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Some of best gifts keep on giving

Many stuff the idea of stuff and pick charities instead

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The Portland Tribune Dec 7, 2006

Keywords

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Read the winter holidays.

Gift giving gets more complicated each year, with the latest toys, gadgets and gizmos. Too many last-minute shoppers buy a bunch of stuff without much thought in the effort to put something – anything – under the tree. We end up with things we neither want nor need, and with big credit card bills on the way.



/ COURTESY OF TRANSITION PROJECTS
Volunteer Mark Forker, a member of Transition Projects' board of directors, receives a donation during the nonprofit's annual coat drive, which provides gift givers with another idea for spreading holiday warmth, literally.

Where does the money really

Charitable donations make great last-minute gifts, and they always fit and don't take up valuable resources to produce.

Several years ago, I stopped giving so many presents, and started donating more to charities on behalf of friends and family. This ruffled some feathers. There were fewer pretty packages under the tree, but as folks stopped to look at the charities themselves, the true value of the gift became clear.

I try to match my gift recipient with the right charity. One of my favorites is

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the gift of tree seedlings. My relatives have a long-standing tradition of heading to the family farm every year to cut down Christmas trees.



I try to balance the annual tree sacrifice by heading over to the Heifer International Web site.



With my donation of \$60, Heifer helps families around the world by providing the tools, supplies and training to plant trees – keeping topsoil in place on farms, growing fruit for food, and providing firewood for cooking and heat in winter.





A gift of \$10 buys a share of tree seedlings. Gift options of \$5,000 or more make up the top end of the range.



In addition to tree seedlings, Heifer provides honeybees, flocks of ducks and geese, as well as goats, sheep, chickens, pigs, rabbits, llamas, water buffalos and, of course, heifers.



Heifer trains the family on how to care for and work with the animals to provide a livelihood. The family is obligated to give their animals' first offspring to a neighbor in need.




Another gift that grows is a Gift of Life from TreePeople in Southern California. For \$25, TreePeople will plant and dedicate a tree to the people on your holiday gift list – \$100 buys five trees.



Holiday gift giving goes both ways. Every year, I give my family a list of charities I like; I'll sometimes ask for socks, dog biscuits or a particular book. I usually end up with a lot of socks.



Here's one from wildlife file



My mother gets it.



For my birthday, she adopted a wolf through Defenders of Wildlife, an organization that works to save threatened and endangered species, including wolves, whales, mountain lions, dolphins and polar bears. I received an announcement – and a little plush wolf – letting me know that “Jen’s Wolf” and her kin are being protected and preserved in their natural habitat.




If you're an animal lover like I am, you already have animal welfare Web sites bookmarked. My favorite is Best Friends Animal Society, which works with individuals and humane societies to create no-kill communities.

A \$25 Gift of Life and Love from Best Friends earns a recipient a subscription to Best Friends magazine, and biographies and photos of the animals sponsored.

If the people on your list are interested in green power, why not give the gift of fighting global warming?

NativeEnergy's holiday cards support its WindBuilders program. A \$12 card keeps a ton of carbon dioxide pollution out of the air – \$72 prevents 6 tons of CO2 pollution by displacing electricity generated from fossil fuels. The festive card announces the sender's green thoughtfulness, and NativeEnergy puts the money toward building wind turbines and renewable methane generators.

Clif Bar's \$2 Cool Tags make great green stocking stuffers, with the full \$2 going toward NativeEnergy's WindBuilders program.

Gifts give pollution a break

Then there's Green Tags – energy credits that support the development of clean, renewable energy.

Bonneville Environmental Foundation offers six Green Tags for \$120 and eight for \$160. According to the foundation, five Green Tags offset the pollution generated by one cross-country round-trip flight; eight Green Tags offset one year of driving; and 11 Green Tags offset one year of powering a home.

I also like giving – and receiving – memberships to environmental and conservation programs such as the World Wildlife Fund (\$25), Sierra Club (\$25) or the Natural Resources Defense Council (\$15).

If you can't decide which nonprofit to support, there are virtual gift baskets from Network for Good organized into themes – like Aid for Animals, Save the Earth, and Hurricane Recovery. Gift givers specify how much to give to each charity.

Other nonprofits may recommend their own green gift ideas. For instance, the Natural Resources Defense Council suggests a national park pass, or a DVD of Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth."

Here are a few charities gift givers might consider this season.
Best Friends Animal Society

5001 Angel Canyon Road, Kanab, UT 84741-5000, 1-435-644-2001,
bestfriends.org

Bonneville Environmental Foundation

133 S.W. Second Ave., Suite 410, Portland, OR 97204, 503-248-1905,
www.greentagsusa.org

Clif Bar Inc.

1610 Fifth St.

Berkeley, CA 94710-1715, 1-800-254-3227, www.clifbar.com

Defenders of Wildlife

1130 17th St. N.W.,

Washington, DC 20036, 1-800-385-9712, www.defenders.org

Heifer International

1 World Ave., Little Rock, AR 72202, 1-800-422-0474, www.heifer.org

NativeEnergy

823 Ferry Road, P.O. Box 539,

Charlotte, VT 05445, 800-924-6826, www.nativeenergy.com

Natural Resources Defense Council

40 W. 20th St., New York, NY 10011, 1-212-727-2700, www.nrdc.org

Network for Good Gift Baskets

7920 Norfolk Avenue, Suite 1100, Bethesda, MD 20814, 1-866-650-4636,
www.networkforgood.org

Sierra Club

85 Second St., second floor, San Francisco, CA 94105, 1-415-977-5500,
www.sierraclub.org

TreePeople

12601 Mulholland Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90210, 1-818-753-8733,
www.treepeople.org

World Wildlife Fund

1250 24th St. N.W., P.O. Box 97180, Washington, DC 20090-7180,

202-293-4800, www.wwf.org

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