

Sunday, December 11, 2016 **5A**

The season of giving

'Tis the season of giving, spending time with family and friends, and celebrating traditions. This past weekend, we began my family's holiday tradition of putting up the Christmas tree. One of my favorite moments is opening the boxes of ornaments. Each time I see these very special ornaments from my children's time spent at daycare and preschool, happy memories, and some tears, return.

My oldest son helps me put up the tree, fluff the branches and string the lights. Then all three of my children find their favorite ornaments and hang them in a special place. We hang the stockings, and our Elf on the Shelf returns. On Christmas Eve when the letters from Santa arrive with the reindeer food, we all head out to the front yard to spread the special treats so Santa can find our house. Never mind that we don't have a chimney — Santa has that covered. Then we all load up and drive around the county to enjoy the Christmas lights. Giving is also part of our family tradition, not only during the holidays, but

year-round. I'm sure your family has their own holiday traditions you cherish.

'Tis also the season of deciding what impact we want to have on the lives of those around us, both through our philanthropy and our volunteerism. As you are planning your own holiday traditions and thinking about the impact you wish to have, please consider a year-end gift to United Way. Campaign Chairman Tom Bundros needs our help to reach our \$3.8 million goal. A new tradition of giving can leave a lasting legacy. Your gift to United Way is one that works 365 days a year right here in Whitfield and Murray counties to improve lives and strengthen families. Each year United Way impacts more than 60,000 children,



**AMANDA
BURT**

youth, adults and the elderly in our focus areas of education, basic needs and health.

We often think of the chill in the air as part of our holiday traditions and experiences, but the cold weather means more people in our community need help meeting basic needs. You don't have to look far to see that we still have a high level of poverty right here. Last year, more than 28,515 nights of shelter were provided to those with no place to call home, and 16,320 adults and children received food assistance. Disaster services and house fire assistance were provided to 181 people, and 614 domestic violence calls were answered. United Way also provided 10,955 people with assistance to reduce their long-term need for food, housing, or utility assistance through counseling, life skills education or budgeting.

I am fortunate to work with some of the most incredible board members, volunteers, staff and agency community partners. They share a passion for our mission and work tire-

lessly to make our community a better place to live, work, raise a family, and to reach those most in need of a helping hand. United Way's 60 Community Solutions volunteers work throughout the year to make sure the programs we fund meet the greatest needs in the most efficient and effective manner without duplication of services — stretching our dollars beyond what you or I could possibly do alone.

As you look towards making giving part of your holiday traditions, we invite you to make great things happen with United Way. A gift to United Way of \$260 will provide 48 meals to women and children residing in a domestic violence shelter. A gift of \$1,000 will provide 174 meals to homebound elderly. To see more examples of what your dollars can do, visit ourunitedway.org/what-can-your-dollars-do and watch our success stories on [YouTube.com/UnitedWayNWGA](https://www.youtube.com/UnitedWayNWGA).

Amanda Burt is the president of United Way of Northwest Georgia.