

'TIS THE SEASON

This holiday season, two staffers experienced the chaos of Black Friday firsthand; Geneva students put the hecticness of the holidays on hold to spread the true reason for the season; a local organization spent the morning before Thanksgiving serving the community; a Geneva family broke their fourteen-year-old New Year's Eve tradition. Read all about it!

BACK IN BLACK

A GUY'S TAKE

BY DANIEL GROVER

Dark circles rim the eyes of the sleepy people who stand, anticipating the great deals behind the locked doors in front of them. Black Friday is a long tradition and a seemingly valid reason for people to fight one another over something as simple as a coffee maker that is 20% off.

As I walk into Best Buy at 6 a.m. and gaze at the people greedily running from one deal to the next, trampling over anyone who gets in their way, a shoe hits me. It flies off the foot of a lady, running to get the last pair of headphones on the shelf. But what surprises me the most is not that the shoe hits me but that she does not even notice the shoe is gone. As I return the shoe, she quickly apologizes and tells me that she is not usually like this, but she just has to get the headphones for her son because he recently

made the honor roll.

I continue my shopping finding great deals all along the way. As an employee restocks the shelves, I ask him, "How are you already out of something when the store just opened?" He looks at me with his tired eyes and tells me that they have been open since six o'clock the night of Thanksgiving Day. When the Thursday shoppers rushed to the back of the store to grab the discounted TVs, they knocked down the shelves that he is now restocking.

With a pounding in my head, frustrated with everyone, I go home and lay down. While on the couch I try to think of a better way to shop these days, when I see an advertisement in the paper for "Cyber Monday." I think to myself, "Next year, I'll stay in and sleep and do all of my Christmas shopping online."

A GIRL'S TAKE

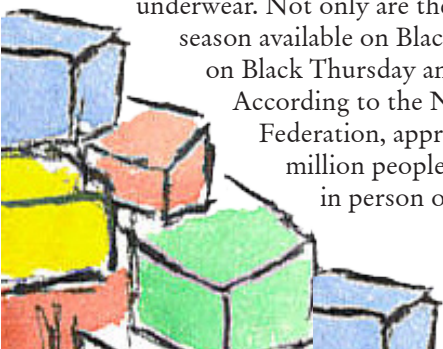
BY KATELYN DAVIS

Once a year, extreme shoppers have the pleasure of receiving great deals on almost everything. The tremendous mark-downs range from the newest electronics to underwear. Not only are the best deals of the season available on Black Friday, but also on Black Thursday and Cyber Monday.

According to the National Retail Federation, approximately 151 million people shopped online or in person on these days. The

most important thing to people during the three days that are considered Black Friday is paying the cheapest price for everything. I am one of these deal junkies who loves the thrill of saving money. I was psyched when I found out that a ton of stores opened at 6:00 pm on Thanksgiving Day, hoping that all the crazies wouldn't show up until actual Black Friday. That was not the case.

As I walked into Walmart around 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, grabbing a cart, I strolled into the store.





Immediately, I was herded like a cow and handed a map of the store layout, as I tried to follow the huge crowd. The map had a plethora of electronics scattered across the store, where friendly associates were waiting, ready to receive and help the insane customers. The store had an aroma of smells—mostly body odor and pine trees.

I continued through the store, trying to beat the mob of people to the electronics, not able to take short cuts because everything was completely roped off. Occasionally I was shoved, but what can you expect when there are rows of 55-inch flat screen TVs that only cost \$270 right next to you. After being shoved many times, I started to catch onto the game. You must shove back to survive the craze.

As I looked around, I realized that none of the adults were actually carrying the products they wanted, but their children were. I saw children holding four to six pillows, pajamas, towels, socks, sheets and boxes of shoes, all for their family members. This made me realize that the main focus during Black Thursday was to buy all the stuff that you can and then come back for the toys later.

Finally, making it to the back of the store, I waited to grab an X-Box, but unfortunately supplies were limited, and I was not “issued a wristband.” After asking around, I was told that you had to have a wristband to purchase the electronics. This wristband was given at the front of the store by the employees.

Frustrated, I just grabbed a pair of Batman pajamas and slippers and made my way to check out. Forced to walk around the whole store before reaching the registers, I got to witness women cat-fighting over shoes, pillows and towels. Racing to the register, one lady had about 15 shoe boxes in her cart. Additionally, the lines were around 25-40 people long. I waited an hour and a half just to buy some pajamas.

