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## Alternative Christmas Fair Aims To Help Needy

Aleda Johnson / Staff Writer 1 hr ago

The Christmas season has always been about purchasing items from a loved one's "wish list," wrapping them in colorful paper and sparkly bows and seeing the look of joy on the person's face when they open the gift Christmas morning.

But what do you give the person who has everything? Another watch? New socks?

Bridgewater Retirement Community has a solution.

For 13 years, they've been hosting the Alternative Christmas Fair, which encourages people to give to those less fortunate instead of spending money on frivolous gifts.

This year's fair, which will be Nov. 12 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren, features national organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and Big Brothers Big Sisters and local charities such as The Collins Center, Valley AIDS Network, Skyline Literacy and Valley Program for Aging Services.

"We've become such a consumer society and there are so many needy people in the world," said Lucile Vaughn, a resident at BRC and member of Bridgewater Church of the Brethren. "To spend more money for something somebody else doesn't need doesn't make a lot of sense for me, so to make a contribution to Habitat for Humanity or the Harrisonburg Free Clinic or the other organization we support makes a whole lot more sense."

At the fair, attendees can purchase gift card donations to various charities in honor of someone.

Donors then receive a holiday card to send to the recipient acknowledging the donation made in the honor.

For those who still wish to purchase gifts but also want to help those less fortunate, vendors will be at the event selling crafts from third-world countries.

Crafty Hands Toyland from The Dayton Market will also be selling homemade children's toys.

"Crafty Hands sells creative games and toys, which is great for people who have children or grandchildren," Vaughn said. "Instead of something that needs a battery, they get something you put together with your hands."

A light lunch will be served and baked goods will be available throughout the event.

Vaughn came up with the idea for the fair when she saw an article about a similar event where people gave money in honor of a loved one instead of purchasing a gift at the store.

"I suggested it to a group of my fellow church members, and they said, 'Yes we will do it,'" Vaughn said.

For the first few years, only about 40 people attended, so Vaughn decided to get some marketing advice.

She enlisted the help of Ron Kline and his students from the Bridgewater College Society for Human Resource Management.

"For the last 10 years, we've done the marketing to help them be a success at what they're doing," Kline said. "The students who volunteer make posters, press releases and church bulletins, and the students volunteer the day of to help with managing the event."

Since receiving marketing help, the fair has seen an increase in the number of attendees and the amount of money raised.

"It made all the difference in the world," Vaughn said. "The first couple years we made a couple thousand, and the third year it was double that."

Vaughn encourages those who are looking to give a gift this Christmas that will keep on giving to attend.

“I think most of us have too much stuff already,” Vaughn said. “If a person is interested in spreading some joy around the world, this is a good way to do it.”

For more information visit [www.bwco.org](http://www.bwco.org) or call 828-1607.



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