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Tri-County Health Department Offers Imaginative Holiday Gift Ideas

With the holiday season upon us, shoppers are always looking for a unique present, and Tri-County Health Department has some creative suggestions for everyone's gift list.

"With everyone watching their budgets, the hot gift trend this year is for eco-friendly, energy-efficient items," states Dr. Richard Vogt, Executive Director of Tri-County Health Department. "It is terrific that saving the environment can also save money."

Eco-friendly gifts include bicycles, garden equipment, energy-efficient appliances or an emergency generator. Big spenders looking for a perfect gift can order insulating replacement windows for the whole house or choose from a variety of hybrid cars.

Less expensive eco-friendly stocking stuffers include compact fluorescent light bulbs, LED nightlights, a programmable thermostat, canvas grocery bags, pedometers, rechargeable batteries, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, water-saving showerheads, or a water filter pitcher instead of bottled water.

Eco-friendly gift wrapping ideas include attractive recycled papers; using newspapers for wrapping—such as using the Sunday comics for kids' gifts or *The Wall Street Journal* for business and office gifts; and recycling maps or sheet music.

Other clever gift wrap presentations include using a new extension cord to tie up gift boxes with electronics inside; using a jump rope to tie up sports gifts; and accenting gifts with items such as scarves and bandanas, or pinecones and evergreen boughs, instead of paper and ribbon. Examples of creative gift wrapped boxes are pictured on www.tchd.org/gifts.htm.

"Recycled" gifts include antiques, family heirlooms and select personal items. Handmade "coupons" redeemable for errands and chores also make great gifts.

Toys are the most popular gifts for kids, so choose those that keep a child's mind and body active. Some toys can be dangerous, so parents should read warning labels for age recommendations and choking hazards.

Outdoor enthusiasts will appreciate gifts of warm winter gear, camping equipment, an all-in-one survival tool, a GPS tracking device, sporting goods, a yearly parks pass or a bicycle. “Always include a safety helmet with the gift of a bicycle. Helmets are proven to reduce the risk of traumatic brain injuries by 85%. Also consider a headlight, bell, blinking safety lights, reflective clothing, wrist guards and kneepads,” Vogt adds.

You might consider a donation to a favorite charity—one that fights a particular disease, supports the earth, provides disaster relief, or offers public health services like immunizations, clean water and basic nutrition to underdeveloped countries.

Donations of non-perishable food are always welcome at food banks, and go a long way to help needy families in our own area.

Drivers will appreciate a winter car safety kit consisting of warm gloves, ice scraper, tire gauge, collapsible shovel, jumper cables, first aid kit, dried food, bottled water and a spare blanket.

Seniors and baby boomers might like warm clothing, sturdy bathtub handrails, non-skid mats, shower massages, comforters, heated booties, or motion-activated lights and timers. Large print gift items include books, magazines, calendars, crossword puzzles, address books and playing cards. “Talking” gadgets that compensate for vision impairment include a watch, thermometer, clock, calculator, bathroom scale and books on tape.

The gourmet cook might like healthy cookbooks, a cooking class, a BBQ fork with temperature gauge or fat-free cookware. Food baskets make great gifts, but they don’t have to be full of fattening cookies or candy. More nutritious items include fresh fruit, meats, cheese and crackers, canned goods, exotic oils and wholesome home-baked goodies.

Santa could stand to lose a few pounds, so physical fitness gift ideas include sporting goods, exercise equipment, resistance bands, step counters, heart rate monitors, health club memberships and exercise videos ... all followed up with a gift certificate for a massage.

And don’t forget the family pet, with an ID tag, a reflective collar, microchip, healthy chew toys, or a donation to a shelter or clinic.

Trim the tree with the new, energy efficient, LED light strings that use one-tenth the energy of traditional lights. At the end of the season, recycle your tree, wreath and garland at community collection points which turn trees into mulch and compost. Or better yet, buy a living tree and plant it in the yard after the holiday season.

A complete section of gift ideas, photos of eco-friendly gift wrapping ideas, and warnings from the Consumer Product Safety Commission are available on the Tri-County Health Department website at www.tchd.org/gifts.htm.