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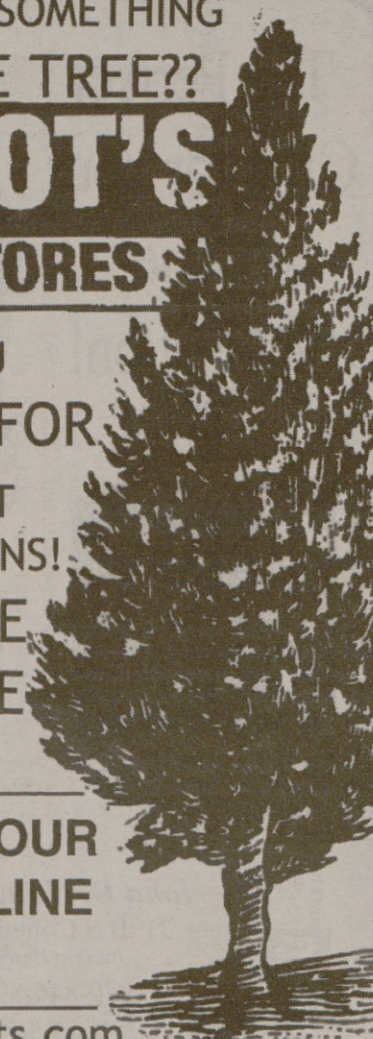
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Thrifty Gifts



The National Retail Federation (NRF) and the average college student don't look at Christmas the same way. For retailers, the season's festivities are about increased sales, and the visions dancing in their heads are customers with fat wallets. For students, the holidays are a time to go home, relax and have someone else do the cooking and cleaning: The last thing most students are thinking of is spending money.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the NRF is estimating an increase in holiday sales of 5.7 percent this year. Last year's dismal holiday sales loom large in their balance books, and retailers hope that this year's holiday shopping spree makes up for it.

If college students as a whole can be classified as any one thing, being cheap would top the list. As a result, few students want to go and break the bank on presents for friends and family, unless daddy's credit card is doing the spending. Students tend to turn to alternatives where the thought counts more than the price, and little to no time is involved in the purchasing decision.

"Gift cards are great for my sister, my mom and my dad," said Brian McCarthy, a senior electrical engineering major. "They're easy to pick out and you can spend as little or as much as you want."

These days, people can buy gift cards at practically any retail location, from Kroger to Foley's. While they may not say anything special, they are easy to wrap, and you have the satisfaction of knowing that the recipient got exactly what they wanted. Most require as little as a \$10 starting amount and the sky is the limit. Online retailers also issue gift certificates.

The Internet is an arena students are familiar and comfortable with and also serves as a fantastic shopping opportunity for cash-strapped students. EBay.com, a site many students have used, is the quintessential cheap-and-easy experience. It takes five minutes to learn to bid, and from there shoppers can find virtually anything under

the sun. This is a paradise for those on a budget, and the site is logically organized so that bidders can easily find what they're looking for.

EBay is not the only option for shopping online. Target has a full-featured Web site that ships straight to one's door. One-click shopping on Amazon.com makes it simpler than ever to locate that hard-to-find CD or book in a matter of minutes, plus they gift wrap it for you. In addition, online-only storefronts have been popping up, selling regional products you can't find in Texas. Just do a search on Google for the item you are looking for and you are bound to find it for sale somewhere.

Thomas Hryhorchuk, a senior mechanical engineering technology major, is a firm believer in Best Buy.

"Everybody loves electronics," Hryhorchuk said. "It's always the best buy for Christmas, birthdays, whatever. It has everything I need from DVDs to video games."

For the student with loans to pay, spending money is not always an option. It's the do-it-yourself presents that appeal to these undergrads.

"Pictures are a great present for everyone," McCarthy said. "Frames are cheap and pictures give the present a personal touch."

For that someone special, personal touch is what it's all about. Significant other gifts require a lot of thought, but not necessarily a lot of money.

