

Happy Holiday? Community Comment December 14, 2017 Mike Goldsby

Merry Christmas! Next week is the Solstice, the longest night of the year in the middle of a clear, cold winter in Humboldt County.

It is a great time to hunker down, put aside our differences and count our blessings, simple things like a warm house, good food and the support of friends and family. It is also the season of giving, to help those who do not have even those simple things.

For most of us, we revel in the festive decorations and the festivities. But the festive atmosphere can have the opposite effect on people who have experienced loss, grief or life changing personal problems. In fact, people say they sometimes feel worse, thinking they should be happy or at least act happy when they feel the exact opposite inside.

If this doesn't make sense, talk to anyone associated with hospice or counseling or homeless services or drug and alcohol treatment. They will attest that it is not the most wonderful time of the year for everybody.

I recently talked about the season with Arlette Large, Executive Director of Humboldt Recovery Center, or HRC as folks like to call it. HRC is the longest standing addiction treatment program in Humboldt County, around since the early 70's.

Arlette is a former student of mine from Addiction Studies at College of the Redwoods and she is very proud of the 64-bed facility. She said "Getting clean and sober any time of year is hard but the guilt and shame around family and community impacts them more so throughout the holiday season."

HRC hosts holiday meals for the residents and their families and donations to the facility are always welcome.

Dr. Jacqueline Gunn wrote an article titled "Coping with Grief and Loss during the holidays." She said "Firsts" are especially difficult. The first time at Thanksgiving without a spouse, the first holiday away from the family and in a drug treatment program.

Dr. Gunn said people may need to consider breaking some annual traditions in order to feel better. This is interesting since I think many of us believe we need to force people to maintain tradition.

Gunn also writes that it is better to ask someone what they need rather than tell them what would be good for them.

The Mayo Clinic published some tips to deal with holiday stress and depression.

Acknowledge your feelings. It is normal to feel sadness at times. You can't change those feelings because the calendar says to be happy.

Reach out. Small doses of friends and community might be better than isolation.

Be realistic. The holidays do not need to be perfect.

Set aside differences. There is plenty of time to argue.

Stick to a budget.

And learn to say no. Give yourself the gift of not participating in every single activity.

None of this may apply to you and that is something to be grateful for. Spread that joy by making a donation to some place like Humboldt Recovery Center.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment