

Season's Greetings

Celebrations from around the Region



▲ Patient Zack Allary gets a boost from Sparkle the Clown as he puts the finishing touch on the tree, as the Alberta Children's Hospital gears up for their first Christmas at the new site.



▲ **FROM COVER** (Left to right): Kuldip (front), Amandeep, Lakhwinder, Manpreet, and Vikram Chohan celebrate their first Christmas together as a family. In July, Amandeep, Kuldip, and Lakhwinder took their very first flight and landed in Calgary where they now reside with Region employees Parmit and Harjinder Chohan and their two children, Manpreet (also a Region employee) and Vikram. Manpreet and Vikram have adjusted to gaining three new siblings and as much as they have taught their brother and sisters, they too have learned just as much. "They see how grateful these children are for everything they been given. They are most thankful for the basic things in life that most of us take for granted - the love and compassion of another human being," says Jennifer Ramsbottom, Parmit's supervisor and the Pharmacy Technical Manager at the RGH. "I applaud Parmit and Harjinder for taking these three children into their home and their lives. At this time of year when most children are making their wish lists for the latest gadgets and electronics, Amandeep, Kuldip, and Lakhwinder have been blessed with the greatest gift of all - a family."



▲ Staff from the Seniors Health Outpatient Clinic at Rockyview General Hospital got into the true spirit of the season through the "Adopt A Family" program put on by the Calgary Women's Shelter. Together they raised close to \$1,000 in gifts and cash for the mother and two children they adopted. (Left to Right): Peggy Furman, secretary; Jan Tuffnail, RN; Bonnie Johnson, RN; Brenda Beach, RD; Bonnie Johnson, RN; Audrey Paddison, secretary; Kathy Gates, RN; Patricia Jean, psychologist; Christine Saltuklaroglu, Rec. Therapist; Heather McHugh, SW; Cheryl Jeffery, pharmacy. Missing: Liz Gillis, Manager; Janet Dawson, physician; Linda Kurytnik, OT; Rishma Jessa, CNS; Beverly Forbes, secretary; Linda Weaver, psychologist.



▲ You can make a list and check it twice, along with your email, benefits & payroll information and much more, from e-people kiosks throughout the Region. (clockwise from bottom I): e-People Assistance Team members Jocelyn Osborn, Lorna Hayes, Elisabeth Timm, and e-People Trainer Melanie Kazimir unwrap the new e-People kiosk at Southport.



▲ Joanna Hansen, 92, a resident of the Rising Sun Long Term Care Centre in Black Diamond, along with Toni Borys (left), Recreation Department, and Recreation Therapist Susanne Mills inspect the gift baskets being raffled off in this year's Bazaar. Each department at Oilfields Hospital donates a basket; the general public purchase them in a raffle, and the proceeds go towards the Handi-Bus program. Last year \$3,500 was raised to give active residents access to resources in their community, such as the swimming pool.



▲ Patient Donna Stunzi shares a Christmas moment with two-year-old Ethan Schmidt at the Christmas party put on for patients, staff and their families on Patient Care Unit 47, the Oncology and Intensive Palliative Care Unit at the Foothills Medical Centre.



▲ Calgary Flames Goaltender Miikka Kiprusoff and Defenseman Dion Phaneuf chat with patient Kristen Mortensen during the Flames' Christmas visit to the Alberta Children's Hospital.



▲ (Left to right) Patient Teghan Kwan, Recreation Therapists Lesley Baker & Tina Coupal, and patient Melinda Bouffard make Christmas chocolates at FMC's Recreation Therapy & Rehabilitation Medicine area. Recreation Therapists provide a number of leisure related activities for patients to get them into the festive season, including sanding, painting and assembling wooden reindeers and candle holders, Christmas chocolate making, and a trip to see ZooLights.



▲ Physical Therapists Barb Larson (left) and Joanne Simonds show off some of the Christmas floats created by the different departments at Oilfields Hospital in Black Diamond. Prizes will be awarded for the top three or four floats. The general public is welcome to drop by to vote.



▲ The multidisciplinary staff of Unit 112 at the FMC donated a grand total of 54 boxes to Samaritans Purse Operation Christmas Child. Next year the staff hopes to collect even more gift boxes and challenge other departments and units to donate as well. Anyone up for some friendly competition?



