

This month the Hood River News has published the first edition of “12 Columns of Christmas,” a booklet containing editorials written by Editor Kirby Neumann-Rea from our Christmas papers between 2000 and 2012.

Each bears a Christmas message, drawn from adult, juvenile and children’s literature, folklore, song lyrics, Scripture and other sources.

David Marvin designed “12 Columns,” and Deb Jones, Tony Methvin and Rick Ursprung of Columbia Gorge Press oversaw its printing.

All proceeds from the sale of “12 Columns of Christmas” go to Hood River Warming Shelter.

Copies are available for \$5 at Hood River News, Waucoma Bookstore, and at the participating Warming Shelter supporting churches and organizations: Riverside Community Church, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Hood River Nazarene, Mid-Columbia Center for Living, St. Mark’s Episcopal, and Hood River Valley Christian Church.

Call Neumann-Rea at 541-386-1234 if you would like multiple copies.

An excerpt:

Christmas in its purest form is an observance both solemn and celebratory. In Christmas there are two sides that do sometimes seem to contradict: the poverty of Mary and Joseph and the social realities underlining Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” countered by the joviality of the modern Santa Claus and our predilection for bulging stockings.

This is the time “to be of good cheer,” yet any Christmas season is tinged with gravity as well as gaiety. Christmas and the New Year celebration bring out contemplation on the trials of the year behind us.

Yet it is not a slight on Christmas to point out its own tinsel; Christmas literature can help us laugh.

“I am in a holiday humor,” wrote William Shakespeare.

What parent or child can’t relate to Marcelene Cox’s comment: “Our children await Christmas presents like politicians getting election returns; there’s the Uncle Fred precinct and the Aunt Ruth district still to come in.”

Our most popular Christmas writings featured “a little old driver so lively and quick,” who names his reindeer things like Donder and Blitzen. Saint Nick has “cheeks like roses and a nose like a cherry.”

Christmas gives us the chance to laugh — a gift we often forget to give ourselves. “How many old recollections, and how many dormant sympathies, does Christmas time awaken!” wrote Dickens.

Bearing witness

‘Blue Christmas’ services Dec. 21

Dec. 21 is National Homeless Awareness Day. No vigil in Hood River is planned such as the one held last Dec. 21, but Linda Presley of Valley Christian notes that “Blue Christmas” services on the same day are an appropriate venue for people who want to honor the homeless.

“It is a time to be mindful of those who are out in the cold,” Presley said.

“Blue Christmas” recognizes that Dec. 21 is the shortest day of the year and the “holiday cheer” is not a universal feeling.

The event at Valley Christian Church (975 Indian Creek) starts at 4 p.m. and involves prayers and readings and the lighting of candles.

“It is the shortest day, and the darkest night, and Christmas is not really a happy time for someone who has experienced some kind of loss,” Presley said. “We light candles for people we want to remember, and celebrate the fact we can express these feelings of grief and God understands.”

In from the COLD



SIGNS are placed along streets near shelter sites.



Photos by Kirby Neumann-Rea

SHELTER HOST Alan Wiebe, seated above, talks with volunteers at Church of the Nazarene. Volunteers undergo training and work in pairs, and can select from three shifts. At Riverside Community Church, volunteer Matt Rankin, left, loads mattresses and other shelter gear into his truck for transfer to the next host site, with help from some of the kids of the congregation (inset). More venues are needed, in general and for specific weeks this winter; see “Getting Involved,” page B7.

Volunteer-based Warming Shelter program for homeless undergoes changes in 2013-14; host sites and more volunteers needed

The Hood River Warming Shelter is seeking to enrich the quality of life of the homeless in Hood River County and surrounding areas by providing “a safe place to meet the basic human needs of people without shelter during our coldest months.”

The warming shelter started in November 2010 on a rotation basis between five local churches and had trained 100 volunteers to operate the shelter from January-March on nights that were below 35 degrees.

“I think we’re getting better every year,” said Andy Wade of Hood River, one of the shelter founders. “The first year we put it together in three months from the first meeting to opening night. Every year we’ve tweaked it a little to try to make it better and I think we’re getting there.”

The warming shelter operates for a week at a time at a rotating list of host sites, and is open from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m.

It has a strict no-drugs-tobacco-or-alcohol use policy, and weapons and sexual activity are prohibited; families are provided with as much privacy as possible. Also, guests must be in and stay in by 9 p.m., and “lights out” is

10 p.m.

