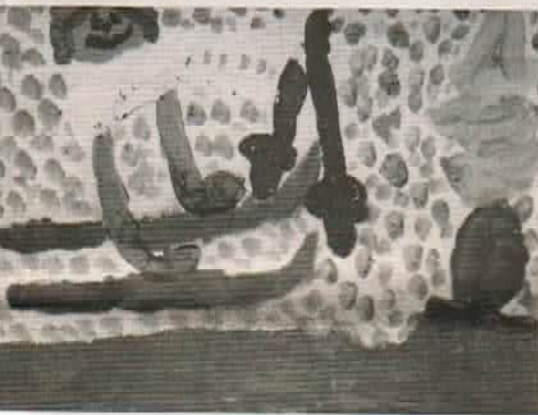


# OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, December 7, 2008

Consider the donation of your time this season to groups who support the disabled in our communities



Christmas Cards from COOL ARTS — a non-profit organization with a mandate is to offer fine arts opportunities to adults with developmental disabilities. The artists featured are Barbara Taylor, top, Jordan Lige, left, and Rob Farley, right.



'TIS THE SEASON

# The Joy of Giving

**H**ere we are (ready or not). The countdown to the festive season is upon us. This year, many people and families will be reducing their purchases and consumption to something a bit more reasonable — and some won't.

Would you consider a reduction in purchases and a new way of giving this 2008 festive season?

Most of us know we are lucky to be able to call the Okanagan region our home. Imagine if you had to live on a fixed income, you had a challenge or disability that did not allow you to work more than part time, if at all. You're caught in the middle of trying to afford a place to rest your head, let alone pay for it, you had no family, few friends and were not able to ask for help in traditional ways,

Most of these people are identified by the system through Community Living B.C., but many still live in challenging situations. The thought of having an opportunity to participate in a sporting program, art class or resource group created for people with disabilities is still a dream to some of these people, but many of these programs exist here in the Okanagan.

Amid the excitement of the season, and throughout the year, it is important to remember to appreciate how others who are less fortunate are doing. Maybe learning about how they are feeling, and letting them know the community is there to help them?

Many of you already donate time and money and goods annually. There are many good causes to donate to in terms of funds or gifts, providing much needed food for the food bank, adopting a needy family, looking after a sick neighbour, adopting an animal, helping out an elderly person, to name but a few.

With the financial situation as it is, the need will be even greater in our own cities this year and likely next.

For people on fixed incomes such as the elderly and people with disabilities, this financial reality hits home daily with the added stress of the holidays, increasing the pressure. For people with a disability who live independently, and older folks with a challenge, they may have little or no family, have little or no money and have little or no chance of having a "traditional" Christmas celebration.

Here is an idea for giving this season — look at volunteering your time and your



ALLISON  
MCNEILL

*Whose Challenge Is It?*

knowledge, kindness and genuine caring to others.

There are so many societies in the special-needs world that need funding and volunteers, we can't name them all. So we will highlight a few to familiarize you with them.

We became familiar with Special Olympics years ago when our daughter with Down syndrome was introduced to the organization. As it turned out for her, it truly transformed her life into an exhilarating opportunity for her to shine among her peers in sports while also experiencing the dynamics of the social aspect.

She received many benefits — a personal commitment to herself, her sport and her team were paramount. She gained the knowledge of being instructed by trained, specialized volunteers for each sport and enjoyed her fellow athletes and the excitement competition — winning and not winning — can bring.

There are many chapters of Special Olympics internationally, with B.C.'s starting in 1980. Special Olympics B.C. is a registered charitable organization, which provides high-quality sports programs and competitions to meet the needs and interest of individuals with intellectual disabilities, enriching lives and celebrating personal achievement through positive sports experiences.

In our Valley, we have 11 Special Olympics chapters with a huge cross-section of seasonal activities. Our daughter has taken part in swimming, rhythmic gymnastics, downhill skiing and track. Although she did not start until her teens, there are new programs now for much younger athletes.

Special Olympics can also fill that need to volunteer, which may just be burning in your thigh muscles. I offered my time as a board member and then volunteered

as the Winter Games public relations director, with chair Wendy Falkowski and a great volunteer committee in 2006.

Both were remarkable experiences that benefitted volunteers as well as athletes. There are opportunities to coach with Special Olympics, to help with special events (and, of course, the board may have a spot) — all areas where your expertise might benefit many and give you the true gift of giving all year round.

The website is [www.specialolympics.ca](http://www.specialolympics.ca) and the contact is Leslie Thornley at 250-317-1272.

The People in Motion society are valleywide, locally funded and volunteer driven. If you have been to local ski hills, you might have seen these volunteers pulling riders in sit skis, allowing the rider the sensation of skiing.

PIM have many other programs year-round and have need of volunteers and funding to support their programs. They also have a van that is well used for people and families all year, but is in especially high demand over the holidays. PIM are looking for volunteer drivers who possess a Class 4 driver's licence who would help some of their clients get to or from a festive event.

For more information, call executive director Paul Arney at 250-861-3302 or visit their website at [www.pimbc.ca](http://www.pimbc.ca). They always have room for volunteers in a host of different ways, from office help to becoming a sit ski coach, helping with wheelchair soccer and, of course, opportunities to donate funds to help those sports continue into the future.

And for those of you who have yet to do your Christmas Cards (that would be me) and want to support local art we suggest you look to COOL ARTS — a non-profit organization with a mandate is to offer fine arts opportunities to adults with developmental disabilities.

They have some lovely hand-crafted cards for sale. One pack of six different images is \$9. Two packs of 12 cost \$16 and six packs of 36 cards costs \$50.

To purchase call 250-712-3609 or visit Creator Sara Loge's website [www.coolarts.ca](http://www.coolarts.ca).

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