

# Holidays can be rough for recovering alcoholics

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recovery, pray and meditate, he said. Otherwise, "old ideas and ways of thinking come back," he said.

Rick said he's been sober for almost seven years by the grace of God and the Alcoholics Anonymous program.

But he's well aware of "the wreckage of his past." Rick said he alienated his family when he was actively drinking and often thinks about his broken relationship with his adult children.

"Sometimes those fences don't mend very quickly," Rick said. "I, for one, always have some regrets and feelings of sadness.

"But I have to understand that all those things take time, patience and a lot of love and understanding."

But many people do not share Rick's understanding.

Jim Robinson, a drug and alcohol counselor for Lutheran Family Services in Lincoln, said alcohol-related arrests skyrocket during the holidays.

"Too many people associate the merriment of the holidays with drinking," Robinson said. "All the tournaments and football games, it just all adds to it."

The effects of that increased alcohol consumption are also a problem, he said.

Chuck Stepanek, executive director of Nebraska's Mothers Against Drunk Driving said heavy holiday drinking resulted in 1,875 alcohol-related fatalities nationwide from Thanksgiving to New Year's Day last year.

MADD sponsors the Red Ribbon Campaign every holiday season, which encourages adults to drink responsibly.

But Rick said responsible drinking is not an option for as much as 10 percent of the U.S. population estimated to have alcoholism.

Those afflicted will always have the disease, he said, and even for those recovering, alcohol in any amount can

fuel a disaster.

As a recovering alcoholic, Rick said he knows he will never rid himself of the disease. But by reaching out and helping fellow alcoholics, he can focus on others instead of on his own affliction, he said.

For example, Rick will work with AA at the Meeting Place in Lincoln to keep meetings and social events going for alcoholics during the toughest period of the holidays. The Meeting Place will be open 24-straight hours from Christmas Eve through Christmas night, and again from New Year's Eve through the next night.

"The recovery community in most places is very active in doing everything possible to assist and reach out to fellow alcoholics and addicts during this period of time," Rick said.

But many addicts may not know they are alcoholics and may not want to seek help during the holidays or any other time of year, he said.

Alcoholism is a disease of perception, and those afflicted will not see alcohol as the source of their problems, Rick said.

"It's the only terminal disease known to mankind that continually tells the sufferer that they don't have it," he said.

About 95 percent of alcoholics will die from complications of the disease, he said, but friends and family members may be able to intervene.

The key to reaching alcoholics is to be honest, and tell them how they act when they're drunk, he said. Tell them you're afraid of them when they're drunk. Tell them you're afraid of what they might do.

Alcoholism is a progressive disease, and always gets worse, Rick said. "It's walking death is what it is," he said.

But there is hope for survival, Rick said — quitting drinking for good — something that can be difficult to do during the holidays.

# Police bring children holiday cheer

BY CHAD LORENZ  
Senior Reporter

Lincoln police officers will be scouring the streets next week, searching for hundreds of juveniles on a special list.

Police will go from home to home, trying to confiscate something from the children—their holiday woes.

"People think we're here to stomp on people's rights and be bullies, but we're not that way at all," Officer Tom Duden said. "We care about kids and their happiness."

Duden is in charge of buying \$13,000-worth of toys for the Lincoln Police Department's Santa Cop charity.

The Lincoln Action Program will distribute some of the toys at its headquarters Dec. 20 through 23. Parents who have applied can pick a toy and stocking stuffer for each child.

Officers will personally take the rest of the toys to the homes of needy families. During the past year,

officers have compiled a list of needy families they've encountered while working, Duden said.

When officers come to their doors, people are shocked and scared, Duden said. When the officers explain they've come to drop off toys, anxiety turns into gratitude.

"We have a lot of people on their couch with tears in their eyes because they didn't think anyone knew they needed help," Duden said. "They don't know who to thank."

"I tell them, 'I'm sorry. You'll have to take that up with the guy who wears the red suit.'"

The toys are actually gifts from hundreds of Lincoln businesses, organizations and individuals that have donated money for the toy drive, Duden said. All kinds of groups — from the Lincoln Square Dance Club to the kindergarten class at Prescott Elementary School — gave what they could.

"There are too many people and too many businesses to thank," Duden said.

Two weeks ago, Lincoln police auctioned off 220 items donated by 180 businesses including a football, volleyball and soccer ball

## Holiday

autographed by University of Nebraska athletes.

Friday afternoon, Duden was at Big Red Keno when a lucky winner approached him with a \$20 bill and said, "Here's 20 for the kids."

Last week, police went on two shopping sprees and bought more than 60 large boxes filled with toys.

Duden said he felt good knowing LPD could give something to children who might not have gotten anything for the holidays.

Last year, Duden visited a family he had heard about from a school official. A single mother was trying to raise four young daughters and work.

Duden took groceries to her so the family could have a holiday meal, but there were no gifts under their Christmas tree, Duden said.

When he returned with a car full of presents for them, he said the family was ecstatic.

"Christmas is supposed to be a special time. For some, it's just a very tough time to get through."

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