about half-way there, with online and offline contributions and I feel so blessed and grateful for those who've supported Lexie. From the bottom of my heart,?I?thank you all!

This was really the highlight of the holidays for me, along with having family together to share in the bounty.

But the joy quickly fades when faced with utility rate increases, grocery bill hikes, insurance premiums and the like. I?don't want to be a downer as the new year begins and I?truly hope 2019 will be an amazing year.

I've made some personal resolutions and I?am steadfast in my commitment to helping Lexie, and all other charitable causes that

need a boost!