During my wait, I met Jennifer who was buying ten pairs of shoes for only \$199.90, saving about \$320. “I am here just to hide from my kids. My children are napping, and this is also

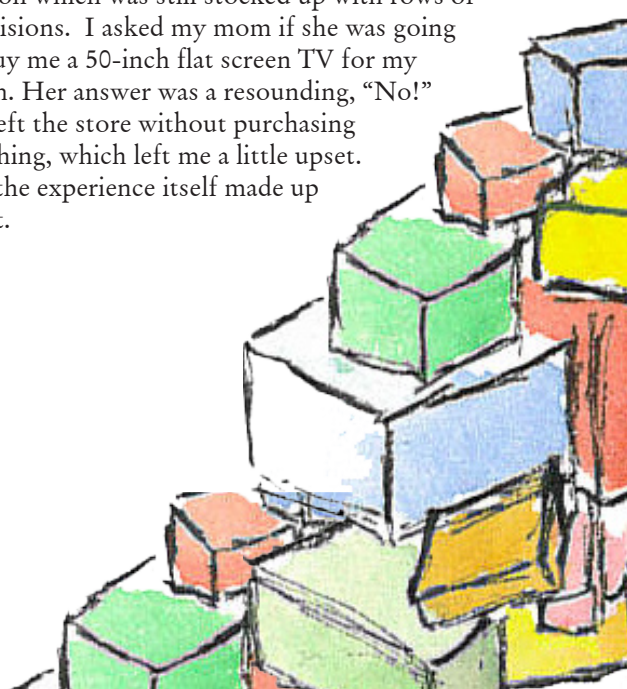
the only time I get to shop for myself,” she says.

There were two women ahead of me who spent \$15.98 and saved \$65.00. “We are just here to get a crockpot,” Ann said. “This is ridiculous, so many people are here!”

Finally making it to the register, I checked out and ended a successful day of shopping and saving money. Now to get a nap for tomorrow’s shopping.

Beeeeeeep! Beeeeeeep! The sound of my alarm clock woke me up at 5:00 am on Black Friday. I rolled out of bed, tired, not ready for more pushing, shoving and insane shoppers. I pulled up to Walmart with dark circles under my eyes, walked in, and no one was there! No crazy cat-fighting ladies, no cranky kids holding multiple pillows while lagging behind their parents, no long lines; all was calm. Waiting there with my camera ready for action shots, nobody walked in. I strolled around, watching Walmart employees still picking up things from the night before, hoping that more people would trickle in. After waiting for about three hours, more people started showing up. Most of them bought 50-inch flat screen TVs and then left.

After being denied an electronic item just the night before, I walked to the electronics section which was still stocked up with rows of televisions. I asked my mom if she was going to buy me a 50-inch flat screen TV for my room. Her answer was a resounding, “No!” We left the store without purchasing anything, which left me a little upset. But the experience itself made up for it.



AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

BY EMMIE OWENS

As the wind rustles through the trees on a humid, overcast morning, almost 300 men wake up at 7:00 am to serve the needy. They all gather around smoking fires with coffee in hand as they cook turkeys, coming together to spread the light of the Lord through the act of giving the day before Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is a holiday brimming with family traditions. Whether it's watching college football or baking grandma's special pumpkin pie, families complete activities over the break together. However, some families choose to give forward during their Thanksgiving break and serve the local homeless community.

Christian Men of Boerne is an organization that specifically focuses on giving to the needy families in the Boerne area. Established in 1999, Christian Men of Boerne cooks turkeys the day before Thanksgiving for Boerne area families who are in need. Celebrating 16 years of serving and fellowship this year, the ministry has grown immensely since its humble beginnings. Over the years, Christian Men of Boerne has expanded from serving 35 families to almost 400.

"It gets bigger every year, and it's all about a bunch of men coming together to help others. It doesn't matter what religion you are. We are all here to help," founder Marty Carroll says.

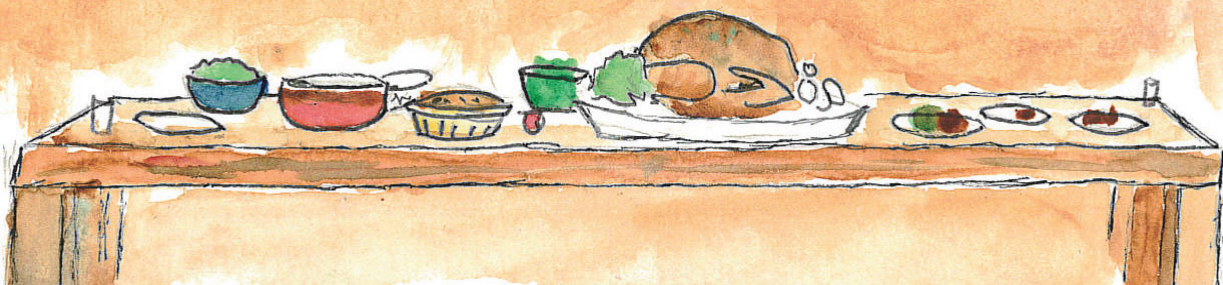
Fathers and their sons make up the majority of the 280 men who volunteer. They come together from nine different churches across Kendall County and gather at the Boerne

fairgrounds to cook the turkeys, which are donated by HEB. "There are a lot more hungry families in Kendall County than you would think," annual volunteer Darrel Steubing says.

