

Gift giving in a 'winter of discontent'

A common thread running through many of this month's features has to do with heating this winter.

In our cover section, Margo Opsasnick, from Delta Medix in Scranton, says an increasing number of patients are calling the group to ask for a statement of medical need to prevent power shut-offs at their homes.

Misericordia professor, Fred Croop asks, "What are people going to do? Timing is an issue, with fuel price increases and the tax reassessment happening simultaneously. There could be a public revolt."

As we stand on the doorstep of another winter, there are some harsh realities we need to consider. One is that oil prices, even though they've retreated a bit, are still nearly double what they were a year ago. The other is that emergency funds for heating assistance aren't what you think they are.

Gary Drapek, president of the United Way of Lackawanna County, explains that LIHEAP money, which provides both emergency and non-emergency heating

funds, is usually exhausted by December. This year, with a spike in need, he fears the well will go dry much earlier.

Non-emergency heating assistance is distributed based on a formula that takes family size, income and other factors into consideration. This is a one-time cash benefit that does not exceed \$300. In a crisis, a low-income citizen can seek emergency funds — this is also a one-time disbursement and cannot exceed \$300. That's \$600 — tops — that a low-income family may receive to help with heating costs. Anyone with oil heat knows that \$600 won't fill the tank — and a typical winter requires that you top it off several times. Should a winter come earlier, stay later or be unduly harsh . . . that's even more refills.

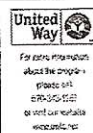
United Way has launched an interesting gift-giving idea. We all receive assorted trinkets as gifts from those with whom we do business. This year, think about giving the gift of warmth in a client's name instead. How much more meaningful than another letter opener! (See p. 71 for details.)

Jay

This holiday season, United Way suggests 'the Gift of Warmth,' rather than 'chachkes'

Gary Drapek, president of the United Way of Lackawanna County, says board member and businessman, Pat McMahon, has suggested a unique idea for holiday gift-giving by businesses. Instead of coffee mugs, engraved pens or other 'chachkes,' give the gift of warmth to a struggling neighbor and send the 'Gift of Warmth' card to your clients. Drapek says he fears this winter will be potentially deadly for low-income seniors and households with small children. The emergency heating assistance available through LIHEAP (in emergencies, the needy can receive \$300) is no longer even enough for one fill-up. Drapek says he has personally known seniors who, having run out of oil, attempt to live in one or two rooms heated by

a kerosene or electric space heater. In one such case, an alert postal worker was able to contact the United Way for help. However, Drapek fears an onslaught of such scenarios this winter will deplete LIHEAP funds before the New Year even begins. To explore how to give 'The Gift of Warmth,' call the United Way at (570) 343-1267.



The Gift of Warmth

United Way Emergency Heating Fund

\$1.50



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