



This Year Deliver Holiday Cheer and a Hot Meal

It's the height of the holiday season which means we're all braving the parking lots and crowds at our favorite stores, searching for the perfect gifts for our loved ones. The ornaments are hanging on the tree, the lights are twinkling on the house and *A Christmas Story* and *It's a Wonderful Life* are playing for the millionth time on TV. Even though by December 26th we're ready to toss a candy cane at the next person who sings *Jingle Bells*, these familiar traditions and rituals are a part of "the most wonderful time of the year," which we'll welcome back again with open arms about 365 days from now.

In the midst of the festivities surrounding the holidays, it's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle, yet somehow this time of year also manages to be the biggest season of giving and volunteering. People in general try to be a little more thoughtful and a little more concerned about the situations of their fellow men. Not everyone will be home for Christmas, or even have a place to come home to. Many people, despite their hard work and efforts, can't provide the little luxuries for their families that have become synonymous with the season, and some can't provide basic necessities at all.

While not every need can be met, the willingness to help in some capacity does lift the burdens of those affected by service. The Volunteer Center has plenty of great holiday service projects for everyone to participate in. Everything from collecting toys, coats, and food to singing songs for senior citizens, is available to those looking for an opportunity to lend a hand.

One activity has become a particular favorite over the years with our staff. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas we partner with local churches and the South Puget Sound Community College to provide hot meals to local residents. This past Thanksgiving, more than 70 volunteers prepared, packaged and delivered 520 meals to homebound individuals in Thurston and Mason Counties for the Holiday Meals program.

In Thurston County, the meal pickup and delivery is at the Student Union Building of South Puget Sound Community College. Students in the college's Culinary Arts Program prepare the meals in advance then volunteers pick them up, along with delivery maps, and head out to spread the cheer. In Mason County, volunteers from St. David's Episcopal Church prepare the meal for drivers to deliver.

Recipients for the meals are nominated by organizations such as Senior Services for South Sound, Volunteer Chore Services, and Lewis, Mason, Thurston Area Agency on Aging. These meals fill a gap for residents unable to attend traditional holiday meals in the community or with family members. Other organizations that have helped out this year include the Olympia Auto Mall, which sponsored this year's program, and First United Methodist Church of Olympia, Washington Middle School, River Ridge Community Church, the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Olympia Interfaith Community, Hope

Community Church and the Cub Scouts, Pack 110 of Shelton which donated decorated placemats for the Holiday Meal recipients.

We encourage you to experience the joy that comes from giving by participating in programs like this with your friends and family. For a list of other holiday opportunities, please visit us at www.volunteer.ws.