



Kate Fratti

kfratti@phillyburbs.com

Getting excited about giving

In-boxes here at the newspaper are filling with notices from businesses and schools and churches and clubs and civic groups planning to pull out the stops to help others in this season of giving.

It does a heart good — does a lot of good in the community, too.

Bucks Countians are generous. Maybe it's an expression of their gratitude for nice neighborhoods, open spaces, good schools, solid social services, strong communities.

Whatever drives the giving, it is constant throughout the year and then escalates right about now.

Two "help" invitations recently caught my attention. The first was because of the enthusiasm of the writer, Rachel Sparrow, a young woman who helps with media relations at CoreStates Capital Advisors in Newtown Township.

Seems CoreStates officials wanted to do something nice for military families with loved ones deployed. Employees were assigned the task of figuring out what, and I think they've come up with a good plan.

If you go to CoreStates Saturday, Rachel and company will help you create a crystal clear video message for your loved one overseas. All you need to bring is an e-mail address to which you'd like the message sent.

I recall that when my son was deployed, he had very limited access to a computer. But from time to time, he'd be on a base and wait in line for a computer at an Internet center, and, boy, what a treat when he'd tap out a message.

He told us he, too, got a lift from clicking on our news and photos from home. At the time, I never thought about a video exchange. How nice it would have been for us to exchange some laughter and an awkward camera wave, although, surely it would have had me blubbing for hours after — the good kind of blubbing.

So, consider it. If you don't have access to a Web cam of your own, stop in between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. tomorrow at CoreStates to see Rachel. The address is 115 Pheasant Run. I suggest you call today, make an appointment and get directions, 267-759-5000.

Families will have the chance to record and send personal holiday messages using the Talk Fusion Video E-mail service. They'll be able to record up to a five-minute, crystal-clear video message that their family member can view with

a single click on any computer.

"[We] wanted to reach out to the community in a way to touch the lives and families of the true patriots abroad who are protecting our liberties here in the U.S." said William Spiropoulos, CoreStates CEO.

Then came a personal note from Mike Bradley and his wife, Cindy Lawn, of Northampton. They have plans for an old-fashioned, low-tech way to help others, and it struck me as something any one of us could do this season if we wanted.

The couple, along with their teenage son, Ross, and young daughter, Sarah, host a neighborhood Christmas party every year. Too much food and drink every time, Mike says.

(Is there such a thing as too much food and drink?)

Every year, he and Cindy tell neighbors, "Don't bring a thing." And every year, neighbors come to the door with house gifts and goodies in hand anyway.

Sarah had an idea.

In this year's invite, Mike urged friends to use whatever they'd spend on a hostess gift or holiday platter or cheer to instead bring a check made out to the Red Cross Homeless Shelter, which in these hard economic times has a waiting list of folks who need help.

Mike, who makes a living writing about and counseling adolescents, said it's a way to help Sarah transition from being excited about getting, to being excited about giving.

Guests will simply place their tax-deductible donations in the box under the Bradley/Lawn Christmas tree and then get on with merrymaking.

"We suspect that the only thing you'll find better than meeting old friends is helping out some new ones you'll likely never meet," Mike writes in his invitation.

I suspect he's on to something.

Kate Fratti, whose column appears on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, is reminded the poor don't go away in hard economic times. Instead, their numbers grow and their conditions worsen.