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Gift-giving, outside the box

By PHYLLIS J. BANDSTRA

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As our focus has undoubtedly already turned to making our holiday gift lists, these economic times may have some of us reducing our lists, or reducing the amount we will spend on each item.

Well what if one of the greatest gifts you can give would cost nothing at all, but have a value that far outweighs something in a box? This gift is the giving of your time to another person who needs it. In this case, I am talking about our area youth.

Numerous studies show that when youth who are at risk for dropping out of school, drug and alcohol dependence, or involvement with crime have trusted and caring adults in their lives to support and guide them, they exchange bad choices for good ones.

That's the whole goal behind our Goodwill GoodGuides Youth Mentoring program. It's a national mentoring initiative by Goodwill Industries International designed to help youth between 12-17 to experience nurturing, positive relationships and community support that enable them to develop to their fullest potential with the capability of making informed decisions as involved members of their communities.

Would you consider giving the gift of at least one hour per week for one year? You may give more time of course. But after an orientation and training in the GoodGuides program, you will be ready to help youth to build career plans and skills as they prepare for school completion, postsecondary training, and productive work-and most of all, the means to become self-sufficient contributing members of society.

We began operating GoodGuides in late January and have made 54 successful matches that include one-to-one, group, and peer mentoring. Mentors and youth are selectively matched according to gender, common interests, compatibility, and other important factors. And many community members and businesses have come forward to give career talks, company tours, and educational guidance.

You can't put a price on something like this. The value of guiding a young person toward a promising career; showing a young person that you care; and convincing a young person that he or she can actually be excited about the future because there is now a goal and a purpose.

I invite you to offer your gift of time to make a difference in the life of a young person. Contact our GoodGuides Program at (814) 536-3536, ext. 304 or e-mail us at [goodguides@goodwilljohnstown.org](mailto:goodguides@goodwilljohnstown.org).

Consider this gift marked: "Please do open before Christmas."

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