

Community Comment
December 15, 2017
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All I want for Christmas

When I was a kid, I remember reading stories about Christmas. I was raised Catholic so the story of the birth of a child that would become known as the son of God was the story most told and the most important. This story, in my experience, was all about the message. The message was peace on Earth, good will toward men. This country had just come out of a true World War. It was the fifties and the memories were fresh and raw. It seemed as though everyone had a loved one either lost or wounded in horrific battles in Europe or the Pacific. The “police action” in Korea added to this sense of war and it’s affect on a culture. Peace on Earth, good will toward men was a very real wish my family had.

As the fifties moved on, Christmas became more and more commercialized. Television became more affordable and soon it seemed like everyone had one. My experience was that everyone, it seemed, watched the same things and saw the same commercials. Soon, the idea of making a wish list for Christmas became a common activity. Since we were lower middle class and had financial struggles, these lists were more pragmatic than fanciful. But they were still fun.

It was in my college years that the idea of community and community service became clear to me. My first volunteer effort was working on the Rose Parade float that was built by students at Cal Poly in Pomona and San Luis Obispo. I was an engineering major and this work was great fun. I met interesting people from all over and had a real sense of accomplishment. This was mostly a frivolous project but I got the volunteer bug.

When I came to Humboldt, community and service became a big part of my experience. Along with my Forestry studies, a number of other forestry students and myself proposed building a natural trail in Redwood Park and the City Council approved of the idea. The City of Arcata provided hand tools and donated loads of wood chips and gravel. We had a faculty advisor and over a nearly 18 month period, the trail was completed. We built bridges and steps and benches. We designed a nature walk and brochure with stops marked along the way to tell the story of the redwood biome.

When I was teaching, my classes that were project based did many park design projects for Arcata, Eureka, and Humboldt County. This experience led to my running for City Council. That led me to discovering Rotary. Community service eventually became a part of my life. I find the work of service, the opportunity of service, to be a satisfying and rewarding experience.

My Christmas wish list has changed over the years. The list now includes things that might be needed in our community and around the world. With friends in the community, and the amazing people I work with in the Arcata Rotary Club, I have been able to

participate in numerous projects that maybe have improved people's lives. My immediate family have all carved out their own type of community service.

My wish list has been mostly fulfilled by my Humboldt County community. So, my Christmas Wish this year is that each of us will find the time to give just a little to better our community. Pick your interest. You have more to offer than you can imagine.

Merry Christmas and happy new year. 2018 will be what we create.

This has been Sam pennisi for community comment.