Christian Men of Boerne provides each family an entire Thanksgiving meal, allowing area families in need to gather their families and create memorable traditions without the financial stress that comes with preparing large amounts of food. Pre-qualified families are contacted through Hill Country Family Services and given a ticket to come to the Boerne fairgrounds to receive their complete Thanksgiving dinner which includes turkey, sweet potatoes, green beans, cranberry sauce, dressing, rolls and a pie. The families who are pre-qualified through Hill Country Family Services are not homeless.

"Most of us do have jobs, but for how many we have in a household, turkeys are just too expensive. It's hard. I have three kids at home, and only one is my daughter. The other two I'm taking care of are my niece and nephew, and they eat a lot," says a single mom recipient. Not only does serving meals help to further serve the community, but "it's a great fellowship gathering of Christian men, doing the Christian thing, being a light of the Lord for others to see during Thanksgiving," Steubing says.

Christian Men of Boerne looks forward to growing each year and spreading God's word to more and more people.



RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR

BY RUTH WACKER

3, 2, 1, the clock strikes midnight! Another year commences as the cheering grows louder. Many families have unique traditions to celebrate the new year. For some people, New Year's Eve is celebrated with parties and fireworks. For others, it might amount to gathering on the couch to watch the New York Times Square ball drop from the sky. Many have certain foods or drinks they celebrate with each year. Before this year, the Millett family celebrated New Year's Eve in the same way for fifteen years.

"The vision for the Young Life family ski trip is for families to come together, focus on each other and Christ, build relationships with other families, laugh a lot, and get a glimpse into the ministry of Young Life," says Annie Millett, wife of Steve and mother of Geneva senior Greta Millett, and two graduates, Hans (2012) and Dakota (2014).

Young Life Family Ski Trip began in 2001 when five families from the Young Life staff decided to take a trip together for the holidays. Afterward, they had such a great time that they decided to invite all their friends the next year. Now, many families join the Milletts every year at Young Life's Trailwest Lodge in Buena Vista, Colorado. The trip includes skiing, sledding, games, skits and home cooked meals. Some of these adventures turn into stories that families will tell and cherish forever, and some lead to less enjoyable experiences they will never forget (especially when sledding in negative eight degree weather).

"It was the coldest I have ever been. It was freezing and miserable. I thought my fingers, toes, and nose were going to fall off. I'm pretty sure I had icicles on my eyelashes," says Greta Millett.

Of course, some of their great memories

from the trip are not so painfully gained. In fact, each year New Year's Eve is celebrated by all with lots of laughs and dancing, and then New Year's Day is spent driving back home.

"For New Year's Eve, we usually have a Young Life club with all the families that then moves straight into a New Year's Eve Party complete with a Father Time, Baby New Year and a Rave Party," Mrs. Millett says.

The party includes several traditions every year. Each year, a big room is decorated with balloons and streamers. The kids then pass out party supplies like hats, necklaces, glow sticks and horns. Finally, the party starts. Dancing ensues at the beat of the DJ's music. Every person shows off their dance moves until the final year's end countdown. But some New Year's Eve surprises can change the party plans entirely.

"My favorite memory from the trip was when all the power went out in the lodge on New Year's Eve," says Greta Millett.

So instead, they celebrated a little differently than in the past. The night was spent playing games, singing to the guitar and enacting funny skits. The room was lit with a warm fire accompanied with flashlights and glow sticks. The morning of New Year's Day, the Trailwest snack bar is opened for breakfast as the families pack up. Since many people stay up late, the trip ends with parents driving their sleeping children back home. This dance party sensation had occurred every year since 2001, but the trip was canceled this year due to severe weather in Colorado. Nonetheless, the Milletts plan for the trip to be in full swing next year with all sorts of new adventures, memories waiting to be made, and a New Year's Eve party to top all the previous years.

ALL ARTWORK BY
NOAH BENSON



IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

BY ARIANNA FLORES

As the sunlight fades and the cool nighttime air settles in, 30 people gather on the porch of a house. A young girl stands on her tiptoes to ring the doorbell. A hush falls on the crowd, until a warm face greets them with a wide open door.

