

Volunteers 'brighten' holidays

By Frale de Guzman
Of the Emerald

Christmas is the season for spreading holiday cheer, singing carols, giving gifts and spending time with friends and loved ones.

Holiday Project, a non-profit organization, attempts to brighten the holidays for people who can't spend Christmas with loved ones by taking volunteers from the community to visit patients in nursing homes and hospitals.

About 30 people volunteered to take part in the program last year, visiting local hospitals and nursing homes such as Good Samaritan and Pleasant Valley on Christmas day, says Joy Gall, coordinator of Holiday Project.

"We sing songs, talk to people and give out gifts of Christmas cards. We also urge the volunteers to get over their apprehension of the patients by touching them," Gall says. "And this was a great way of bridging the gap between them."

The 1,000 cards distributed to the patients were made by first grade children at Edgewood Elementary and other local primary and secondary schools. Elementary children from Veneta and Coburg also have offered to make cards to give to the patients, Gall says.

Making the cards gives children "the opportunity to learn about the people in the nursing homes and hospitals and shows them what they can do to help," she says. "Also, it's nice to hand something to someone you don't know."

Volunteers are divided into groups

and spend between one and two hours at their assigned locations. Because of the lack of volunteers, people are unable to spend much time at one location. But despite this fact, patients often treasure their visits, Gall says.

"The people seem to be real touched," Gall says. "It brings back lots of memories. They talk about their families and what they used to do at Christmas while others sing along with us, and it's all very touching."

The patients are not the only ones who are affected by this act of good will, Gall says.

"People get in touch with feelings that at other times they wouldn't acknowledge," she says.

Volunteers often experience various emotions ranging from joy to sorrow, and because feelings are a part of the person, volunteers are often told to take their feelings with them when they go to visit, Gall says.

"Being with somebody is the biggest contribution anyone can make," Gall says.

The effects of the Holiday Project are felt by everyone, especially by the volunteers who participate in the visits, Gall says.

"I'm very glad to be a part of the program," Gall says. "I learned that I can be a gift to other people by just being there and sharing myself. And to actually be there on Christmas day and realize that you made some difference in their lives really makes my Christmas," she adds.

The program, which began in Eugene on Dec. 25, 1981, has continued to flourish. More volunteers are



Joy Gall

expected to show up this year because more people are in the Christmas mood and are "truly in the sharing spirit," Gall says.

This year, volunteers will meet at Benjamin Franklin Savings and Loan, 201 E. 11th Ave., at 12:30 p.m. Anyone interested in taking part in the Holiday Project can contact Joy Gall at 687-9055 or Graham Lewis, evenings only, at 342-1505.

Forum to address 'darker' side of contemporary drama

The dark side of drama, as seen in American theatrical productions written during the 1970s, is more significant than its lack of popular success indicated, says Grant McKernie, head of the University speech department.

In a University Forum lecture on Tuesday, McKernie, who is also director of University Theater, will show why the more controversial works of four contemporary playwrights were better than they seemed when first introduced to American theatergoers.

His talk, "Theater and Culture in the 1970s and 1980s: Reflections of America in the Drama," will begin at 8 p.m. in the Eugene Conference Center, adjacent to the Hilton Hotel.

McKernie will review the popular successes of Neil Simon as well as the difficult but dramatically significant plays of Sam Shepard, David Rabe and Stephen Sondheim.

The number of new American plays introduced on Broadway dropped, and audience interest in live theater was salvaged "only by nostalgic productions of old plays," McKernie says.

"My goal is to make people more aware of why these playwrights suddenly became so dark in their vision, so forceful in their language and so violent," McKernie says.

"The new plays were more than thought-provoking — they were offensive," he adds. "When theater became despairing and apocalyptic, audiences turned away from it."

A member of the University faculty since 1979, McKernie has led University Theater production to national prominence.

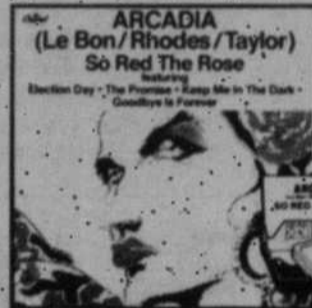
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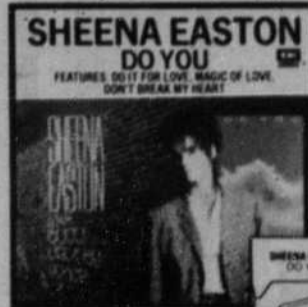
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