

## keep the spirit strong in the new year

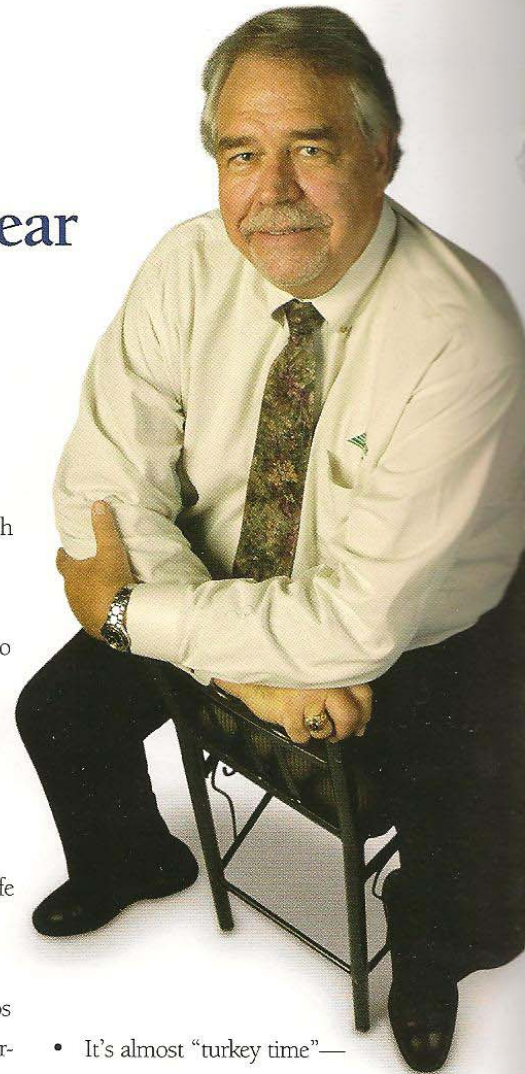
At the end of a work week, some folks say TGIF. I don't know about you, but as 2009 begins, my rallying cry is "Thank goodness '08 is over!"—TG0810! Talk about corruption, greed, stress, frustration, fear, and near disaster. For me, the year 2008 may have challenged us more as individuals and as a nation than any other year in my lifetime.

Thank goodness the holiday season was here to help us out of the doldrums. Our challenge as we go headlong into the residual challenges of the last 12 to 18 months is to hold on to the hope that the recent holiday season brings forth. This month I am challenging you to take that hope, that spirit, forward—not just in your mind or as a foggy memory—but by taking action with your family, friends, colleagues, and community to rally words and aspirations into action.

To that end, I challenge all of you who read this column to take action to reclaim the spirit of the holidays throughout the year by considering the following ideas:

- **January** marks the birth of Martin Luther King. What can you do to bring King's dream of all people living and working together a reality?
- **February** marks Valentine's Day, Forgiveness Month and Random Acts of Kindness Week. Need I say more?
- In **March**, we celebrate "wearing of the green," but the month also marks Freedom of Information Day. In a time where freedom of information is more important than ever before, make a commitment to stop the fear that is created by half-truths, innuendo, racism, bigotry and lies. And "those" e-mails...please verify before you forward.

- There's plenty going on the third week of **April**: it is National Turn Off Television Week, income taxes are due, and it's my birthday. Plan three activities with your family after you turn off the tube! (Doing your income taxes and celebrating my birth week don't count.)
- **May** is physical fitness month—look in the mirror and decide. Do you need to do something about who you see looking back at you?
- **June** is a strong reminder that the Mississippi River is our treasure. It is American River Month, including Clean Rivers Week. Call the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office to learn how you can protect this natural jewel that is the "Upper Miss."
- **July** marks our Independence Day. Perhaps now, more than ever, we need to find reverence and take action to maintain our freedoms and make a renewed effort to be politically engaged.
- It's almost the end of summer, so it must be **August**. Plan a final summer fling, a BBQ, picnic, boat ride, or camping trip. Get outside before it's too late!
- In **September** ask yourselves why is Labor Day so important to us all? Don't know? Find out, and while you are at it, be reminded that Grandparents Day is celebrated this month. Celebrate with your grandparents or go to a nursing home and celebrate with someone else's grandparent; you will be glad you did.
- **October** is Energy Month. How can you conserve energy in your home, place of work or school? Decide how you can erase your carbon footprint, and take action.



- It's almost "turkey time"—time to be thankful for all the actions you have taken. And don't forget America Recycles Day is **November 15**.
- It's **December**, and we've come full circle; it's a time of giving. And remember, the best gifts don't always come wrapped in shiny paper with a bow on top.

The holidays are a time of renewal, re-energizing and revival. They should also be a time of reflection. Take a moment to reflect on the previous holiday season, and ask yourself, "How can I make the spirit of the season live through the new year?" Then take action, and do something to make it happen.

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