

# Gifts

# of Time

# Replace \$

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Little acts of kindness are replacing big donations of money this Christmas.

Against a backdrop of war rumors and an ailing economy, many Penninsulans are cautious about giving money but they are giving physical gifts, such as toys and food baskets and volunteering to help those in greater need, according to Natalie Price, manager of volunteer relations for the Volunteer Center of San Mateo County.

Price says volunteering is up 10 to 20 percent so far this holiday season compared to last year.

At St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room in Menlo Park, volunteer director Phyllis Weston expects at least 90 volunteers to help prepare and serve the Christmas day dinner to an estimated 2,000 persons.

"Now we need some people to donate canned hams," said Sam Acuff, administrator at St. Anthony's. "We don't need more people spilling gravy over each other in the kitchen."

Redwood City resident Ben Vaisse and his son Mike will be among the volunteers. Unlike most Christmas day

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volunteers, they are regulars. Vaisse first contacted St. Anthony's when he needed to find someone to help care for his wife, a victim of multiple sclerosis. "They came through for me," he said.

After his wife died just before Christmas last year, he again called St. Anthony's to ask how he could repay them. "And that's how I started as a volunteer in the dining room," he said. Vaisse, who is just now between jobs, has been working in the kitchen two to four mornings a week. He arrives at 8 a.m. to prepare vegetables in the pantry before serving the noon meal to the patrons.

Vaisse has continued to volunteer because of what he gets out of it. "I do it for the way it makes me feel," he said. "Because of my wife's illness, I got used to taking care of someone. You get a lot out of serving someone yourself." He says he definitely plans to volunteer at St. Anthony's even after he starts his new job.

Vaisse's son Mike, a senior at Serra High School, has worked at St. Anthony's at least 10 times since Easter. He is volunteering to fulfill his school's community service requirement.

"My dad suggested I try it," he said. "It has made me think about what if I were in that position. And 99 percent of the people we serve are polite and very grateful."



Volunteers Mike Vaisse (left) with his father Ben Vaisse (right) chop vegetables at St. Anthony's Padua Dining Room. Photograph by Augustine Buonocore