



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Students and staff of Inner Potential take a moment to pose for a photo in between their time helping out at the Bob Chisholm Community Center in Seaside.

Hot meals, friends and a program partnership

No one should go hungry for the holidays — or any other time of year. That's the message Chris Duffy, nutrition coordinator for the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District conveys every weekday with programs feeding senior citizens, either homebound or at the Bob Chisholm Community Center.

Duffy and the district teamed with the Warrenton-based agency Inner Potential to help prepare and serve meals to seniors from Seaside, Gearhart and Cannon Beach. With students from Seaside, Warrenton and Astoria, their mission is to partner with individuals experiencing intellectual or developmental disabilities in achieving a healthy and fulfilling life.

"They were looking for something proactive to help their students learn hands-on activities, counting, organization, timing, serve-out on meals and the lunch," Duffy said. "The partnership has been fantastic and very well-received by the students."

Weekdays, any senior over 60 may come in and eat, Duffy said. Hot meals are served Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 11:45 a.m. The center serves soup and sandwiches Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Meals consist of about 800 calories, with a starter salad and "a lot of proteins," Duffy said. "If there are dietary restrictions, we make accommodations for that."

Since the program's debut in August, the community center has averaged about 26 diners and volunteers a day. Wednesday is considered the peak day, with about 30 diners.

Members of the group help prepare about 200 meals a week as part of the Meals on Wheels program, which delivers food to about 40 clients in the South County.

"It's not only the food they get,



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Chris Duffy and Judy Parish discuss the menu during lunch service at the Bob Chisholm Community Center in Seaside.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



which is good, but they get to talk to people because it can be very lonely when you leave alone," diner Jean Wilson, 93, said, adding: "I don't have any trouble with loneliness because I read all the time."

At lunchtime, socializing is a main draw. "Monday morning, we have people start getting here at 11:15 when we have the coffee out," Duffy said. "For them to sit down at a table and talk about the weekend and events throughout the week — that to me is as important as getting that nutritious meal, that balanced meal."

Diners look forward to seeing friends and socializing.

"I underestimated how important that would be," Duffy said. "About once a month we'll bring in a musician, games — but the idea is to be able to meet with your peers."

Kevin Okerlund of Inner Potential said the volunteer work brings new skills and career potential, possibly in the local hospitality or kitchen industries. "It's been really neat to see how independent they're becoming, and how the seniors have really responded."

Interaction between students and seniors is an added benefit, Inner Potential's Sue Thurston said. "Building those connections in the community is really important, for people who sometimes may not have had that in their lives. As long as everyone is committed and it remains positive, they really look forward to coming."

Helping a stranger at Christmastime

On a recent grocery store run, something remarkable happened.

It was a Saturday, around noon, less than two weeks before Christmas, and the store was madness. This was defensive shopping: carefully looking around the aisle before exiting, pushing the cart tight against the merchandise to make room for people buzzing by, and lines. Long, long lines. I looked around, knowing that I had 15 to 20 minutes to kill before I could put my stuff on the conveyor belt.

Behind me, I noticed an elderly man in a motorized shopping cart. He was struggling to get a can onto the conveyor belt. I quickly moved to help him with the rest of his groceries.

Realizing that he was alone, I settled my bill, and let the attendant know I'd stick around in case the man needed my help. It wasn't more than five minutes before the elderly man was ready and noticed I was still there. He looked to the

GUEST COLUMN
A.J. WAHL



attendant, who explained that I was there to help him to his car.

The man was grateful, and said he had a story for me. Closer to the exit, with a little more freedom from the crowds, he explained that only a week before, a gentleman in line ahead of him at the store had also offered to help, and had asked if he was a veteran. The elderly man replied that he was, and the gentleman nodded, thanked him for his service, and left shortly after. When the elderly man went to pay his bill, he was told that the gentleman ahead of him had already taken care of it.

After telling me the story, the elderly man said how grateful he was for the help of strangers, and regretted that he wasn't

able to tell the gentleman thank you.

