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December 13, 2007

Homos for the Holidays

Well, it's that time of year again.

The weather outside is just about to be frightful. And, as far as I'm concerned, the shopping is never delightful.

But that doesn't mean I'm the new Grinch or that my family bloodline includes Ebenezer Scrooge. It's just that when I do shop, I tend to do it from the comfort of my den with my trusty laptop at the ready and my overburdened credit card nearby.

Whether or not you're consumed with consumerism at this time of year, the one thing we can all agree on is that it's all about giving.

With our son turning 22 next week and only one toddler in our immediate family configuration, the challenge of what to give the adults in my family is never easily answered. We're all folks, who by and large, don't really need anything—we've all got good jobs, roofs over our heads, not really wanting for anything that is within our purchasing capacity. Buying a 54" flat screen or putting a big red bow on a new car is really on the outside of our giving range.

So instead of buying a few more CDs or another

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piece of Fiestaware to round out a collection, the adults in our family have decided to make charitable gifts in honor of one another. It's a much better investment of our holiday cheer than say a crystal bowl that ends up at the back of the closet.

Soulforce

Overall, charitable giving has always been high on our list, and not just at the holiday season—although we do get all those direct mails asks at this time of year because it works. People are in a giving mood; so, we also give money.

The organization that gets our money at this time of year is the Rainbow World Fund (www.rainbowfund.org). The brainchild of San Francisco-based psychiatric social worker Jeff Cotter, Rainbow World Fund is a relief organization that bundles LGBT philanthropic giving for humanitarian projects throughout the world.

When I spoke with Cotter, he told me that after being a social worker for about 15 years he wasn't fulfilled professionally. "I wanted to do something I had never done before. I wanted to have a positive impact on the planet and help people," he told me in a phone interview. "I put those ideas out to the universe and let them go." A few months later, Cotter said, his own inner voice told him to start a world relief agency based in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

That Cotter listened to that inner voice has been a gift that has kept on giving to those in need throughout the world since 2000. RWF has raised millions, not hundreds of millions, just millions—but that money has had a profound impact because Cotter uses it to leverage in-kind contributions that have even greater economic and humanitarian value.

Making its mark on humanitarian relief, RWF has partnered with America's Second Harvest to get food to the folks who lost everything in the devastations of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This

past July, RWF made its third humanitarian trip to Guatemala where 15 volunteers delivered 1,650 pounds of medical and school supplies valued at a quarter of a million dollars. RWF also partners with AfriCare to fund HIV/AIDS education in rural South Africa and Adopt-a-Minefield to fund minefield clearance in Cambodia.

What's great about Rainbow World Fund is that unlike most international relief agencies, RWF has no real administrative overhead. Everyone—and I mean everyone—volunteer their time. 92.3 percent of the money raised goes directly to humanitarian aid, 2.3 percent goes to education and only 5.4 percent goes to administrative and fund raising costs. 5.4 percent is astounding when the non-profit industry standard for admin costs usually hovers at 15.

Through its work, RWF is also presenting the LGBT community to the world. "Our first priority is to help those who need it, but a by-product is changing how people see the LGBT community," said Cotter. "The Fund is a way of putting our highest values - love, kindness, and compassion - to work, and of providing a platform for our concern and caring to be seen and heard around the world."

So, if you're looking to be a good Homo for the Holidays or a great friend of one, start by going to www.rainbowfund.org. It could very well be the most fulfilling online experience of the holiday season!

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