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Sustainable Giving

By Sophie Braccini



Nanette Heffernan and her children making candles. Photo provided

There are different ways to be planet-conscious when shopping for the holidays – making your gifts yourself, buying things that last and are well made, or buying pre-used items or giving others the things you don't need anymore.

Nanette Heffernan, a Lafayette mother of two, makes gifts with her children, organizes a free gift-cycle with gently used toys, and only makes or purchases gifts that will be useful to their recipients.

“Every year with the kids we create gifts for their grandparents, aunt and uncles, and baby sitters,” says Heffernan. “The most popular are the tea-lights that are fabulous and super easy to do.” Heffernan bought silicon molds to make the candles because they are very easy and pop right out when they're done. She has star, flower, and shamrock molds. The kids melt paraffin (found in craft stores) and pour a little bit into each mold, put in a candle wick, then add

sprinkles of old crayons that have been smashed into small pieces. The crayons melt into the hot paraffin and add color and texture to the candles.

“We also make hand soaps using the same molds, and the kids add tiny flowers on top for decoration,” she says.

When it comes to wrapping the gifts, the Heffernans get creative. “We mostly use recycled tissue paper that we save,” she says. “Sometimes the kids take a used food container, like a cream cheese container, and découpage it by ripping little pieces of tissue paper, painting the container with a layer of watered down glue and sticking the colorful pieces on it.”

Making their own gifts or giving what they no longer use can be a great way to increase kids' mindfulness of waste. “We gather all of the toys we do not use any more, as if we were going to do a garage sale. We take pictures of every piece. Then I send an email to everybody I know locally before Christmas and say, first come first serve, just come and take it,” explains Heffernan. She also asks for what she needs, like this year, a tabletop art easel with a drawer for her daughter.

And reusing items doesn't have to be just between friends.

... continued on page B7

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For our 3rd year at The New Rheem Theatre and Orinda Theatre, ticket sales were up 23% and sponsorships and program ads were up 129%.

THE APP RAP

By Alex Pawlakos

App: CamScanner, by IntSig Information Co., Ltd
For: All smartphones
Price: Free

CamScanner's ability to turn your smartphone into a portable scanner is not only technologically impressive, it is also unbelievably handy. Using the camera in your phone, you simply take a picture of any paper document, typed or hand-written, and it is quickly scanned and downloaded into your phone. CamScanner automatically crops and enhances the image for easy reading. These documents are also stored in your phone with the ability to organize them for ease of accessing at a future time. With the touch of a button you convert the picture of the document to a PDF file which then can be sent to your email, faxed, or uploaded to the

cloud. The real beauty of this app is the seemingly endless number of situations in which it can be used. For example, you could scan a menu in a restaurant, business cards at a conference, receipts for high priced purchases in case you lose them, or scan an article or recipe you read in a magazine while waiting at the dentist's office. Scanning notes on a whiteboard might be very useful. You could even scan your medical documents and, if you are ever in the Emergency Room, email the documents right to the ER from your phone. The ability to send these scans as PDF files to any email address makes CamScanner a true 'must have' app.



Alex Pawlakos enjoys biking, weightlifting, and tutoring in his spare time. He is a reporter on Express Yourself!™ Teen Radio.

TEEN SCENE

Stepping Out During the Holidays

By Linda Lan Phung

Findings of good cheer fill the air as the holidays approach. Stores are piled high with decorations, houses decked with lights and ornamentation, and people filled with generosity.

Salvation Army Santas ring their famous bells outside of shopping centers in anticipation of donations for the poor. As important as giving dollars is to help charities help others. This year, why not experience how it feels to give back by volunteering your time?

Whether it's sorting food for the hungry, collecting books, or coaching kids, a plethora of opportunities await for you to get involved. With volunteering, when you help someone, you're "teaching them to fish" so that they can pass it forward to help others in the future.

Miramonte junior Guy Raber volunteers with non-profit organizations because he believes it to be a great way to give back to the community. He states, "My favorite volunteering moment was two years ago when I was an instructor for beginning sailors. One of my beginners told me that I was his idol. Hearing him say that gratified me because it showed I was making a difference by volunteering – even if it was only as a sailing instructor."

Campolindo senior Megan Chen chose to volunteer because she enjoys assisting people.

Chen says, "I'm so lucky to be where I am here in Lamorinda, living the way that I do. Helping the less fortunate makes me happy because I'm helping someone in need." With volunteering, Chen sees firsthand how she affects the person. She adds, "The best feeling happened when I served food at Glide Memorial Church for the hungry people and saw how grateful they were, smiling and thanking me."

Volunteering benefits both sides. It definitely impacts lives in a profound way, as Raber's and Chen's

experiences illustrate. It is also fun because volunteers derive pleasure from their efforts.

Whether you are a seasoned volunteer or volunteering for the first time, the holiday season is a great time to donate your talents, time, and dollars to help others who are less fortunate. Volunteers are needed in every organization year round. Besides helping out at your local church, school, or club, you can find an organization that suits your interests by visiting the Volunteer Center of the East Bay at www.helpnow.org or Volunteer Match at www.VolunteerMatch.org.

As Raber says, "There are always people who are down on their luck, so the best way to be helpful is to volunteer for the rest of the year as well as the holidays." Everyone experiences that feel-good euphoria when doing something positive and meaningful for others. This season, step out and give back to your community!

Linda Lan Phung, a Miramonte High School junior who volunteers throughout the East Bay, is an officer with Club Be the Star You Are!®, and strives for 17-second miracles, inspired by author Jason Wright. Be the Star You Are!® is spearheading Operation Hurricane Sandy Disaster Relief to help families on the East Coast. http://btsya.com/hurricane_sandy_relief.html.



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