

OPINION

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OUR OPINIONS

Counting blessings

■ Pass the turkey and the fixings, but don't forget a heaping helping of gratitude as well. We'll help get you started.

"I appreciate you."

Those three words, which are gaining popularity these days, add a warmer twist to an age-old expression of gratitude by shifting the focus from the favor rendered to the source of the kindness.

And they should remind us as well of the good place we live and the good people we live with. Oh sure, we can squabble with the best of them. But at our core we are an uncommonly kind and giving community.

And when we put our hearts and minds to it, we can get things done. Remarkable things.

That's one blessing to be thankful for today. Here are a few others.

Teach our children well — We live in a community that apparently recognizes the value of its teachers. More than 70 percent of respondents to a High Point University/News & Record poll favored higher salaries for teachers, even if it meant higher taxes. Now, if only state lawmakers would get with the program and support those teachers with fair wages and resources.

Cat-scratch fever — The streaking Carolina Panthers are good again — maybe very good — having won seven games in a row. We're almost willing to forgive team owner Jerry Richardson for his arrogant quest earlier this year to hit the state up for money to upgrade Bank of America Stadium or move his team to another city in, presumably, another state. Almost.

We came. We fought. And we've (almost) triumphed — Say what you will about the soon-to-be \$65 million downtown performing arts center in Greensboro. The effort has raised an unprecedented amount of private money, and is almost certain to become reality. A final campaign for the next several million of an already set goal ends soon — and we hope will end well.

Downtown's upsurge — Near the end of every year recently we've taken stock of steady downtown growth, but developments in 2013 represent an especially significant spike in activity: the performing arts center, a downtown university campus, at least three planned hotels, more apartments, a new grocer and a new park. No matter how you slice it, that's progress in a part of town that provides the city's soul and heartthrob and a place for all to come together and enjoy.

Gateway Gardens — An underappreciated oasis of calm and

beauty in east Greensboro provides a welcome respite on a busy work day. Or a place to stroll and reflect on a weekend afternoon. It's a not-so-hidden gem that isn't just for city visitors.

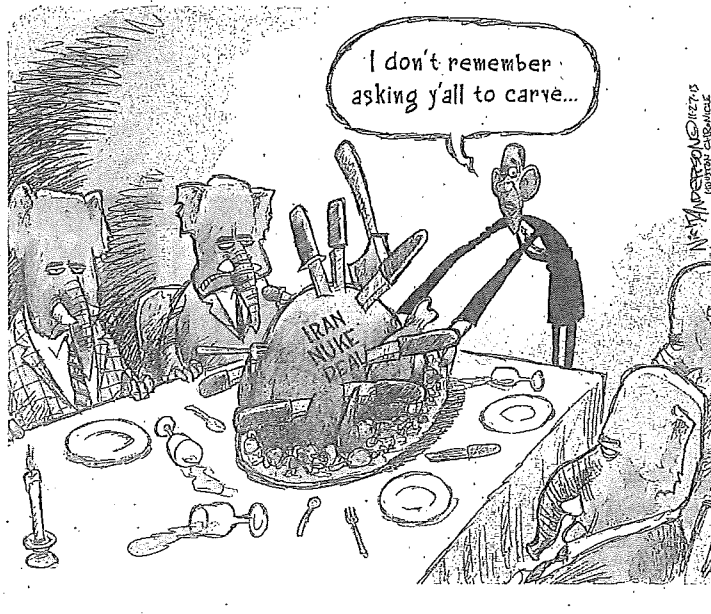
Pet causes — For now, at least, the public's sensitivity seems to have been raised to the urgent need for us to do better by our pets. A new, reasonable tethering law passed by the Guilford commissioners last week is one helpful, hopeful step. So is Gov. McCrory's support for sensible, and overdue, requirements for dog breeders (if only Raleigh lawmakers would follow his lead). For 2014, there's also the "12 Acts of Kindness" program, which calls for citizens across the state to support their local shelters in 12 ways, including donations of canned food, toys, bedding and treats. The Shelter Project, incidentally, includes among its partners the advocates for Susie's Law, the statewide animal abuse legislation that had its start and inspiration in Guilford County.

