Elves that Give!

BY STACY VERMYLEN, OLD NAPLES RESIDENT

As the 2023 holidays ended, I wondered if my daughters have taken down the Elf on the Shelf, that little elf creature who, according to the legend, watches to make sure the children are good, or...." However, there is a band of elves in Naples who did more than watch! They gave, too!

Jingled Elves is a group of Naples women who work together to celebrate the holidays with a theme that makes you chuckle but also inspires you to donate! The program was started in 2017 right after Hurricane Irma by Donna Issenmann, who had the idea that a Christmas trolley event, complete with red elf t-shirts and fun headbands, could motivate people to donate. The mission, "to provide funds to charities focusing on improving the lives of women and children in Collier County," raises money by hosting a trolley tour in December, gathering sponsorships for each elf, hosting shop and share events, and accepting donations for grants to organizations that serve women and children in need.

I played golf last week with Linda Sims, a dedicated Elf herself, who was recruiting for more elves! "It is fun, you get to be on the trolley spreading cheer, have a jolly time, and contribute to the cause—you'll love it! "The commitment is short term but lively, and each elf supports the cause by buying a ticket to the trolley event. The trolley starts at Mercado (flash mob included) and travels to Venetian Village, Sugden Plaza, and ends at Barbatella on 3rd. Each elf participant pays a fee for the trolley ride, and receives a t-shirt, gift bag, and festive meal plus the chance to join the crowd singing carols from the trolley as it passes through town. Most of the women involved are active in lots of organizations in town but also join this elfin program because it is just plain fun, and it feels good, too.

The giving part is the best reward for being a Jingled Elf! This year they hope to have their totals add up to over $200,000 with donations to be made to ten deserving agencies serving women and children, including Baby Basics, Blessings in a Backpack, Fun Time Children's Center, the Guadalupe Center and more. By early December, they had over 107 sponsors, up 30% from last year. The hope is that people will feel in the holiday spirit, motivated to help those who need it, especially those still reeling from hurricane Ian (who was definitely NOT a good Elf, by the way!).

So, next year, think about joining the fun, donning a little headband, and singing your heart out, to welcome the holidays and send a little love to women and children. Meanwhile, I recommend my daughters keep that Elf on the shelf all year!

If you volunteer for a great cause or know of someone whose volunteer efforts are making a difference in the local or global community, please share your story by emailing doug.haughey@n2co.com.