



Extension News Column

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Date: Nov. 17, 2011
To: Mary Beth Smetzer, community news editor, News-Miner, 459-7546 (wk), 452-7917 (fax), msmetzer@newsminer.com, and people@newsminer.com
From: Roxie Dinstel
Re: **Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3**
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Today, let's not just think about saving money, but rather spending the money in the right place on the right items. The holidays are around the corner and you, like me, might be struggling with ideas on what to get your loved ones.

Let's make this a practical Christmas. Rather than spending your hard earned money on things that will catch dust, think about buying gifts that will help not only your loved one but also the local economy.

You've heard me tout the values of local foods before, so this year, let's have a local Christmas. I have a dear father-in-law that is past the time of needing anything new in the house. He thinks buying books is an extravagance when he has a good public library and new shirts I buy him are often shared with others in the community. So, this year we'll fill up his propane tank and maybe put a little payment on his electric bill. That, to a senior on a limited income, is pure gold in the gift department.

Let's think of some other gifts that might not be high on your radar, but would hit homeruns in the gift department.

How about a gasoline gift card (or a charge account) at your local gasoline station for your favorite teen? Nothing they'd like better than to be able to run around a little.

Everyone gets a haircut from time to time. If you know who they have cutting their hair, give them a gift certificate. Or, just go to the local barbershop; they will love to see you. How about a manicure or pedicure? All will be much appreciated.

Utilities are a challenge for folks. Pay their phone bill, water bill or electric bill. For privacy considerations, the company probably won't tell you how much they owe at any time, but plunk down money to be paid on anyone's bill and they will take it. I have grown sons and as I'm paying my cable bill, sometimes I just pay a little on theirs. They are tickled because it frees up their money for other things and I'm glad to offer just a little treat to make their lives easier.

Many of our local stores offer classes from time to time on how to use items in the store. Buy someone a class in sewing, fly tying or painting. Or, if you have someone who has always wanted to take the Master Gardener or Master Food Preserver class from Cooperative Extension Service, offer to pay their fees and clear their schedule (that means watch the kids, guys!) so they can take the class.

We have a ton of local restaurants that offer gift certificates. I had two elderly aunts in Colorado that I was always sending dust catchers for their holidays. One year, I called the church and asked where they commonly ate. That year (and every year after) I sent them a gift certificate to their favorite local restaurant.

Buy a gym membership for someone. Now, don't use this as an opportunity to make a comment on someone getting a little thick around the middle, or you might be in trouble. But if they go to the gym on a regular basis, drop a little on their bill.

Buy an oil change for someone's car. Or, give them a gift certificate to a local auto parts store so they can buy what they need to do it themselves.

We have fabulous entertainment here in Fairbanks. Fairbanks Light Opera Theatre, Fairbanks Community Drama Association, University of Alaska Drama and a hundred other organizations offer drama, song and dance, and musical events throughout the year. Buy tickets for an upcoming event. If it is applicable, offer to babysit so the recipients can attend.

How about hiring a local teenager to help for a day to put up the holiday decorations and clean the house after all the festivities? Or, if you are that teenager, offer your services as a gift.

Make a donation in their name at the local library, veterans' center or hospital. A friend purchased a book and donated it to the library in her father's name. That Christmas, he got a picture of his granddaughters giving it to the librarian.

The idea is to spend money locally on things and services that will be used, not something that catches dust or goes on a shelf somewhere.

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