Making the east no longer least — The City Council is still haggling over the best way forward, but increased and overdue attention has been focused on economic development in east Greensboro, which remains largely untitled ground for growth. Now, to turn talk into action ...

ANYTOWN — By design, this National Conference for Community and Justice residential summer camp in Blowing Rock brings together young people from wildly divergent backgrounds, experiences and circumstances to gently topple walls and build bridges. ANYTOWN alums also played a helpful role this year in discussions about the downtown curfew and activities for youth.

Warm beds — In a short spear-headed by Greensboro Urban Ministry, Winter Emergency shelters will open their doors during the cold months, beginning Sunday. The faith community lives out its beliefs by welcoming those who have nowhere to go and who could die when temperatures drop. The "least of these" deserve hot meals and a roof over their heads, and they can find them in Greensboro.

Cool heads — Greensboro's City Council candidates conducted themselves with mutual respect and dignity. Winners were humble and losers were gracious. If only more residents would take part by voting.



■ TOWN SQUARE ■

Tips to survive the holidays

The Christmas holiday season is approaching, or should I say, it has arrived? Halloween and Christmas seem to have come only a few days apart, with little, if any thought of Thanksgiving, which was supposed to appear somewhere in between. It's a merchant's paradise!

In years past, there was little, if any mention of Christmas until the day after Thanksgiving when the Greensboro Holiday Jubilee Parade began near Fisher Park, wound its way down Greene Street, turned onto McGee Street, turned again onto Elm Street and ended near Fisher Park. Having marched that same parade route for eight years, I can honestly say that it was long and tiring, but the entire city looked forward to it each year. The crowds were huge and enthusiastic.

In those days, that event officially ushered in the Christmas season. At the end of the parade, the crowds would depart and begin shopping in the stores in downtown Greensboro. It was a true Black Friday. Nearly everyone had the Christmas spirit, and that spirit lasted for the next 30 days.

Today's holiday season is nearly twice as long, allowing more time for planning, shopping, cooking, traveling and enjoying all the things the holidays bring. Unfortunately, this extended season also allows more time for all of the potentially not-so-good side effects.

Some warnings and tips for



CRYSTAL MCCOMBS

Visits to friends are often accompanied by an offer of "have some." Not wanting to offend, we often politely say, "I'd love some."

We should remember that most of those treats are calorie-laden, and will eventually show up on us somewhere.

Sweets are delicious, but we wear them a lot longer than we taste them. Alcohol consumption is part of the holiday celebrations, but that, too, has a high calorie count and carries the potential for unsafe driving.

All that glitters. Decorating is an important event during the holidays. Remember, however, that what goes up must eventually come down, and while decorating can be fun and uplifting, taking it all down can be a real chore.

Money. As for gifts, nice gifts don't just have to be expensive. Many people find themselves paying for gifts all the way into the next season. But volunteering your time and talent to help someone in need can be a more valuable gift. Also, a gift card for gas, food or some other necessity can be a truly welcomed gesture.

Carols in October. Christmas has inspired composers for centu-

ries, but a two-month barrage of Christmas music can become overbearing and contribute to depression. So, change the station! Listening for short periods preserves the special nature of the music.

The blues. Depression can be a serious issue during the holidays. The first holiday after the loss of a loved one can be particularly difficult, and the emphasis on spending can be hard for those whose income is small or nonexistent. Minor family conflicts that occur throughout the year seem to take on greater significance during the holiday season.

So, resolve to think younger. Christmas spent with children can be very uplifting. The excitement of little ones can be contagious and uplifting and even remind us of our own happiness at this special time.

The key to surviving the holidays without a lot of anxiety is to maintain a balance in holiday activities, avoid overdoing things and surround yourself with positive people. Have realistic holiday expectations and strive to maintain the spirit of Christmas throughout the year.

Crystal S. McCombs is a News & Record Town Square community columnist.



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