

Black Friday and White Christmas

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I can't make this column any more black and white than this: In the post-pandemic, highly-charged political climate we find ourselves in, a world where economically many are struggling, it's only those who are fortunate that might be looking forward to tomorrow's 'Black Friday'.

It's a day synonymous with deals - a chance to buy an enormous TV for half price or to stock up on goodies and gifts for the holiday season. For others however, those who only dream of either a white Christmas or a happy holiday season, Black Friday is just that: it's bleak, bleak and leaves little room for any type of holiday joy. That's why today I'm hoping that our Caledon community will rally around those who may have worked hard all year, but are still no farther ahead, or families burdened with continued debt, or without employment, or the many who often go to school or bed hungry. Even if you don't believe in Christmas in a religious way, many of us do still dream of a white Christmas filled with plenty of snow, bright lights and the 'spirit of the season.' If you're one of the lucky ones, turn your Black Friday deals into an opportunity to give back, spreading a little white Christmas/seasonal joy to your neighbours throughout Caledon.

There are a number of ways you can help out locally, either using your Black Friday savings on gift items to maximize donations to places like CCS, Family Transition Place or the Milo Foundation (just a few examples) or through direct monetary donations and support. There are so many community-minded and charitable organizations doing great things this holiday season that while I draw your attention to the few listed here, I also encourage families to discuss together where and how you might be able to make a donation that's meaningful to you on a personal level.

Perhaps it's through your local faith-based institution, dropping a toy in the 'Toys for Tots' box or a monetary donation in the Salvation Army kettle. Get the kids involved to help them both learn about, and understand the importance of, charitable giving. Speaking of kids, while we often think of little ones during the holiday season, let's not forget that teens are as deserving as those wee ones and they have wish lists too, as do those impacted by gender-based violence who might perhaps be spending this time of year seeking safety in a shelter. Locally, you can check out the Family Transition Place Amazon wish list by following the link from their website at familytransitionplace.ca/give/

How else can you help? Caledon Community Services is a name no doubt many residents are already familiar with; an agency providing an array of support not just now but throughout the year, from employment and English language support to transportation, a food pantry and more. New this year, if you NEED help, CCS is offering a confidential online form for families to complete, or you can register for assistance at either the Southfields or Caledon East library branches. If you OFFERING help, any monetary donations between now and December 31st, 2024 will be doubled through a matching gift from Mars Canada (up to \$25,000) meaning your support will go twice as far! Food donations and basic needs are always welcome (check their website for what's most needed right now) or you can check out the CCS Amazon wish list registry at www.amazon.ca/registries/gl/guest-view/MC2GS51ONSL4. Finally, if your family is planning to attend the Santa Claus parade this year, you might want to take part in the Family Holiday Giving Day at the Exchange afterwards. Activities for all ages will be available from sorting food donations to lending a hand in the kitchen. Visit the CCS website to learn more.

Another local institution you might consider donating to is Caledon Meals on Wheels, an organization supporting and connecting seniors to health, nutrition and community, through a variety of programs and services - not just meals! Their clients include shut-ins and many who find the holidays an especially difficult time. If you are able and in a GIVING frame of mind, their Friendly Visiting Program is critical for local seniors and could use your help. This program matches volunteers with seniors to foster meaningful relationships through regular visits, phone calls, or outings. These connections provide not only companionship but also a lifeline to the community for seniors who may otherwise feel forgotten not just through the holiday season but all year long. In another example of corporate goodwill, the Stafford Group, owners of the Bolton Tim Hortons, are supporting the 'Match Our Meals' Fundraiser. From December 1 to 31st every dollar donated will be matched, up to a total of \$7,500. Finally, if you NEED

support, or know of someone who might benefit from a friendly face and listening ear, contact CMOW today.

You may recall the tragic story of Milo Yekmalian who lost his life in a car accident several years ago. Milo was a gifted basketball player and athlete who, as a young teen realizing not every family had the advantages he'd grown up with, started an informal program he called "Hoops for Hunger." Working with local school principals, families who needed assistance were asked to provide a list of 3 wants and 3 needs and Milo personally, along with the support of community and fundraising efforts, raised money to fulfill these wish lists. Since that time, and now carrying on the work in his name, the family has created and registered the Milo Foundation, a charitable organization last year helping over 500 people! You can support them through cash and/or food donations of canned goods or with gift cards to No Frills where the foundation organizes a giant shopping trip to augment canned food donations with fresh food items like produce and more. Finally, new clothing including warm winter jackets, boots and gloves are matched with children who might not otherwise have access to outdoor gear. Learn more by visiting milofoundation.ca/about-milo.

I encourage you, if you are able, not just on Black Friday, but throughout the holiday season, to consider supporting those in need in a way that is meaningful to you and your family. You might keep it simple by just stopping by one of the many local businesses like Alton Greenhouses in Alton or Bolton's British Bites, to drop off an item on their suggested donations list and let them take care of the delivery. Some schools and local churches have "Angel Trees" or similar where you can pick a note from the tree with a promise to fulfill the request listed. Even grocery stores make donating easy with many offering pre packed bags of needed food bank items - all you have to do is pay for it! There are so many other local businesses, real estate agents and community minded citizens offering to collect food, cash or other specific items in support of a variety of agencies that we couldn't possibly list them all here, but what that means to me is there are many ways to help, if you are in a position to do so. We might not be able to guarantee a white Christmas in terms of snow, but every little donation helps to ensure a struggling family, a single-parent or someone experiencing loneliness, homelessness or illness to maybe, just maybe, have a little brighter holiday season.