▲ Rockyview General Hospital Laboratory Services Administrative Assistant Lynn King with an African-themed Father Christmas doll she made, one of several artistic creations she produced over the years to auction off for money to be donated to charity. This year's item was a quilt, proceeds from which went to the United Way. In the past Lynn's beautifully detailed crafts have helped raise money for the Red Cross, Tsunami Relief, Walk For Breast Cancer, and the Adopt a Family program at the Calgary Women's Shelter.

Photography by Paul Rotzinger & Greg Fulmes

From Hanukkah and Christmas to the Aga Khan's birthday

Staffers celebrate holidays from all around the world

Regardless of faith, ethnicity or background, December is a time of celebration for many Region employees. We talked to three Region staff about how they celebrate the holidays at home.

Barbara Balfour
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Traditionally, Florin Man's family don't decorate their Christmas tree until Christmas Eve – but they start getting in the mood when St. Nicholas tucks small gifts into their children's shoes on Dec. 6.

"In the evenings, after supper, we sing and listen to Christmas carols in Romanian and English," says Man, a Community Care Co-ordinator for the palliative Home Care team who hails from Romania.

On the night of Dec. 24, Romanian families feast on home-made sausages, pork roasts, sauerkraut, and cabbage rolls, with a walnut and poppyseed roll for dessert.

As the evening settles in, families either host caroling visitors from the neighbourhood or go caroling from house to house themselves. "We try to

preserve this tradition here in Calgary by visiting friends and families here," says Man.

Presents placed under the tree on Christmas Eve are opened the next morning, followed by a church mass and another suppertime feast that night.

In some parts of Romania, freshly cut twigs are brought inside and immersed in warm water to coax the sprouting of green buds just in time of Christmas. This is meant to symbolize new beginnings and new life for the upcoming year.

At this time of year, Teresa Sulkin celebrates her Jewish faith by lighting candles at Hanukkah, an eight-day festival of lights that started on Dec. 15 this year.

Families light a candle every night and feast on foods fried in oil, like potato latkes and sufganiot, deep-fried donuts with marmalade inside. This is done

to celebrate an ancient miracle that occurred when the Jews reclaimed the Jerusalem Temple and made a 24-hour supply of oil last for eight days.

"Hanukkah is a holiday that celebrates having the freedom and the right to practice one's own religion," says Sulkin, a physiotherapist from Argentina who is part of the Region's Seniors Falls Prevention Team.

Garzana Ahamed, a registered nurse with the Region, was born in Uganda, raised in Canada and belongs to the Ismaili Muslim faith. On Dec. 13, Ahamed and her family celebrate the birthday of the Aga Khan, their spiritual leader.

They celebrate by attending jamat khane, or "place of congregation", where they gather to pray. Beforehand, they indulge in a dinner of traditional foods such as biryani, a rich chicken or meat curry with rice cooked with saf-



Teresa Sulkin lights the Menorah for Hanukkah with her 21-month-old granddaughter, Hannah.

ron and Indian spices. Ahamed often gives her children a present to mark this special occasion.

Before Dec. 13, a celebration for all Ismailis across the city is held at the Round-Up Centre, complete with food and a live band.

But Ahamed doesn't just stop there

when it comes to holiday celebrations. "I like to celebrate the holidays by putting up a tree and giving presents for Christmas, too," says the mother of three. "We live in a Western society and I want my kids to feel like they fit in while also being aware of other multicultural traditions."

Region staffer opens nursing school in Tanzania

Making a difference in Africa

Barbara Balfour
COMMUNITY RELATIONS

When Sharon Mkisi first landed in Tanzania about 7 years ago, she was as overcome by the beauty of the land as she was by the intense poverty engulfing its peoples.

She was only there for a three year volunteer work contract, but it didn't take her long to realize it took very little to make a significant difference in the lives of people around her.

"I saw people dying on a regular basis for the lack of the few dollars it would take to buy medicine," said Mkisi, a health care professional who currently works for the Region as the Area Manager for Pediatrics in Home Care. "I saw children with incredible potential begging for food on the road. But I also saw the difference it made when one of the children from our street side school was given support and had his school fees paid so he could go to a regular school and learn."

"He got the highest marks in his class. The beaming smile on his face as we congratulated him is unforgettable. He will be a leader in his community some day."

It was those kinds of experiences that have led Mkisi to commit herself financially, emotionally and socially to the people of Tanzania. In 2003, Mkisi and her husband – whom she met and married in Tanzania – founded Baraka Community Care Connections.

