

Charity Begins At The Pub

Written by Dr. Karen Stollznow
Friday, 28 December 2012 09:00

People around the world are celebrating the fact that the end of the world didn't occur on 12/21/12. Not that we were surprised. Like many other skeptics, the Denver "Mile High Skeptics" held a tongue-in-cheek "End of the World Party". Don't worry if you missed the opportunity, there'll be another failed Armageddon to celebrate soon enough.

For this special occasion just before the holidays, we wanted to do more than just eat, drink and be skeptical. We decided to invite guests to bring along a gift of clothes or non-perishable food items to donate to a local charity.

Then we looked for a suitable charity. We searched for a local secular organization and there simply aren't any. We decided that it didn't matter anyway. All we wanted to do was to give to people. This drew some criticism from skeptics who didn't want to donate to a cause that promotes religion or forces people to pray. I can understand this argument. I once worked in a soup kitchen for St. Vincent de Paul in San Rafael, CA. (This was because I wanted to help, not because I was doing community service!) I disliked it when the staff forced their hungry guests to "say Grace" before they were allowed to eat.

In the end, we selected the Denver Rescue Mission. Yes, they are a Christian organization. Their building downtown is a city landmark for its cross saying "Jesus Saves" in neon lights. However, they are:

Thriving today as non-denominational organization, no one is denied services because of gender, race, color, creed, national origin, religion, age, handicap, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, or marital, parental or military status.

They don't refuse anyone, so why would we refuse them? The organization does a lot of important work for the community, without bias. They not only deliver food and clothes to the people who need them, but they provide overnight shelter, transitional housing and life-skills education.

We ultimately chose them because they *wanted* the donations! Many charities receive an oversupply of donations at this time of year, and don't have the resources to process them all. It

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would be a shame to donate items that would never reach those who needed them.

The drive was a success, and we collected about sixteen bags full of canned food, cereal, rice, pasta and pre-loved clothes. We have resolved to do this on a monthly basis. The coldest months in Colorado are yet to come, and many people are in dire need of coats, blankets, hats and gloves. However, we don't need a holiday or a season as a reason to donate. It's a great way to do something for society that doesn't involve donating money or time, if we don't have it.

I'd like to encourage skeptics to start similar drives with their local groups. Perhaps your group already does something similar. Let's break the stereotype that supporting charities is only for the religious.

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