

Extracting the joy of the season

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With the start of December, we are now officially boots-deep in the yuletide season.

Many have likely been singing carols for



a week or so, simply because they can't wait for the season to arrive.

It is a joyous time, to be sure.

I find it rather odd, and sad, however, that the season kicked off with 'Black Friday' sales events, all in the name of capitalism. A tradition of our neighbours south of the border, this American Thanksgiving weekend extravaganza launched the Christmas shopping mania.

And what 'madness' it was.

Major malls and retailers opened bright and early Friday morning for the mile-long lines of anxious consumers, eager to snare those 'limited supplies' and 'doorcrashers.'

In Bolton, hundreds arrived shortly after 6 a.m. at the local Walmart, hoping to get one of those spiffy TVs.

There were stories of crowded malls, parking woes and even fights among shoppers.

I imagine more people lined up at malls and stores across North America in the past few days than go to church on a weekly basis.

What a strange way to kick off a season of hope, joy and goodwill. I find it almost embarrassing to be part of a culture that makes finding retail bargains a top priority.

Either we love our deals and simply have to spend, en masse, or there's a widespread need to save money, pointing to an uncertain economic situation.

Either way, it's hardly the way to launch a period of peace and joy.

Fortunately, King saw three separate community events on the weekend that did just that - welcome a season of joy and compassion with friends and neighbours.

King City hosted its second annual Christmas in King City evening of cheer, food and entertainment, along with the lighting of the tree in the new parkette. The well attended street party brought the people out in droves and there were smiles all around. This event has great potential and becomes bigger every year.

Sunday evening in both Schomberg and Nobleton, the trees were lit and residents shared good cheer.

Some may see these as minor token events, but they're much more. They exude character, a sharing nature and giving community.

Getting together and taking time to share in the holiday spirit doesn't have to be a huge extravagant affair. A gathering, like the true meaning of the season, is quite simple.

The festivities will continue this weekend for A Main Street Christmas in Schomberg, a day-long festival that includes a parade, street entertainment, great food and great friendship.

Again, the meaning behind such events goes deeper than just the costume-clad characters and tractors. It's a sense of who we are as a community - close-knit members of small town Ontario, keeping traditions alive and well. That's what it's all about.

These events have nothing to do with shopping, bargain hunting, or crashing doors of any kind. Sure, if you want to patronize a local business, grab dinner or take-out, that's just a bonus.

A sense of community is fluid and evolves, just as physical developments evolve and take shape.

While people may enjoy their relative peace and quiet and, in some cases, privacy, it's great to get them out of their homes and into

our streets and businesses. People, in general, like to have a sense of belonging, of being part of something bigger.

And there are ample opportunities to do just that.

King Mayor Steve Pellegrini is always encouraging residents ? newcomers and existing ones alike ? to get involved, volunteer and shop locally.

There are also many opportunities to give, right here in your own community to help our own.

The local churches, service clubs and food bank hold fundraisers and donation drives this time of year. There's the Nobleton Christmas Drive, too. Think about giving.

My eldest daughter wanted to take her holiday money from her nana and put it toward sponsoring a second child from a developing nation. She's also going on a school mission trip to the Dominican Republic in January to volunteer at a convent and help make a difference. She's been busy collecting donations for the cause. Hopefully she may be able to meet her sponsored child during that trip, something Plan Canada is trying to coordinate.

Lexie is also refraining from purchasing gifts for her family this year. She's creating something special, something sentimental, something meaningful.

Before school lets out for the holidays, she'll be going on an inner-city walk in Toronto, handing out food to the needy and homeless. I?may join her.

It's funny being taught valuable lessons by your offspring!

My wife and I?have scaled back a bit, more so out of necessity than desire. But again, the season is not about extravagant gifts and stress. It's about family and spending time together. We go out as a family to community events, simply to soak up the feeling this time of year. This is something that money just can't buy.

If you really think about it, our needs are fairly basic. While I love collecting watches, I?don't need another. I have plenty of jewellery, too. Right now, my only hobby centres around collecting and painting miniature spaceships and aircraft.

Fortunately, the message seems to be sinking in across the board at our house. My boy bundle and youngest girl gift admitted their needs this year are much smaller. Perhaps Lexie read them the riot act or maybe, just maybe, they'd rather have their hearts filled than their toy chests.

I've instituted a new rule in the house for the whole month of December ? we must start and end each day with a loving sentiment. That's really all that matters.