"For someone special, I would give a sweet, romantic gift that accentuates both our personalities, that we could enjoy together," McCarthy said.

A simple drive to look at Christmas lights or having carolers stop by the house is a wonderful surprise that shows you care. In the end, that's what giving gifts is all about: that warm, fuzzy feeling that comes from being with friends and family.

By Jim Daniel

Christmas tree decorations

16th Century: Martin Luther first to use candles on trees

1850s: Shaped glass bead garlands introduced in Germany; same company introduces "angled-angel" dressed in pure gilded tin

1870-80: Glass ornaments reach Britain and North America

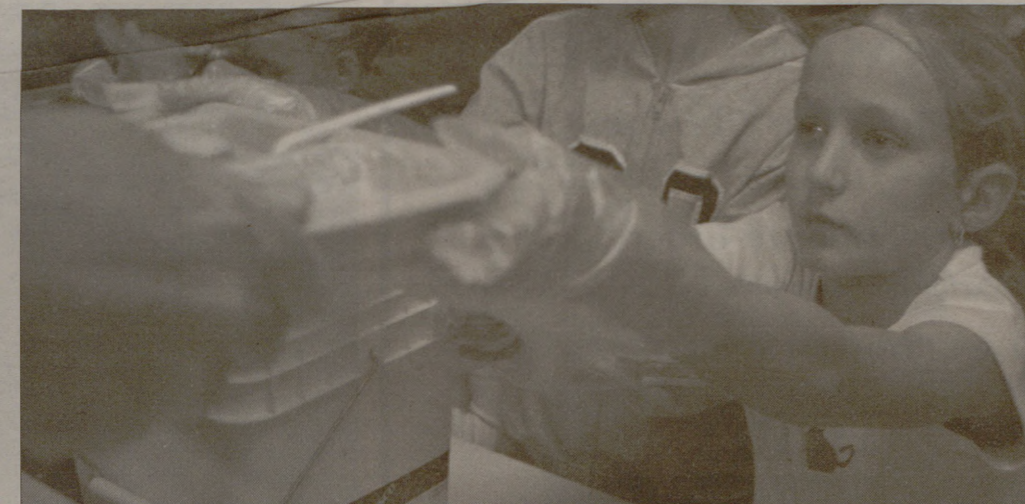
1882: Ornaments complemented by electric lights

1890: Light strings mass-produced



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Source: Encyclopaedia.com, Christmas Around the World
Graphic: Jacob Janszby East Pott

Giving to the Brazos Valley



Nine-year-old Gracie Duke of the Wixon Valley 4-H Food and Nutrition Group serves local people in need of a warm meal at the Twin City Mission Community Café in Bryan on Friday evening. The dinner consisted of two meat patties, gravy, green beans, potato salad and bread. Photo by Joshua L. Hobson/The Battalion.

Strands of twinkling lights are being untangled, trees are being purchased and people are racking their brains to come up with the perfect gift. That's right, Christmas is almost here. It won't be too long before students and shoppers are cramming into the car to search for a parking space at the mall to find the gift for the person who already has everything.

Every year many fill their Christmas mornings with sounds of crumpling wrapping paper. For another group of people those mornings are filled with silence. These people do not have the means to provide much, if anything, for their loved ones on Christmas morning.

The good news is a lot of people have dedicated themselves to making sure this is not the case for as many people as possible. Numerous opportunities exist for everyone to help give someone a special Christmas.

Through organizations such as the Salvation Army's Angel Tree, Twin City Missions' Community Café and many others, people who would otherwise have nothing are given a wonderful gift.

Shannon Jeffcoat, director of the local Angel Tree program, said volunteers can do many things to help during the holidays. In addition to donating new toys, Jeffcoat said volunteers can "help by sorting gifts, distributing the gifts, transporting the gifts" or whatever someone feels most comfortable doing. Programs such as Angel Tree are important to the communities they serve.

See Giving on page 4

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