

## **Holiday News Tips from Mercer Island Rotary Club**

### **Shopping Spree for West Seattle Kids**

About 90 needy West Seattle kids and up to 40 teens and 80 adult volunteers will flood the downtown Seattle Sears store Saturday, 6 December, for a “shopping spree” for winter clothes and shoes.

Each student nominated by his or her West Seattle school is accompanied by an assistant to choose up to \$100 in clothing. The kids also will receive a warm coat, socks and shoes. They are told they cannot buy anything but apparel for themselves—none for other family members, as many wish to do.

Mercer Island Interact Club teens, a group sponsored by the Mercer Island Rotary, arrive at 6 a.m. to set things up. When the elementary students arrive by 7 a.m., the high school students present them with gift bags filled with school supplies, and the two groups get to know each other over breakfast and measuring for shoe sizes.

The MI Club got involved in 1999 and the decorated gift bags followed shortly. For the last five years, the high school students have raised money and donations for these gift bags. MIHS Interact, founded in the 1960s through MI Rotary, encourages “Service Above Self.”

However, Interactors are just one-third of the workforce. Another 80 or so adults from the West Seattle Rotary join in. WSR raises the money for the clothing and organizes the event. This is its 35<sup>th</sup> year. Downtown Seattle Sears Store opens early and discounts prices to support the event.

A bus will pick up the kids at their schools. They not only will shop, but enjoy breakfast, a Santa visit and pizza lunch with holiday carols. They are returned to their schools by noon.

### **MI Rotarians Ring Bells for Renton Salvation Army**

Some stories from Saturday bell-ringers in front of MI Albertson's, QFCs and the Liquor Store amuse and amaze. They come from the 90-some MI Rotarians and family members who hope to beat last year's record of \$9,000 in MI donations to help the Renton Salvation Army meet the needs of children, families, seniors and others. (Rotary has staffed the MI kettles for more than 10 years.)

One customer who comes every year puts an ample donation into the kettle, “in thanks for the year that the Salvation Army helped get me back on my feet,” says the now senior citizen. Another comes to hear John Townsend and Dylan Sullivan play their trombones as they ring the bells. Others say the pet dogs who sit with their Rotarian masters seem to charm their wallets.

Keith Blue, who organizes the Saturday efforts now until 20 December, says the drive is his pleasure.

“It's simple, straight forward and soul-warming. It gives Rotarians a chance to get better acquainted with each other and the shoppers,” and it helps the Renton Salvation Army support

local day care, thrift shop, food bank, summer camps, holiday assistance, services for the aging, AIDS and other medical services, shelters, counseling, job training, and substance abuse rehabilitation, among others.

### **Clubs help other clubs get out the green**

Rotarians are noted for partnering. At Christmas time, that means helping the Lions Club sell Christmas trees, wreaths and garlands at the Farmers Insurance parking lot. "About three years ago, Rotary and Lions began sharing manpower for the Half-Marathon in March and the Christmas tree sale in December. So, 30-some Rotarians will fill 3–4 hour shifts until all the trees are sold," says Sam Sullivan, MI Rotary Half-Marathon director.

Lions tree sales chair Craig Feters says the force swap really helps. "We have 1,200 Noble, Fraser and Douglas firs, 200 wreaths and 1,700 feet of garland to sell from 29 November to about 16 December. We also get help from Mercer Island Youth and Family Services and MI Boys and Girls Club, to whom much of the proceeds go. MIYFS uses the money for its emergency fund, to supply food, assistance for utilities, rent, and other urgent needs. The MIB&GC funds go to youth programs. Other proceeds help supply large-print books for the senior library at the Community Center, Meals on Wheels, adult daycare, teacher and student awards for community service, and support for the NW Lions Sight and Hearing Foundation and leader dogs.

Feters reminds people to bring old eyeglasses and hearing aids to the tree sale trailer, or to the MI library or fire station, for their recycling program.

### **In the Land of Plenty, Plenty are Hungry**

The need for food for the region's hungry is up by 22 percent this season over last year at the same time, says Katie Bain of Rotary First Harvest. This agency gathers, packages and distributes produce to the regions' food banks, using the labor of Rotarians on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays of each month at the Kent and Shoreline warehouses.

This steady workforce keeps up its end of it, says Katie. But the real need is for more donations of food and funds to local food banks, she adds.