With the help of friends and family, they built a small school for the community in Morogoro, Tanzania. Mkisi



Sharon Mkisi, Area Manager for Pediatrics in Home Care, is currently supporting no fewer than 53 young orphans and children from extremely poor homes in Tanzania.

"I expect that someday we will all see the ripple effect of those actions."

is currently supporting no fewer than 53 young orphans and children from extremely poor homes, through nursery school and into grade one.

Long after she returned to Calgary, she is paying for staff salaries as well as tuition fees, books, uniforms, desks, and a small meal so that the children do not have to learn while they are hungry. Her husband is directing the centre from Morogoro.

In Swahili, the word Baraka means "God's blessings." It is a reflection of Mkisi's thankfulness for all that she has been able to experience in life, and her desire to pass it on to others.

"My personal investment is in the lives of the children of Africa and through what seems to be very small contributions I expect that



Sharon Mkisi

someday we will all see the ripple effect of those actions," she says.

"I have dreams for many programs through Baraka which will contribute to people's lives and community in Tanzania. We have plans of being able to impact other areas such as healthy living, education programs, water filter technology, microfinance as well as having hospice care

for people dying of AIDS and other conditions."

Mkisi is looking to partner with others who want to sponsor the children and support them through school. For Christmas this year, Mkisi is trying to raise enough money to be able to buy a pair of leather shoes for each child for Christmas. In a country where families save money to add a little meat to their Christmas meal in an effort to make it special, a pair of shoes is much more than they can afford.

If you are interested in buying a pair of Christmas shoes for \$15, or sponsoring a child to support them through school at the cost of \$1 per day, contact Mkisi at 710-8172.

Tax receipts can be issued for amounts over \$25.

Homeless but far from useless

Christmas on the streets

Emmanuel Ngwakongwi
DIVERSITY SERVICES

As the mercury drops and homeless shelters fill beyond capacity, it's important to remember the holiday season is not joyous for everyone.

Homelessness is a growing problem in Calgary due to factors such as job loss, lack of affordable housing, and drug and alcohol dependence.

In May 2006, more than 3,400 men, women, and children were homeless in the city – all of whom are potential clientele served by the Calgary Health Region, and whose health needs can range anywhere from mental health to trauma and drug rehabilitation.

In a recent effort to address homelessness and health related issues, the Region, in partnership with the United Way and the Calgary Homeless Foundation, and community agencies working with homeless populations, organized the third annual Conference on Diversity and Wellbeing in November.

With the theme of Taking Action on Homelessness and Health, the conference created a forum for dialogue among community stakeholders to address health disparities experienced by homeless populations. Thanks to additional funding from the United Way, a research component was attached to the conference to investigate the health problems faced by homeless people and determine possible strategies.

"This conference is important to the Region because our vision is Healthy Communities – we are concerned about the social determinants of health – housing, income, employment, education, etc., that all have an impact

on health," said Delaine Johnson, Manager of Diversity Services and conference chair.

"Homelessness is not about the stereotypical homeless person – a single male with drug and alcohol addictions, living under the bridge and begging for coins. It is about the conundrum caused by the economic boom in Calgary. The increase in the value of homes and rent has forced families out of their homes or even destroyed the dream of ever owning a home for many families."

As the city of Calgary prepares to unveil a 10-year plan to eradicate homelessness, it is vital that all issues – such as drug dependency, poverty and abuse – be addressed rather than simply providing more affordable housing to clientele. More information on research findings about homelessness and health will be published in future issues of *Frontlines*.

FACTS & STATS:

- Half of Calgarians who are homeless right now have a job, but are not making enough to afford appropriate accommodation.

- An average of 2,800 people use homeless shelters every night in Calgary.

- Fifty-three per cent of those without a home are suffering from some form of mental illness. Over 30 per cent suffer from some form of addiction.

- If affordable housing options do not become available, the City of Calgary estimates that by 2008, approximately 19,000 households could be at risk for homelessness.

WANT TO HELP? Each year, on the first Thursday of January, CUPS Community Health Centre provides a dinner for approximately 800 of Calgary's homeless. To volunteer, call 221-8786 or email cup.hossli@shaw.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the issues that staff may encounter with clients who are living on the streets, please refer to the Diversity Services website, at www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hecomm/diversity/health_and_homeless_populations.htm or contact Diversity Services at 943-0205 or diversity.services@calgaryhealthregion.ca