



Contributed photo
Jolene and James Pooley with their sons, Conner and Brayden. The Hermiston family is focusing more on building holiday traditions than buying a lot of presents.

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stressful and it takes away from the true meaning of Christmas.”

The Hermiston couple began formulating ideas before Thanksgiving. In addition to online shopping, the Pooleys shopped in the Tri-Cities and locally.

“We use a lot of Walmart layaway because it’s a good hiding place,” James said with a laugh.

The Hermiston couple has two sons, Conner, 8, and Brayden, 3. With the boys’ birthdays coming up in January and February, Jolene said their new approach to Christmas shopping is making planning for that much easier.

“Last year we went so extreme,” Jolene said. “We thought what do we get them because we got them everything for Christmas, so this year we split the gift

ideas up.”

Shawn Logue, who has four kids ranging in age from 16-25, is sticking to a holiday budget this shopping season. In past years, Shawn and her husband, Dan, set an amount but invariably would surpass it because they didn’t communicate about who bought what.

In determining the amount, the Hermiston couple factored in what they spent in the past, what types of gifts their kids preferred and what else they wanted to do with their money during the holiday season. For the past six years, they have taken a family trip to enjoy the festivities in Leavenworth, Washington.

“It’s taken us a long time to learn Christmas isn’t about the stuff and the presents. It’s more about building family traditions,” Shawn said. “Our trips to Leavenworth are more memorable

than buying gifts.”

In their second holiday season together as a family, the Halls, too, are creating and melding traditions. This year, they had the younger kids draw names amongst themselves.

Set up like a secret Santa, no wish lists were shared. The idea, Deana said, is to have the kids observe and learn more about their siblings when making decisions about what to buy.

The Pooleys also are focusing more on establishing holiday traditions and spending time together. Doing things like heading up to the mountains to chop down their own Christmas tree, sipping hot chocolate around a campfire and going sledding are some things they’ve done during recent holiday seasons.

“Christmas needs to be about more than just presents,” Jolene said. “It’s about family.”

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on the list, but came looking for food or gifts for their children, they were asked to come back on Wednesday.

“We want everyone to have something,” she said. Volunteer LaVera Sanchez said one of her favorite memories was from last year, when a woman came in after being recommended for the program.

“She didn’t know how her name got on the list,” Sanchez said. “But she couldn’t say ‘thank you’ enough. She was crying; she was very appreciative of everything.”

Two women who stopped by on Monday said the program has helped their families during some rough times.

“I just moved down from Alaska,” said Cheyenne Blazka, who found out about the program through her child’s school. “It’s really heartwarming to move and start fresh, and see that people still care.”

She said her kids were excited about the presents, but she was most grateful for the food donations.

“Food stamps don’t



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Guests look through donated Christmas decorations during the Christmas Express on Monday at Agape House in Hermiston.

always cover everything,” she said. “It really helps.”

Stephanie Bates got donations from the program last year.

“We’ve been so down,” she said. “It’s awesome we could get gifts for the kids.”

“It helps keep Santa alive,” Blazka said.

In its 49th year, Christmas Express gathers donations from community groups and individuals, packages them up, and sends them to the Agape House. In addition to the

items collected for Christmas donations, the program yielded about eight large crates worth of food that Agape House will be able to distribute throughout the year.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said the program received about \$6,500 in cash donations as of Monday, and that the donations from school food drives were the largest he’d seen in the 15 years he’s been doing Christmas Express.

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have shortened hours — from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. — on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. For questions, call 541-567-2882.

People are invited to ring in the new year with a murder mystery dinner theater event to benefit **Agape House**. Tickets, which are \$35 each, are now on sale for the barbecue pork loin or beef tri-tip dinner. “**Murder at Deadwood Saloon**” is Monday, Dec. 31 from 6-9 p.m. For tickets, call **Dave Hughes** at 541-567-8774. See next week’s **Hermiston Herald** for a full story about the

event.

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 The **Stanfield Public Library** announced a pair of free events this week.

The monthly Family Story Time is Thursday at 6 p.m. In addition to reading a book, participants can make a craft and enjoy a snack. Also, 15 families will receive a free book.

On Friday, there’s a special holiday craft. The free activity runs from 2-3 p.m.

The library is located at 180 W. Coe Ave., Stanfield. For more information, call 541-449-1254.

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 The public is invited to celebrate the final services of the advent season at **St. John’s Episcopal Church**, 665 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston.

The fourth Sunday of advent is Dec. 23 at 9 a.m. with a service of lessons telling the story of Israel and the Nativity. It also includes music and will conclude with the eucharist.

Also, the first service of Christmas is Monday, Dec. 24 at 7 p.m., followed by mass at 7:30 p.m.

For more information, contact **Rev. Chuck Barnes** at 541-567-6674 or chuckb@eotnet.net.

You can submit items for our weekly *By The Way* column by emailing your tips to editor@hermistonherald.com.

49th Annual Christmas Express

Purchase a vehicle in December and a portion of all proceeds will go towards purchasing new toys for the Christmas Connection. New toy donations will also be accepted at the dealership.

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