"Merry Christmas!" come the shouts from the red-nosed, bundled visitors. With the strum of a guitar, they break out into song.

"Oh holy night, the stars are brightly shining." The all-too familiar lyrics reach the ears of the entire family now gathered in the door frame. Sometimes a flash or two goes off, preserving the moment in Christmas memory, and most always a few new voices join in the fun.

The Village Green neighborhood caroling is one of those inexplicable experiences that define the Christmas season for many of the neighborhood's residents. Geneva senior Mack Vaught has lived in Village Green for the majority of his life, and has been a part of the neighborhood community's annual caroling trips ever since the tradition started around ten years ago.

Their idea stemmed from the need to form a community during the neighborhood's earliest years of development. With this now established Village Green tradition, carolers focus on the true reason for spreading Christmas cheer.

"We aren't singing Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," says Vaught. Rather, the songs sung are deliberately Christian, such as "Oh Holy Night," "Away In a Manger" and "O Come All Ye Faithful."

"I think of them as a way of sharing what

we're all about," he says of the Christmas carols.

This ministry brings the light of Christ to each neighbor who listens in. "Hopefully they see us, and the fun we're having singing to them, and want to be a part of our community or get involved in what we're doing."

Carolers visit houses in hopes of ministering to both newcomers, and those distant from Christ during one of the most holy times of the year, but sometimes challenges present themselves.

"There were some years where it was raining and we still did it. I had to learn the songs on guitar last minute. It was really cold, and I remember being really stressed out about that," says Vaught with a laugh. "We cut it off early and drank hot chocolate." It turns out there was a silver lining, and this post-carol gathering proved a bonding experience.

"I don't know any other neighbors who have this kind of relationship," Vaught says. "This is where I grew up, and having this kind of neighborhood has been really good for me."

The fellowship of Village Green is a real-life example of God's first and foremost commandment being lived out by His followers; caroling helps to bring awareness of that truth.

Neighbors aren't the only fellowships that gather to spread the true message of Christmas; every Christian family holds traditions that symbolize the Christmas story. For senior Ashley Masso, the origins of her family's traditions quite literally touch base with the very root of Christmas.



Masso's grandfather was born in a city just outside of Bethlehem. At age 13, he came on a boat with a few of his siblings to North America, where he later met his wife. The day after the two were married, Masso's grandmother learned to cook Arabic food to feed her in-laws in celebration of the marriage.

From this celebration grew an exotic tradition: Masso's grandmother cooks Arabic cuisine every year during the holidays for her family. "The highlight of getting together is my grandma's food," says Masso, smiling.

"In Arabic cooking, you use lots of spices like cinnamon," she says. Kibbeh, one of her favorite dishes, is made with ground meat and a variety of seasonings, similar to a meat pie. Arabic baklava is a sweet, nutty pastry that her whole family enjoys.

Her grandmother's cooking brings the whole family together, cousins and all, even after the passing of Masso's grandfather. "It's really important, especially to my dad, that we recognize the importance of what my grandpa did to get us here and create a stable family," she says.

Masso's acknowledgment of her family's origin during Christmastime serves as a reminder of the most important birth in history.

Although each family tradition points to the same overall event, they come in all shapes and sizes. Junior Caleb Nilsson explains one of his family's most unique activities at Christmastime.

Like Masso, Nilsson usually spends his holidays with his grandparents. The week before Christmas, he and his siblings hang out

with their grandma, who has hidden a pickle ornament for each grandkid in her Christmas tree. "The first person to find their pickle wins first prize," he says excitedly.

"The ornaments are always hard to find because they're the same color as the tree," says Nilsson. Once each kid has found their ornament, they get a present to tide them over until Christmas Day. "It's great to get a gift in advance," says Nilsson, winking.

However, his parents always stress the importance of seeing beyond these entertaining yet material blessings. He says, "My parents make sure that Christmas is about Jesus and not just the gifts. Always." The example they set has influenced the mindset of Nilsson and his two younger siblings, even though they "talk about Jesus all the time."

In fact, some of Nilsson's favorite Christmas memories don't involve receiving gifts, but giving gifts to his family and to other children who have less. "It's awesome to see people's excitement as they open up my presents," he says.

Despite the differences between all three families' traditions, they all point to the same person. Through all of the songs, food and gifts, through the countless welcoming faces and selfless spirits, "*He* is what it's all about," says Vaught. As the neighbors leave the final doorway and face the cold winds of December, the sound of laughter and the sight of smiles say more than any Christmas card ever could.

