

People

CLOSE-UP

Outer-Sighters: Blindness not a barrier

By ANGIE MARTIN
Chronicle Staff Writer

An intimate group of holiday celebrants gathers around a cheerfully decorated table of Christmas cookies and punch. The red Kool-aid and ginger ale mixture swirls in the Crystal punch bowl. Someone gently bumped into the edge of the table.

"Let's say the blessing now, you all, we have a lot to be thankful for," said Sandy Penn, city recreation department visually impaired program leader.

The group is indeed thankful; never mind that the refreshments are modest and some of the tree ornaments are a little crooked.

Many of them can't see the Christmas tree lights or the person whose hand they are holding as they bow

"Sometimes the sighted world treats blind people differently but I wish the sighted would treat blind people like people."

-- Roy Townsend

their heads in prayer. Many must take care to keep their red and white canes nearby.

But, more than anything else members of the Outer-Sighters are thankful that they have each other and the Christmas party is just another good reason to get together.

The Outer-Sighters is a group of 18 visually impaired residents, either partially or completely blind. They range from young adults to elderly citizens.

And although there are several social service programs for the blind in the city, there are few social clubs for visually handicapped citizens.

Penn, who is sighted, is an integral part of the Outer-Sighters. She began her association with the Outer-Sighters nearly four years ago as a volunteer. Since July she has been a program leader for the

group, in cooperation with the Winston-Salem recreation department's special populations unit.

Before she became involved in the Outer-Sighters, Penn had little faith in the ability of blind individuals to participate in a variety of social and athletic activities. Then Charles Roane, who helped create the Outer-Sighters and who is a program leader now, gave Penn an opportunity to watch the Winston-Salem beepball (softball for the blind) team in action.

"When I watched that I was totally amazed," she said. She explains that in beepball, the players are able to track the ball because it beeps electronically.

"Then, I started bringing them bats and balls and doing whatever I could do. And now I'm out there in the field," said Penn.

Outer-Sighters vice president Francenia Smith has been involved in the group since it was launched in 1978. Because Smith is partially sighted she said she is able to help her peers who are less sighted.

The purpose of the group, she said, is to provide a social outlet for the community's visually impaired, many of whom aren't able to participate in other social activities because of their handicaps.

"We get along well," Smith said. "We understand each others' needs. There used to be a time when the blind had no social outlets."

The Outer-Sighters not only double as beepball Braves, but most of them also participate in the Winston-Salem Blind Bowling League, Wednesday night Bingo games, ceramics classes and recreational excursions to Busch Gardens.

In planning the social programs for the Outer-Sighters, she usually asks the members what they would like to do, Penn said.

"The programs are for their benefit and whatever they can think of for me to do, that's what I do," she said.

Smith said the Outer-Sighters is also more than a social organization. It is also a civic organization.



Outer-Sighters vice president, Francenia Smith, prepares a snack for her peers during a holiday get-together (photo by Santana).

Their handicaps do not prevent them from helping others such as the Samaritan Soup Kitchen, the United Negro College Fund and the Sickle Cell Anemia fundraising campaign. Last year the Outer-Sighters provided Thanksgiving meals to area needy children.

"We are civic minded. We help our community in any way we can," said Smith. "We're not handicapped in a sense. We believe in helping ourselves and helping others."

The Outer-Sighters have set aside 25 cents per member each month for a Sick Fund. The Sick Fund collection is used to buy flowers and get well greeting cards for members and family who become ill.

Membership fees are \$1 each month. It takes a little time to collect enough funds for the contributions the group likes to give. But, Smith said, they look forward to sharing what they have.

The Outer-Sighters recently made a \$40 contribution to the Samaritan Soup Kitchen in order to help feed Winston-Salem's hungry residents.

"They feel that they are very well blessed. Why not help other people who can't help themselves?" Penn said.

Penn said the Outer-Sighters does not receive financial support from the recreation department.

The Council for the Blind is a national organization which promotes the legislative interests of visually impaired citizens, Penn said. Many Outer-Sighters participate in the council as well.

Outer-Sighters president Roy Townsend said that they are planning a fundraising campaign soon and

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SATURDAY, DEC. 12

The Retirees Association of the Armed Forces will sponsor a yard sale from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. The yard sale will take place at 3714 Carver Road. For more information call George R. Grady Sr. at 767-3403 after 1 p.m.

