Inviting thousands of men to give the best gift: The Gift of You

by Karen Wheeler

News stories at this time of year sometimes deliver information about men's shopping habits, including that a surprising number postpone holiday shopping until Christmas Eve.

But in many families, gifts that come from the mall aren't the best ones guys can give their loved ones.

For tens of thousands of Oregon men who are addicted to alcohol, the most valuable gift they can give is the gift of sobriety.

Call it The Gift of You.

Like many adults, I cannot remember many of the gifts I was given as a child; I do remember the time I spent with the people who gave them.

But in more than a decade as an addictions counselor, I heard the same words repeatedly about the gift men gave when they fought back against alcoholism.

Men in recovery would say, "I'm back!"

And their wives would tell me, "I have my husband back.."

Gentlemen, your families love you. But if you are an alcoholic, the substance is probably blurring your ability to nurture your family, earn a living and meet your responsibilities as a husband, dad, son, uncle, grandfather or mentor.

You know you are trapped in a foggy wasteland. Your family and friends are fearful about receiving a phone call from the hospital, jail or coroner. They are saddened watching you drink yourself to death.

This may surprise you. And it's tragic. Health data reveal that addiction also is cutting lives short.

Consider: Alcohol is the third-greatest cause of death for Oregon men ages 55-64, men who could be playing the family Santa Claus at this time of year for kids and grandkids. In fact, alcohol-related death is among the top four or five causes of death for Oregon men ages 35-64.

Not only that, but Oregon's per-capita rate of alcohol-induced deaths also ranks fourth in the nation. The rate of alcohol-induced deaths is almost twice the national rate.

Think about the gift you can give. And think how proud you would be to give it. If you have a job with insurance, you can talk with your insurance company about coverage; beginning Jan. 1, some companies will be required to cover chemical-dependency and mental health treatment. Or you can call your Employee Assistance Program. If you have a low income and no private insurance, you may qualify for free, publicly financed treatment. You can call a treatment provider directly to learn how to get into treatment, or you can speak with your physician or your clergy person. Alcoholics Anonymous chapters meet in virtually every Oregon community on any given day. You might also call the Oregon Partnership 24-hour helpline toll free at 1-800-923-HELP if you have questions or want support.

Will it require personal courage? Sure. And there are lots of people who are eager to help, if only you will ask.

There's also help for your family, such as the 12-step Al-Anon program and faith-based support groups.

Holiday advertisements may tell you, "Give them what they really want this year." If you're an alcoholic, your family can tell you what that is.

It's the Gift of You.

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