



Volunteer

Christmas Events

The Our Place annual **Charles Dickens Christmas** Reading will be held on Friday, December 19 at 7 p.m. at the Alix Goolden Performance Hall (the Victoria Conservatory of Music). Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased from the reception desk.

Our Place will be hosting our **End of Year Feast** on Wednesday, December 31 from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. Please come out and join us!

For special donations at the Christmas season please contact our reception for suggestions and other information.

Ask Vickie

Why is it important for volunteers to work only when they are scheduled to do so?



Volunteers are asked to work only when they are scheduled to do so to ensure that each of our program areas (the dining room, nutrition bar, clothing room and hygiene area) have the number of people they require to operate efficiently and effectively. Antoinette does her best to ensure that this requirement is met when placing new volunteers in a program area and when changing the schedule of a current volunteer. In order to do so, she needs to know that volunteers will come in when they have agreed to come in (so that there are enough volunteers) and that they won't come in when they are not scheduled (so that we avoid having too many volunteers at one time).

Next month's question: When will the next volunteer gathering be held?



A Lonely Christmas Tree

Up on a desolate hill, in full view of commuters who travel west on I-30 between Arlington and Fort Worth, stands a tree. The tree shouldn't be alive, shouldn't be where it is, shouldn't be decorated like, well, a Christmas tree, its green garland flapping in the wind. But there it is. A mystery.

In the background of this hard-to-get-to place is downtown Fort Worth, maybe the last city you'd expect to silently, without fanfare, embrace a little tree.

But in this crisscross of culture and cows, mud and modern art, there is the little tree that everyone knows, but no one really talks about unless asked — and then the one word that often comes up is Hope.

For nine years, since the shabby little mimosa was a twig, someone has decorated this isolated but very public tree.

At first it was a formerly homeless woman named Carla Christian, who decorated the little mimosa to remind commuters of the homeless. It was just her private deal. There was no sign. No news stories, just a decorated little mimosa, but she gave up climbing the steep knob of a little hill years ago.

Yet, every year, the tree is decorated.

Most people have no idea it started as a reminder of the homeless, though once they hear how it began, it makes sense, this poor little tree with the crude collection of ornaments — some years gold garland, this year green. The tree so scraggly that it can only hold a few balls. Some years tinsel and garland battle for precious space.

"No one knows who does it," says Amanda Applon, who works for the Tarrant County courts. "Everyone sees it but no one knows. That is what's so cool about it."

"It has the ability to take you away from whatever you're preoccupied with for just that second, It's just a tree mysterious people decorate. "It gives us hope." Jennifer Briggs

Please give Antoinette as much notice as possible if you are going to be away and need replacements during the holiday (or any) season.

Donations

As we move into colder and wetter weather we are in need of new or lightly used basic adult clothing. **SOCKS**, underwear, more socks, fleece or heavy-weight tops and jeans, socks again, seasonal jackets. We also need **art supplies**, boardgames, alarm clocks, toiletries, sleeping bags, blankets and coffee mugs. Our library is in need of good **paperback fiction**. If anyone is considering a specific donation for the Christmas season please call reception for information: 388-7112 ext. 221 or admin@ourplace-society.com for any questions regarding donations. If you wish to make a financial donation, please stop by our new building at 919 Pandora Avenue. Our staff will gratefully receive donations, whether by cheque, cash or credit card.

We are always looking for new volunteers

In addition to our ongoing efforts to recruit volunteers for the dining room and the nutrition bar in the drop-in centre, we are also currently looking for volunteers in the following areas: * Hygiene Area *Clothing Room *Reception. If any of these current opportunities is of interest to you, please contact 388-7112, extension 243 or volunteer@ourplacesociety.com.



From Oxford, England:

The Christmas season is a time when those on the margins of society feel even more alone, forgotten and desperate than ever. As you snuggle down in your bed during a cold snap do you spare a thought for the anonymous figures huddling under newspapers for warmth in doorways? In England, Oxford has the third largest homeless population in Britain.

On 29 November the realities of a night left out in the cold were all too obvious for some when they took part in the Oxford Sleep-Out. Launched in 1996 this awareness and fundraising event challenges people to spend a less than cosy night in St Clement's Churchyard. Instructions remind participants to bring warm clothes, sleeping bags and/or blankets. And there's no getting out of it if it's a wet night - waterproofs should be brought too.

Of course it's not quite the real hardship of 'rough sleeping'... There are loos and hot drinks available in the churchyard through the night. But it's closer than most of us would ever hope to come to homelessness.