SUNDAY, DEC. 13

The Little Theatre of Winston-Salem will have a visit from Santa Claus at its Open House from 2 to 4 p.m. Free goodies, a tour backstage and face painting will be part of the fun. Children may have their pictures taken with Santa for \$2. For more information call 725-4001.

The Winston-Triad Lupus Chapter will have its annual holiday party at 2:30 p.m. at the Highland Presbyterian Church activity building. Crafts, Christmas items and door prizes will be available. There will also be a short presentation on "Coping With Illness During the Holidays" followed by a covered dish dinner. For more information call 768-1493 or 724-6303.

The Ralph R. Morgan Post 220 will have a business meeting at 4 p.m. For information on location of the meeting call James McWillis Jr. at 724-0040.

MONDAY, DEC. 14

The Winston-Salem Community Band will offer a free Christmas concert at Hanes Mall beginning at 7 p.m. at the Hanes Mall. For more information call the Special Populations and Programs Unit of the Winston-Salem Recreation and Parks Department. The number is 727-2505.

THURSDAY, DEC. 17

The Centours Social Club will have a benefit dance to raise toys and cash for local underprivileged families. For more information call 748-0562 or Garland Gains at 767-0209.

SUNDAY, DEC. 20

The Little Theatre of Winston-Salem will have a visit from Santa Claus at its Open House from 2 to 4 p.m. Free goodies, a tour backstage and face painting will be part of the fun. Children may have their pictures taken with Santa for \$2. For more information call 725-4001.

The Ralph R. Morgan Post 220 will have its annual Christmas festival beginning at 8 p.m. at the National Guard Armory. For more information call Janie Murray at 724-7652.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The East Winston Library cordially invites the public to attend its Annual Kwanzaa Celebration on Thursday, Dec. 31 beginning at 6:30 p.m.

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SOCIAL NOTES

Christmas Clearinghouse needs more to help spread cheer

Tis the season and it's time to go shopping once again.

But a special group of people in the city are shopping not just for themselves, but for some of the less fortunate members of the community.

Those shoppers are sponsors for families and individuals whose Christmas will not be as bright without the help of concerned citizens.

The sponsors were found through the Christmas Clearinghouse program, a United Way-sponsored agency dedicated to securing gifts and donations for needy members of the community.

But the program is desperately in need of more sponsors and with



Clearinghouse staffer, Jane Porter, solicits sponsors for needy families as Dec. 16 deadline for sponsorships and donations draws near (photo by Mike Cunningham).

Christmas less than a month away, the agency still has 100 families and elderly individuals who do not have sponsors.

Jane Porter, a staff member at the clearinghouse, says anyone can be a sponsor and provide donations of items or of money. Sponsors who want to do their own shopping for their adopted Christmas family or individual may call the clearinghouse and ask to be matched with a family or individual. The staff members will shop for sponsors who are interested in contributing money rather than actual gifts.

The deadline for contributions is Dec. 16 and more information is available from Jane Porter at 722-0664.

Triad area church choirs and high school glee club members have been invited to attend.

Seating for these groups can be reserved by calling Katherine Tischler by Dec. 11 at 761-5198.

WFDD radio to host fourth annual community Christmas carol sing

WFDD/88.5 FM, listener supported radio from Wake Forest University, will host the 4th Annual Community Carol Sing on Tuesday, Dec. 15, at First Presbyterian Church, 300 N. Cherry St., from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. A reception will follow in the RJR Gallery at the Sawtooth Building.

vary Moravian Church, will be song leader.

Dr. Donald Armitage, director of music at First Presbyterian Church, will again be the organist. James Bates, choir director of Cal-

The carol sing is free and open to the public, however, a donation of canned goods to go to the Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina is requested.

ABOUT TOWN

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority gives teen-agers a special lift

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority members along with 41 local high school junior and senior Teen Lift participants took part in the North Carolina A&T State University Day on Saturday, Nov. 14.

The Teen Lift participants were greeted by Dr. Clenton A. Blount Jr. They were given a guided tour by A&T Student Ambassadors. Faculty and staff were on hand to answer questions and to provide academic information about their areas.

Financial aid, admissions and counseling information was also available. Complimentary luncheon tickets and complimentary football tickets were given to Teen Lift participants.

The purpose of Teen Lift is to



Teen Lift participants join members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority during a program sponsored recently by the sorority.

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