The fact is, being homeless is an exhausting way to live, and most guests are ready to sleep by 9:30 p.m.

Games, books and conversation, along with food and warm beverages, are also provided.

Major changes happened this year with the addition of one venue and the departure of two others (more are needed: see Getting Involved for details).

Sites for 2013-14 include Mid-Columbia Center for Living Community Room, Riverside Community Church, Immanuel Lutheran Church, and Church of the Nazarene.

Volunteers work in pairs or threes, and can choose from three shifts: 5:45 p.m. to 10:15; 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.; 4:45 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Another significant change this year was hiring Alan Wiebe as shelter host; five nights a week he helps at the 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. opening shift.

“Alan was one of our top volunteers last year, with the most shifts served, and he just seemed a natural to hire for this position,” Wade said. “He has been amazing as far as providing consistency for our guests and volunteers. He’s just done a tremendous job.”

“I have heard from repeat guests and volunteers how much they appreciate having him in the position and the job he’s doing.”

Rev. Linda Presley, a shelter board member and frequent volunteer, said the number of guests has ranged from five to 11 per night, including men and women. Presley co-pastors at Hood River Valley Christian Church with

A talk with a volunteer

It’s important to meet the need you can meet

Gigi Seikinnen of Hood River has lived in the community for four years, and started volunteering for the Warming Shelter when it started four years ago.

What got you involved?

From the start, I had the modest goal of volunteering once a month. I’ve tried to gradually increase it. My personal goal is to help out about twice a month. There are people who volunteer many more shifts, but my concern is to try to be consistent.

As a friend of Andy (founder Andy Wade), I heard him talk about the man who died from exposure

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Who is homeless?

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, July 2009:

Individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, and children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are

abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement.

In 2003, children under the age of 18 accounted for 39 percent of the homeless population; 42 percent of these children were under the age of 5 (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2004). This same study found that unaccompanied minors comprised 5 percent of the urban homeless population. However, in other cities and especially in rural areas, the numbers of children experiencing homelessness are much higher.

According to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, in 2004, 25 percent of homeless were ages 25-34; the same study found percentages of homeless persons aged 55-64 at 6 percent.

Research indicates that 40 percent of homeless men have served in the armed forces, as compared to 34 percent of the general adult population.

Persons with severe mental illness represented about 26 percent of all sheltered homeless persons (Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 2008). According to the Federal Task Force on Homelessness and Severe Mental Illness, only 5-7 percent of homeless persons with mental illness require institutionalization; most can live in the community with the appropriate supportive housing options.

Many homeless are also victims of domestic violence, and people experiencing recent or chronic unemployment.





Photos by Kirby Neumann-Rea

STATE STREET DIGGING

Crestline Construction crews are hard at work at both ends of State Street this week on the Urban Renewal project. A 1-inch natural gas line was accidentally uprooted Thursday morning, prompting a response from Hood River Fire Department, which stood by until the NW Natural Gas repair team arrived. Meanwhile, at Fourth and State, Crestline workers lower into place a check valve for the new water line going into place as part of the project. Expect 15-20 minute delays on State Street as crews continue excavations between Front and Sixth streets.

TALK

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in Hood River five years ago, and Andy had said, “This cannot happen in our town.”

Andy was persistent in stating that it’s not acceptable and people need a warm, safe alternative. And for me, I guess volunteering is a way of living out my faith.

What’s the Warming Shelter like? Every night is different?

It does vary a lot. Two years ago we had a lot families who were accessing the warming shelter, and you felt good about knowing you were providing a warm, safe

place for families to sleep. You come into contact with some folks you probably wouldn’t deal with much on a normal basis and I think it’s just a good reminder that for whatever reason not everybody lives the same comfortable life that a large number of us do. You meet veterans, people who work; but kind of travel from region to region looking for work. You just meet a huge variety of people; people who have mental or addiction issues, and it’s helped me see there are not a lot of easy pat answers and sometimes it’s important to meet the need you can meet.

What shifts do you typically work?

The middle of the night

shifts ones. I’m a stay-at-home mom and do a number of volunteer things, and I have the luxury of being able to grab a nap the next day; but I find it can be, well, I got my Christmas cards written on one shift.

It can be a good time to read something that you haven’t had a chance to read or catch up on some things.

What do you say to people who find the idea of volunteering with the homeless to be scary?

I was pretty apprehensive about it and I did some soul searching and knew it was pretty far outside my comfort zone but thought it was important to take that plunge and try it.

