

## **OLDER AND WISER: Make the holidays a little easier for seniors in need**

Margaret Coates / North Shore News

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Bill Chalmers, along with Margaret Chalmers, shows off 200 wooden toy trucks which he recently donated to the Family Services of the North Shore Christmas Bureau, something he does every year. The trucks are then given to families and people in need during the holiday season - photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

When we contemplate the holiday season, we envision visiting family and friends, going to festive events and dinners, giving and receiving presents, twinkling lights, carolling and more.

But Christmas can be a lonely time for seniors who may not have family around and whose friends may be preoccupied with their own family activities.

Also, seniors who are on low- or fixed-incomes may not have the resources to fully enjoy the season.

This Christmas let's give seniors on the North Shore a lift.

I tracked down a few places where you might be able to get support as a senior, or where you might be able to help a senior in need during the holiday season.

I could find at least two businesses on the North Shore have programs that help seniors during the holiday season. One program is called Be a Santa to a Senior, run by Home Instead Senior Care, a company that provides personalized care and support to seniors and their families.

To access the Be a Santa to a Senior program visit the Home Instead West Vancouver office, located at 301-2232 Marine Dr. in West Van, and look for the Be a Santa to a Senior tree on display on display until Dec. 13.

Home Instead states that: “Each tree will be decorated with ornaments featuring seniors’ first names and gift suggestions. Holiday shoppers can choose an ornament, buy the requested gift and return it to the store with the ornament attached. There’s no need to worry about wrapping – community volunteers and program partners will wrap and deliver the gifts to local seniors in time for the holidays.”

In a press release, Home Instead states that “Be a Santa to a Senior is a true community program, with generous support from local businesses, non-profit organizations, retailers, numerous volunteers and members of the community, including Upper Lynn Valley Elementary, Caulfeild School, Vancouver Law Society, Hollyburn Country Club, Vancouver Coastal Health, Evergreen House at Lions Gate Hospital and Capilano Care Centre.”

Another program operating on the North Shore is the popular London Drugs initiative called Stocking Stuffers for Seniors, running until Dec. 16. The Stocking Stuffers for Seniors program partners with local care homes, charities, and organizations to bring more holiday cheer to seniors in their communities.

In 2019, the community campaign is chain-wide at every London Drugs location, for the third year in a row. According to the London Drugs website, here is how it works: visit your local London Drugs store, and head over to the store Christmas tree for a Stocking Stuffers for Seniors gift tag. Each tag contains a personalized wish list from a local senior, or a general “wish list” from a participating local care home or partner organization. Simply purchase or bring new, non-gift-wrapped items, along with the gift tag, to the store’s customer service counter by the delivery date. London Drugs will ensure the gifts are delivered by Santa and his elves to local seniors before Christmas Day.

Your donated items don’t need to be purchased from a London Drugs store – any new, non-gift-wrapped item is accepted.

As well as participating in the two aforementioned programs, some local North Shore groups are also attempting to help a senior.

As I wrote in a column a few weeks ago, the Family Services of the North Shore Christmas Bureau is seeing an increase in seniors needing their services during the holiday season. Christmas Bureau staff developed an outreach strategy for seniors that includes visiting seniors in their homes to make them aware of their program and perhaps connect them with other resources. To volunteer, donate or apply for support, the Christmas Bureau can be reached at 604-984-9627.

Every year a number of organizations provide a Christmas dinner, including North Shore Neighbourhood House and many local churches. This Christmas, the dinner at North Shore Neighbourhood House is being

held on Christmas Day. For tickets and times check with the front office by calling the neighbourhood house at 604-987-8138.

Some North Shore churches, in partnership with local businesses, are putting on a dinner for people who are low income, lonely or looking for company, or are new to the country. The dinner is being held on Saturday, Dec. 14 from 5 to 8 p.m. at Carson Graham Secondary. The evening includes a turkey dinner with all the trimmings, special entertainment, Santa and friends, as well as gifts. No registration is required.

At this time of year many organizations are looking for volunteers as well. Try your nearest organization to check out what options are available by phoning the North Shore Community Resources Society at 604-985-7138 or visit its website at [nscr.bc.ca/volunteers/jobs](http://nscr.bc.ca/volunteers/jobs).

Perhaps instead of volunteering (or in perhaps addition to), check on your senior neighbours who may need a hand with such things as putting up their lights (don't forget taking them down), driving them to a Christmas play or concert, checking out the light displays at Park & Tilford Gardens or the winter wonderland at the Shipyards District, driving them to a mall or an appointment, inviting them for lunch, or any other idea you might have.

In this gift-giving season it's also good to think about donating to a seniors' organization. They could use your help with programs and services targeted to seniors in need. Check out NSCR' seniors' directory for a list of seniors' organizations.

Giving a boost, whatever that may mean, to a senior or a seniors' organizations could mean happy holidays for everyone this year.

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