

JIM O'BRIEN

• One Man's Opinion •



Christmas Comes But Once A Year, Coronavirus Or Not



THING WILL HELP." Kathie thinks all those homeless people are going to spend whatever money they get on drugs or booze, but I was hoping he could get a sandwich and drink at McDonald's or Subway. I don't want to get so jaded that I turn away from someone in need. The man looked legit. He wasn't wearing designer jeans or the newest Nike or Air Jordan sneakers as some imposters do.

Now that I am older, 79 at last count, I have learned, at last, that it is better to give than to receive. It feels good.

So many of the waiters and waitresses I know missed a lot of work and pay during the past two years. They are playing catch-up while remembering to bring ketchup to the table to go with the fries.

There was a football game or two on TV every day as contest schedules had to be changed because some teams had so many players sitting out with covid issues. The NHL announced that it would not be allowing its players to participate in the upcoming Winter Olympics in China. The league would use the time frame they slotted for that break in the schedule for games that would have to be postponed.

I did two podcasts on sports topics with my friend Ben Fisher of The Big Fish Roof-



ing Company. He has a complete recording studio in his office building in Bethel Park's Industrial Park.

Ben collects sports paintings and posters and has his walls covered with them, like a sports hall of fame. I paid particular attention to ones that featured Roberto Clemente of the Pirates, just above several Christmas trees. There was a festive atmosphere, not something expected of a roofing company. But Ben is also different.

We packed the car with Christmas gifts. "We won't be able to stop for lunch," I told Kathie, "Because somebody might break into our car and steal our stuff." Such crimes were on a rampage, according to a KDKA-TV reporter. Kathie knew this was a drastic step on my part because she said I am always thinking about my next meal. Or, what's for dinner?

I was actually of some help to Kathie two days before we left for Columbus. She made four different kinds of cookies and rolled the dough in sugar and crushed nuts and dripped green icing into the cavity of the thumbprint cookies. It feels good to contribute in any way since I am so seldom that helpful. She also made stuffed shells, one of our favorite pasta dishes, at the special phone request of Madeline, prompted by her dad, no doubt. Madeline admitted that Mathew Eapen had been a partner in the request.

I thought about our parents, all deceased for years. And how wonderful it would be if they could return for the holidays. They had never seen any of our four grandchildren and they would love them so much.

Everything that could go wrong the week before we left town went wrong. The washing machine, with a full load of clothes in it,

could not be opened. The service man who showed up didn't have the necessary part, and he needed a partner to lift the two-tier dryer and washer. So, Kathie had to go to a nearby laundry and to a friend's home nearby to wash some clothes for our trip.

There was a foul-up in the fuse box and we couldn't get the garage doors up and down for a day. Something knocked one of our birdhouses out of a tree and onto the ground. I had to get a new battery for my car keys.

Customers of mine who had an order form for the past three months were calling, needing a book or two for someone they were having dinner with that night. I never complain. I do whatever I need to do - "whatever it takes," as Steelers' coach Chuck Noll often said - and say, "Thank you."

I wish the appliance repairman operated with similar commitment for a customer of 40 years.

While in Columbus, we had a chance to see Margaret do some cheerleading for her school's varsity basketball team, and to see Susannah play basketball for the Bexley Junior High squad, and to see the twins Jeffrey and Madeline tear madly through their Christmas gifts. We all went to church on Christmas Eve, and enjoyed the Christmas music.

That never gets old. Christmas is still celebrated every year on December 25. It never gets re-scheduled or postponed. We are lucky that way. Hope you have had the best of holidays.

It's not too late to get one of the books in Jim O'Brien's "Pittsburgh Proud" book series.



Coat Drive

To all who contributed to the annual coat and winter gear drive this year, thank you. The donations are being delivered to Shared Blessings in Duquesne to help area children with warm clothing during the cold winter months. Once

again, our West Mifflin Area School District staff, students, and community members displayed great care and generosity to help others in need. Thank You Mr. Mitchell, representing the sophomore class, Mrs. Bonacci, sponsoring

future homemakers and AFJROTC for leading this donation drive at West Mifflin Area High School. In addition, thank you to Cadet SMSgt Caden Ray for selecting the coat drive as her Air Force senior leadership project.

