

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Santa's holiday helpers

Holiday volunteer opportunities abound in Bryan and College Station

By Kim Katopodis
THE BATTALION

Becca Robinson is a full-time student with a job to help with her financial obligations for school and is president of a campus organization. With all of these demands on her time, Robinson still finds time to volunteer at Phoebe's Home, a shelter for battered and abused women and their children.

"I just like to help out these kids," Robinson said. "It's touching to be in the life of a child that has had their dad knock all their teeth out and have them begin to trust you."

With dead days and finals coming up, students have ample opportunity to volunteer at organizations around Bryan and College Station. Service during the holiday season does not have to be time consuming, either.

Sigma Tau Delta, Texas A&M's English honor society on campus, has gotten together with Phoebe's Home to sponsor Phoebe's ABCs (Aggies Bringing Christmas), in which students and faculty can donate presents, new and gently used, for the children as well as their parents through the honor society.

After all the presents have been collected, the society and other organizations on campus, will assist in sorting the donations into age and gender groups to be wrapped for families.

Walking through Post Oak Mall, students may have seen a

Christmas tree by the food court. Paper ornaments bearing the names of children in the area hang on this tree, which is part of the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program.

Sandra Becerra, a Salvation Army store manager, said the Angel Tree program started two months ago.

"There were ads in the newspaper and on radio looking for families who want to participate in the Angel Tree program," Becerra said. "These are mostly low-income families or those on assistance, and the elderly and the sick."

The Salvation Army provided these families with gift and food certificates for Thanksgiving. Now, for Christmas, the tree ornaments provide a way for children in the families to receive gifts.

"On each angel is the name and age of the child, as well as what they are asking for for Christmas," Becerra said.

Becerra suggests people also buy clothes or shoes as gifts if the toy the children want doesn't take up the whole budget.

Leslie Jurisich, a senior information and operations management major, said it's important to give back to the community, especially at this time of the year.

"Every year, instead of buying gifts for each other, my roommates and I adopt an angel from the Angel Tree and buy gifts for them," she said.

The Bryan Housing Authority also runs a program similar to the Angel Tree. Make a Smile Happen (MASH), collects new and gently used toys for needy children. Sombra Davis, a representative from the

housing authority, said people are more willing to help during the holidays.

"I think people tend to feel more generous this time of year. People look for things to do during the holidays," Davis said. "Quite frankly, people need help year-round, and not just material need, but emotional need, too."

Robbins, along with Texas Saints, a campus service organization dedicated to the betterment of life for underprivileged children and their families, is planning to volunteer at the Phoebe's Home Christmas party.

"The message we are trying to get out is to tell students it is fine to just show up during times like dead days and give your extra time to people in need," Robinson said. "You reap benefits far beyond what you expect."



IVAN FLORES • THE BATTALION

ON THE BIG SCREEN

"Bad Santa" Dimension Starring Billy Bob Thornton, Lauren Graham

It's hard to recommend "Bad Santa" without seeming like a morally corrupt ghoul. Devoid of any ethically positive life lessons or likable characters, "Bad Santa" is rude, vulgar and sick. It is also one of the funniest movies of the season. Full of raw human nature in all its vice, Billy Bob Thornton and Tony Cox play a pair of holiday-themed thieves who pillage malls annually while disguised as Santa and an elf. However, things have turned sour as Santa Willie (Thornton) has grown into an irate alcoholic who frequently finds himself, amongst other things, in a complete lack of bladder control. As Willie and

his "little" partner prepare for the year's heist, a lonely, overweight kid who is a few bricks short of a load befriends Willie. While most Christmas movie denizens would see a chance for redemption and change, Willie sees a lonely kid with possessions ripe for the taking.

Not above stealing from children, Willie is a morally corrupt individual who is amazingly well played by Thornton. Cox is hilarious as Willie's minute partner-in-crime with a mouth as big as his greed. Joining Cox and Thornton are Bernie Mac and John Ritter in his last film. Mac brings in the laughs as the head of mall security. Ritter has a relatively small role in the film, but plays the neurotic mall manager to a T. The star of the show though, is definitely Brett Kelly (the kid). A little slow in the head, Kelly's "Kid" is a sad reminder of the existence of the less fortunate. Bursting with love and compassion for the complete stranger Thornton is to

him, the kid opens his home and heart to the bad-to-the-bone robber. Unfortunately, Willie does nothing but use and abuse him. In one misadventure after another, Willie slowly begins to care for the kid as more than an easy ride. While never completely learning the true Christmas spirit, the kid helps Thornton to grow a bit as a person.

Children should definitely be kept away from this movie, as it will not only break any hope of the goodness of Santa, but also leave them with a whole new range of four-letter vocabulary words. Director Terry Zwigoff leaves behind the subtle humor that existed in his previous movie, "Ghost World," to craft an over-the-top comedy full of wonderfully wicked sight gags and cleverly bawdy dialogue.

For the soundtrack, the movie features a plethora of Christmas songs; unfortunately, the lack of original songs leads to a hackneyed choice of seasonal tunes. Other than that little nitpick, the movie

is a relatively enjoyable movie-going experience for anyone with a dark side. The lack of any likable character and the extreme raunchiness of the film may turn off a few potential audience members, but for any Christmas caroler who has become jaded at the thought of the Christmas spirit, "Bad Santa" holds a dark comedy with enough guilty pleasure to keep even the Grinch grinning.

--Robert Saucedo

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