After I finished loading the groceries into the man's car, he thanked me for taking the time to help. I walked across the parking lot with a glow. It wasn't just that I had done a good deed, but something greater than that. I was proud to live by the lessons my grandparents and family imparted to me — if you can do so, help. Respect your elders. It only takes a few minutes to be kind. It felt good to help, but more importantly than that, it feels good to live in a community in which an elderly veteran who is wheelchair bound can go to the store confident that a perfect stranger will give him the help he needs. I live in a place that pays the service our veterans did forward, and gives back to the elders that helped build our community. As we enter into a crazed time of year, I am grateful to be in such a community. A community rich with the spirit of giving.

A.J. Wahl is a Gearhart resident.

A Christmas tree tale

Mr. Sax, who's been playing "Winter Wonderland," "We Three Kings" and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus" on his saxophone day and night to the point where I might hurt him, came in from work the other day to say he'd been offered a free Christmas tree.

"I turned it down," he said, sounding really sad about it. "Maybe next year we'll get a tree again. But I was tempted."

This would be a good time to say Mr. Sax has never been big on Christmas trees. For starters, growing up, his family never had one. He likes them well enough in outdoor spaces and in other peoples' homes, but not so much in his own. There have been enough Christmas tree bloopers in our married life to put off anyone.

Let's start with the year our son was in first grade and I was determined to put a tree up. We'd just moved back east after two years in Los Angeles. Christmas is just not the same in

the land of palm trees and sweaty Santas schvitzing in their Santa suits. "Schvitz" by the way is a Yiddish term, meaning

steam bath or sauna. You may well ask what a person who understands Yiddish needs with a Christmas tree, but that's how we roll.

That year I brought home a beautiful Douglas fir from the local Rotary. It was a struggle getting it upright in the tree stand. There was some sawing involved and the screws didn't grab right. The tree listed slightly. Undaunted, my son and I spent the afternoon covering it in silver balls and tinsel. Remember tinsel? It should be outlawed. Around 3 a.m. we were awakened by a loud crash when Duke, the cat I'd rescued at Thanksgiving, leaped on the tree and knocked it down, shattering every silver ball. I was vacuuming up tinsel for weeks.

The next year I decided the heck with the tree. I bought a large metal reindeer lit up with fairy lights. It was intended for outdoor use, but I put it in the living room. Our son named it "Rudolph." We piled wrapped presents around it. The cat left it alone. When Christmas was over, I draped a red and black Native American rug I'd bought in Arizona over it like a saddle blanket. People who know me well understand this is my idea of interior decorating.

While he was in high school, my son worked at a shop that sold newspapers, magazines, candy, lottery tickets, and cigarettes. They also had seasonal items. A few days before Christmas he came home with a white metal spiral outdoor Christmas tree, which had loops like a multi-tiered hula hoop. Taking after his mom, he thought it should be indoors. The tree set up quickly and we plugged it in and the LED lights came on all bright and twinkly. For a year or two, it became part of the décor. (I retired the reindeer.)

When I was in middle school, my mother, a single mom, chose to work Christmas Day. She was a hospital administrator and being Jewish, she took this day to work so her Christian co-workers might have the day off. This was altruistic but she didn't think of me, who would have spent the day home alone if it weren't for my friends who opened their homes to me. I went from house to house admiring their trees, which filled their living rooms, while their moms offered me hot chocolate with marshmallows and invited me to stay for their ham dinners. This is how I learned to love ham. Yes, really.

In Seaside, Tipton's is an awesome Christmas shop. I was in there a few days ago and was bowled over by their incredible selection of first-rate ornaments. They make it very tempting to rush out and get a tree. There are still quite a few very beautiful ones for sale all around Seaside.

Hey, it's not too late.

'THERE ARE STILL QUITE A FEW VERY BEAUTIFUL TREES FOR SALE ALL AROUND SEASIDE.

HEY, IT'S NOT TOO LATE.'



EVE MARX

Christmas trees come in all shapes and sizes, like this one in Seaside, and they're all good.

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