Fitzgerald, Bogen Statement on Weekly Report, New Covid Cases

County Executive Rich Fitzgerald issued the following statement regarding the growing number of COVID cases in Allegheny County, as reported in the Health Department's now weekly report. The new report provides case and death numbers as well as reinfection and vaccination data:

"I'm thrilled to see that nearly 918,000 county residents have received at least one vaccine shot and almost 300,000 more have received their booster. We know that the vaccines are effective at preventing infection, hospitalization and death, or, in the event of a breakthrough infection, are less likely to be hospitalized or die from COVID-19 than an unvaccinated person.

"Even with a high level of vaccination, the CDC's COVID data tracker continues to show high community transmission in Allegheny County. We have said this for weeks as well, but we urge residents, regardless of their vaccination status, to wear a

mask in public, indoor settings to limit spread. The omicron variant is extremely contagious, and we can best protect our community and our friends and family by taking precautions to limit the spread of the virus."

Health Director Dr. Debra Bogen also provided the following statement regarding COVID-19 in Allegheny County:

"We continue to see increasing numbers of new infections reported to the Health Department, including reinfections and breakthrough cases. We know this number is an underreporting because many people are using home tests. We confirmed last week the first local COVID-19 cases due to the omicron variant from tests as early as December 10. We know that the omicron variant spreads efficiently and is the likely cause of the rapidly rising case numbers. I anticipate that the number of cases will continue to rise in the coming weeks.

Local Round Up

Pittsburgh

The Allegheny County Parks Department announced that the Boyce Park Ski Slopes opened for the season on Sunday, December 26. The snow tubing area will not be open at this time as snowmaking continues. As weather permits, the tubing area will be open later this season. The 2021-22 season will run through mid-March, weather and conditions permitting. The lodge will be open this season, including concessions, indoor restrooms, and equipment rental. The upper level will remain closed to the public.

Allegheny County

The Allegheny County Parks Department is offering its annual Christmas Tree Recycling Program this holiday season. Residents may drop off Christmas trees from Sunday, December 26, 2021, through Friday, January 14, 2022, at all nine county parks from 8:00 am until dusk. All

lights, decorations, tinsel, and stands must be removed from trees prior to drop-off. Trees will be mulched and used in the county parks. The nearest drop-off locations are the Boyce Park soccer fields parking lot and the White Oak Park Chestnut shelter parking lot.

Pennsylvania

Did the holidays bring a new puppy into the house? In the hustle and bustle of the season, don't forget to license your dog. All dogs three months and older must be licensed by January 1. For between \$6.50-\$8.50 per year, or \$31.50 - \$51.50 for lifetime registration, the fees support reuniting lost dogs with their families, kennel investigations, and prosecutions, protecting the public from dangerous dogs, and kennel health and safety inspections. Being licensed also keeps you compliant with local laws. For info and to apply, go to on.pa.gov/3E87Rte.

North Braddock, Braddock, & Rankin

The PA Legislative Reapportionment Commission voted on a preliminary map of proposed legislative districts. Legislative maps get redrawn every ten years to redistribute population growth after the Census in Pennsylvania.

The preliminary plans will keep communities such as North Braddock, Braddock & Rankin in District 34 for the State House of Representatives. You can submit your comments to the Commission until January 18, 2022, or at a public hearing with the Commission. For more information, go to www.redistricting.state.pa.us.

Swissvale

Don't trash your tree! Swissvale residents can recycle their live trees after the holidays! Public Works will collect trees beginning the week of January 3 and run for about three weeks.

New Covid Guidelines For Woodland Hills Events

The Woodland Hills School District is committed to the health and safety of its students, staff and their families.

Due to the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases and its impact on crowds and gatherings, the district will suspend spectator attendance at all events, effective immediately. The only individuals that will be permitted to attend are

athletic and event personnel, student participants and performers, school district administration and members of the press/media. Per school district policy, all individuals who are permitted to attend events must wear a mask.

The district is continuing to monitor the situation within Allegheny County and will provide updates as circumstances change.