



**By ROBERT PIERCE**

**• Leader & Times**

It's mid-December, and thoughts of the holiday season have been in the air for about half a month.

In addition to presents and visions of sugar plums dancing in children's heads, Christmas Day likewise has its traditions when it comes to food.

While families across the world will enjoy their Christmas dinner from the comfort of home, others still will have partake of food elsewhere.

Liberal's Stepping Stone Shelter is giving people the chance to both give and receive a meal this holiday season with its annual Christmas dinner.

The shelter also serves an annual Thanksgiving Day meal, and director Bambi Fulton said the meal will be slightly different from November's.

"We serve ham at Christmas versus turkey," she said. "I think we'll have maybe one or two turkeys that we cook, but for the most part, it's mostly ham. We do the traditional green beans, corn. I don't know if we'll have mashed potatoes this year or not. I'm trying to think of a different way to do some potatoes, but it's still pretty traditional as far as the meal goes – maybe a lot less cranberry sauce than we had at Thanksgiving. We had a ton of that stuff."

Of course, what Christmas would be complete with presents? Fulton said gifts await the residents of Stepping Stone through donations of many generous souls.

"A lot of people will donate," she said. "We're still kind of waiting on donations for presents."

Fulton said in the past, some donors have made bags with items such as towels and socks for the residents, and this Christmas should see similar gifts.

"We put together big bags or baskets for the residents that are here, and they get those on Christmas morning," she said. "That's one thing I love about the shelter that we do on Christmas is giving the gifts."

This Sunday, the shelter will have carolers paying a visit to provide some holiday music. Fulton said there is much she is looking forward to about the holiday activities at Stepping Stone.

“I love Christmas,” she said. “It’s my favorite holiday. It’s going to be really cool to see the different residents we have this year and just how they’re going to get their gifts. That, every year, is going to be a new experience and a fun one for me because everybody reacts so differently.”

While volunteers are still being sought, Fulton said she is hoping for a turnout similar to the Thanksgiving meal in that realm.

“Thanksgiving went so smoothly,” she said. “We actually had too many volunteers, I think. This year for Christmas, we’re going to be doing about 15 volunteers the day of Christmas. Most of those will be in the morning preparing for the meal and the ones in the evening who help clean up.”

Fulton said there will be much for those who volunteer to do when they arrive Christmas Day.

“They’re the ones that are getting our stuff ready to serve,” she said. “They pull apart the turkeys. They’ll be cutting ham.”

Fulton said there is one task she and many others may not be looking forward to, though.

“The poor Thanksgiving people, they had to peel and cut up so many potatoes for the mashed potatoes,” she said. “I try not to torture anybody with that job.”

Volunteer work likewise includes cutting pies and cakes and setting up tables both for desserts and guests.

“We had to add more tables and more chairs,” Fulton said. “It’s basically getting all that together and ready.”

Of course, dinner at Stepping Stone, or anywhere for that matter, involves not only givers, but also receivers, and Fulton said she hopes both will take away something from Christmas Day at the shelter.

“As a giver, it’s always kind of the same,” she said. “I hope they get to see what we do here at the shelter and how important what we do is in helping the community. As the receiver, I really hope that our residents get to see how many people in the community really support the shelter and are willing to give that hand up and just really give them hope for the future that there is better for them.”

Stepping Stone’s Christmas Day dinner will run from 1 to 7 p.m. at the shelter at 1015 N. Washington in Liberal. Fulton said those hours make it convenient for anyone’s schedule.

“It runs all day, so those working different shifts can come any time of the day,” she said. “It just starts an hour later than Thanksgiving did. It’s a free will donation. Any support is good.”