I relate to that fear. It’s def-

initely worth coming to the training. The good thing is there are a number of people who have done it and are waiting to take a shift. It’s encouraging that you can be partnered with someone who knows the ropes and you wouldn’t be going in by yourself.

How can people help?

I would like to see us be very sustainable, and I think one step toward that is more volunteers who are kind of in my category of “consistent,” a couple of times a month, year after year, because those shifts add up and make it possible. It doesn’t have to be a huge.

Visit hoodrivercares.org for more on volunteering.

Lonesome Legos sought for library clubs

Have your kids outgrown all those Legos? The Hood River Library could use your unwanted Legos to start Lego clubs at its branches at Parkdale Community Center and Cas-

cade Locks City Hall. If you have some to donate, feel free to leave them at the kids’ desk, on the lower level of the Hood River Library.

ROOTS

Continued from Page B2

truly a tribute to the leadership and wisdom of many in the Gorge. They have embraced working together, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses.

I attribute much of this success to an enigmatic spirit who goes by the name of Coco Yackley. An unpretentious woman with a unique moniker, she has the uncanny ability to work with corporate executives and individuals in need of health services all on an equal footing.

Coupled with the indomitable spirit of Mark Thomas, whose towering stature is only superseded

by his unwavering faith in the goodness of man, this dynamic duo is making change an exciting adventure.

I expect there to be potholes in which we will stumble, even tar pits in which we may become mired. But with dedicated leadership and the ability to empower others across the continuum we will climb out of the holes and begin our ascent to the mountaintop, where our vision of a healthy community, where all people can thrive, can best be achieved. A group of communities that really care for one another.

SHELTER

Continued from Page B1

her husband, Dave.

“We were so delighted we were open in November when it was cold and it was so important to be open that first week of December when it got really, really cold,” Presley said.

“It’s been a quiet group; a good group of people, mostly guys,” Wade said.

Under the umbrella of Gorge Ecumenical Ministries, the Hood River Warm-

ing Shelter operates as a steering committee made up of 10 different individuals representing host congregations, the Hood River County Commission on Children and Families, Oregon Child Development Coalition, and Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital.

This year the shelter opened in mid-November and will run through mid March, 6 p.m. to 7 a.m.

Once providing only a mattress, sleeping bag and a sandwich, the shelter now offers a simple evening meal, breakfast, social interaction,

shower passes, clothes, laundry services, physical exams and referrals to those without health insurance.

Funding for the warming shelter comes from “a lot of individual support” and has included grants, including local ones from United Way and the Lions, and fundraising such as two months’ worth of Leos Club can and bottle drives.

Learn more at: hoodrivercares.org.

— Kirby Neumann-Rea, with assistance from Rev. Linda Presley

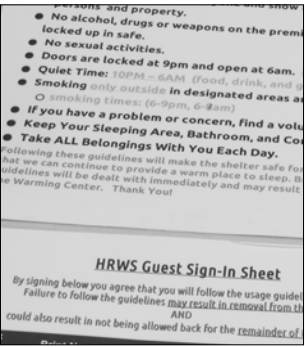


Photo by Kirby Neumann-Rea

SHELTER GUESTS agree to a specific set of rules before they sign in for the night.

GETTING INVOLVED

To learn more about volunteering and the program in general, visit the website at hoodrivercares.org.

About 100 volunteers have taken the training, which is an ample cadre, but a core group is spending one or more nights per week.

More volunteers are always welcome, but to Linda Presley the best approach is to spread things out a little with the folks who have already been trained.

“If the trained volunteers would sign up for twice a month, that would really help,” she said.

Andy Wade noted that the Unitarian

Universalist Fellowship takes on one night a month, and other groups are encouraged to do the same.

“People like that are huge as far as helping out site coordinators, because there are others who can only do it every once in a while,” Wade said.

“We are looking for more teams like the Unitarians who will take on a night, once a month or whatever works; church groups, book study groups, any type of group that anyone wants to put together.

“If there is a group that really wants to volunteer I am happy to hold a vol-

unteer training,” Wade said.

He also noted that more venues are needed, specifically these weeks:

■ Dec. 29 to Jan. 4

■ Feb. 2-8

■ March 2-8

To help out, email:

hrws@hoodrivercares.org

Slightly used or new sleeping bags are always needed along with warm clothing.

Checks should be made out to Hood River Warming Shelter and sent to P.O. Box 656, Hood River, OR 97031.

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