

Hallmarks of a holiday



by Scott R. Lebin

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The holidays are here, and it is a fact that can bring both joy and fear. The charming attributes of the holidays have been part of human celebrations since the time of our earliest ancestors. The ingredients of festive behavior across cultures have included music, food, gift-giving, decorations, costumes and family gatherings.

Whether we were foraging for our daily survival or harvesting the crops from our agricultural society, the idea of taking time to celebrate has long been part of our psyche.

Charles Dickens added to our holiday interpretation by inspiring us to show charity and benevolence at this holiday time of the year. He was moved by those who didn't have the good fortune to be born into the wealthy class, and in *A Christmas Carol* encouraged us to follow those who had a more charitable attitude. His character Ebenezer Scrooge was used to illustrate a transformation between the worlds of the stingy and the generous. So, this story suggests that the nature of all holidays should bring out the best traits of mankind. O. Henry is known for his ironic story endings. It is in the "Gift of the Magi," set at Christmas time, that a very poor married couple who live in New York city during the early 1900s want to give each other a Christmas gift. Della cuts off her long beautiful hair to sell for money to buy her husband a watch chain for his pocket watch, and her husband Jim sells his watch to buy hair combs that his wife earlier admired in a shop window. The irony of the story is outweighed by their generosity and love for each other. Both stories ask us to stand in someone else's shoes and look at our fellow human beings with humanity and civility during this time of celebration.

How can we make the elements of our holiday celebrations into a true gift of joy in our own lives? It is possible to make this a yearly celebration and take advantage of the year-long opportunities in the Fox Valley. There are many ways to celebrate in our communities and the many events put on by organizations for our enjoyment make that all possible. The fear embedded in the holiday season exists when we extend ourselves financially so that we have added stress to our lives as we begin 2018. To avoid this kind of stress we can remind ourselves of the simple joy of being together with our families. Looking for local, free events presented by organizations in Batavia, Geneva and St. Charles provides many opportunities to be part of unique experiences. Whether it is attending a parade or a tree lighting or special holiday performance, the opportunities in our TriCities are enormous. These events do not create a financial burden on the family budget, nor do they require a lot of pre-planning or expended energy before the event. Community volunteers provide the energy and organization that these events require.

The most precious element of enjoying the holiday "spirit" is to realize that our families, our neighbors and our social cadre of friends are the most precious of all the gifts we could have. Long after the holiday is over, it is the shared moments that we will remember and cherish the most. As our thanks for the blessings around us this holiday season bring us joy, let us also remember those who need a helping hand, and as Tiny Tim says in *A Christmas Carol*, "God Bless Us Everyone!"