

# Giving the gift of Charity

By Dennis McCafferty

The past year was tough, no doubt. With that in mind, USA WEEKEND offers an expert guide to holiday gift giving that can make a real difference. Here's how you can end the year on a positive note!



With the holiday season upon us, we're focusing more than ever on the "giving" part of this week's holiday, as a string of natural disasters in the last 11 months has inspired the best in the human spirit. It all started the day after Christmas 2004, when the most devastating tsunami on record hit Indonesia and the surrounding region. Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans and much of the Southeast in August. Hurricane Rita followed in September, hitting Texas and, again, Louisiana. In October, the Kashmir earthquake killed tens of thousands in South Asia, and Hurricane Wilma hit Florida.

With these disasters fresh in mind — in addition to the wealth of other, non-disaster-related causes — USA WEEKEND is happy to present a special holiday guide to giving. After all, Thanksgiving is followed by the peak holiday shopping season, and many Americans are opting to give loved ones the gift of charity. You've probably seen this happening more often: A birthday card arrives with a note saying a donation was made in your name to a village in a Third World country. Or maybe you received a new purse, and 5% of the sales price

was designated for literacy programs.

These kinds of gifts are getting more popular all the time. For example, World Vision, a Christian organization that allows people to give charity gifts (like a year's worth of schooling for a child in a struggling country), has raised \$8 million from 40,000 donors in the past year, up from \$5.8 million from 30,000 donors two years ago. This outpouring inspires questions: When is a charitable gift appropriate, and when isn't it? What mistakes do well-intentioned givers often make?

## CHARITABLE STOCKING STUFFERS

Want to give the gift of charity this holiday shopping season? Here are foundations, sites and stores making it easier, whether you're looking to combine a traditional gift with a donation or to simply give a charitable gift in someone's name:

- **Toys, toys, toys.** Toys R Us and Toys for Tots (toysfortots.org) are collecting cash donations online and at Toys R Us retail stores throughout the holiday season. Toys R Us will donate an additional \$1 million in toys for needy children. Also for Toys for Tots, Spiegel is offering a special 100th Anniversary Teddy Bear for \$15, as well as 10 "Once in a Lifetime" gifts worth up to \$6,000 each at [spiegel.com](http://spiegel.com).
- **Dine, drink and donate.** Le Gourmet Gift Basket ([legift.com](http://legift.com)) is donating 25% of all sales to the U.S. Humane Society to help animals

For answers, USA WEEKEND Magazine has assembled its annual panel of gift-buying authorities to weigh in: Robyn Freedman Spizman, author of *Make It Memorable: An A-to-Z Guide to Making Any Event, Gift or Occasion ... Dazzling!*; online shopping expert Kristine Dang of RedEnvelope; Neiman Marcus holiday catalog queen Ginger Reeder;



affected by the hurricanes. The Inertia Beverage Group ([winerevolution.com](http://winerevolution.com)) offers the "Drink Charitably" program, allowing customers to donate typically 10% of their Web-based wine purchases to participating charities.

- **Retail and e-tail make wishes come true.** More than 6,300 hurricane victims have registered at Wal-Mart stores ([walmart.com](http://walmart.com)) and created wish lists of items needed to rebuild their lives. Also, via eBay's Giving Works program, users can donate 10% to 100% of sales to hurricane relief and other causes.
- **Clearinghouses of good.** [Networkforgood.org](http://Networkforgood.org) allows users to choose from more than 1 million charities for donations. Of course, the American Red Cross ([redcross.org](http://redcross.org)) is the organization where many turn first to give in times of disaster, such as the hurricanes.

Network for Good

and Hollywood celebrity shopper Allana Baroni, who has bought gifts for Clint Eastwood, Jim Carrey and countless others:

Some people struggle with ways to make the charitable gift more personal for the recipient. Any tips on how to do so?

**Dang:** Sure! There are many ways. You can tap into their own interests to match the gift to their passions. If they're an animal lover, why not the Humane Society? That organization is knee-deep in needs because of the pets left homeless after the storms. But the society needs support year-round, as well, disaster or not. You also can make a charitable gift personal by targeting the recipient's community, especially if he or she is involved with civic happenings. If they live in, say, Albuquerque, you can go online and find out what community causes exist there.

**Reeder:** Kristine is right. When you tap into something that hits close to home, it

Lance Armstrong's "Livestrong" bracelet campaign to find a cure for cancer is a worthy cause, as well as a fashion statement.

means so much more. I have an aunt who's a breast-cancer survivor, so anything she receives that goes in her name toward research for that disease is a thrill.

**Spizman:** You also can personalize the charitable-donation gift by making it part of an overall package. If the cause is breast cancer, and you're giving the recipient a pink ribbon as part of the donation in the recipient's name, you can elevate the gift by putting the ribbon on a delicious, pink strawberry cake. Or, wrap it around a nice bottle of pink bubble bath.



Be creative: You can dress up a cause gift with a fun one, like pink-ribboned bubble bath.

gift giving of merchandise with charitable giving is terrific.

**Spizman:** That's key, especially in introducing young people to the concept of charitable gift giving. Lance Armstrong's "Livestrong" cancer awareness bracelets became quite a fashion statement. But, face it, teens like to get "stuff," too. When you want to combine the two concepts, UncommonGoods.com is one of my favorite places to go. It sells hip, affordable jewelry, accessories and other gifts for teens. And, like other online companies, the gift-giver gets an opportunity

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## RELATIONTIPS

The songs are telling you 'tis the season to be jolly, but can you really think celebration in the midst of all the devastation so many have dealt with this year? Is enjoying the holidays at home OK, especially when so many are homeless?

Absolutely. The key to finding a true reason for the season? Extend the spirit of Thanksgiving — a holiday that's not

about giving stuff, but about spending time with those we love — into the usual shop-till-you-drop whatever-you-celebrate-in-December festivities.

Instead of carving out time for power purchasing or decadent decorating, take time to write a personal note to everyone on your card list about why he or she means so much to you. Give the gift of giving back by volunteering and having your kids participate in toy and clothing drives. Make the high holiday night one to remember: Encourage family and friends not to bring presents, but to come with a paragraph about what they are truly thankful for. In other words, open your heart to those you know and those you don't — at least, not personally.

**My RelationTip?** Many experts agree: Feeling bad about problems you did not cause or situations you cannot change will not make life better for you or others. Celebrate your life and the lives around you by going out of your way to make each person feel like the relationship you share is the most important gift. It will be worth more than the money you save!



By DENNIE HUGHES

## CELEBRATE WITH SENSITIVITY

Is there a danger that the wealth of disaster relief this holiday season will overshadow other worthy causes?

**Reeder:** No, I don't see that. Loyalty to a particular cause is cultivated throughout one's life. Disease causes, for example, tend to be more permanent. And we have great marketing now that's keeping these kinds of lifelong causes in the public eye. The way they can combine

