

# Will you join our Group?

"The Group" has once again come together. We will attempt to provide Christmas for children. Youngsters of parents who normally are able to take care of their own but, because of circumstances beyond their control, can't this year. These parents have faced unanticipated adversities, some have been involved in accidents, suffered catastrophic illnesses and the killer of all times, those who have lost their jobs or their businesses. The parents will be faced with telling their children that Santa won't be able to come this year.

We have already heard of a number of families we would like to help. We know as the holidays approach we will hear from many more. Rarely do parents contact our Group themselves. They are too proud to ask for assistance. Neighbors, friends and relatives discreetly contact us. We then try to verify the circumstances and if they fit into our criteria, unbeknown to the parents, we generally try to fill the children's clothing needs and provide toys, games and other items that Santa would traditionally bring.

All items are gaily gift-wrapped and delivered to the homes. Hopefully, when the children are not there. The parents can then give the gifts to the children as if all the gifts had been provided by them.

Everything is done anonymously. Those of us who have participated in "The Group" effort over the last 10 years are known to each other, but to few others. The recipients of our efforts, both the parents and the children, will never know who we are or where we come from. All presents are marked from Santa Claus. The only identification they have with us is a short Christmas message and the box number of "The Group."

Last year we had a number of last-minute families in desperate need and the small reserve we try to keep for emergencies was wiped out. This year, because of the economy, we anticipate the needs will be greater than ever.

We would like to invite you to join "The Group" by making a contribution. We know everybody has

been pinched and money is tight. If you can, we encourage you to contribute anything possible so that some children on Christmas morning, who could only dream Santa Claus would come, will find, to their wonderful surprise, that he really has come.

In many cases we have to clothe the children from socks and underwear to outerwear. We try to give each child sufficient clothing to carry them through the balance of the school year, along with some toys and gifts to lift their spirits. This generally runs anywhere from \$100 to \$250 per child. For each actual dollar we spend, our

very careful and thrifty shoppers often are able to get two or three dollars worth of merchandise.

Some retailers cooperate with us and extend discounts up to 50 percent as their part of the effort. We are fortunate to have enlisted the aid of a toy distributor who sells to us at cost. Unfortunately, a wholesaler of clothing who also sold to us at cost has gone out of business. Our ace in the hole, the Ben Franklin store in Oakdale, has also closed its doors.

We know we have a big mission this year. Last year we provided Christmas for over 150 children. Un-

less there is a real outpouring of donations, we are not going to be able to come close to this number. The difference will be up to you. If you can take part in this community effort to help those who won't be able to help themselves this year, please do.

The motto of "The Group" is the old Irish saying, "There but for the grace of God go I."

None of us ever know when we will be in need and someone will reach out to us. If you can make a contribution, please send it to "The Group," PO Box 167, Riverhead, New York 11901.

And why not?

## Budget fiasco starts again

The Suffolk County Legislature is at it again. In addressing the 1993 budget proposal put forth by Suffolk County Executive Robert Gaffney, they are utilizing the same sleight-of-hand gimmicks to cover their inept fiscal management abilities.

The legislators, at a marathon session last week, applied their very own "omnibus package" approach which promises \$51.7 million in savings. That projection, however, is as weak as their logic. Critics of the action predict that \$34 million of the promised savings is highly questionable, seriously suspect, and, because state action would be needed and court action is sure to come, the predicted savings are, in the words of one dissenting legislator, a fraud.

After the budget fiasco of last year, the fervent hope was that the legislators would have learned a lesson, that they would have done their homework throughout this year to prevent a repeat performance. It didn't happen. They didn't prepare a plan of action, they didn't focus on waste in county government, in the legislature itself. They sat back and did nothing.

Until last week. Now they want to go down the same tired track they took last year. Two of their proposals

are shameful. They want to hit the county employees with another two-week lag payroll which, they claim, will "save" \$11.8 million. They're wrong. They're being dishonest, not only with their employees by putting the burden of fiscal mismanagement on their backs, but in trying to fool the public. The \$11.8 million is not a savings, it's merely a deferral. They will have to pay it later. They are simply delaying the inevitable.

And, their call for a "voluntary furlough" is another scam, another attempt to saddle the employees with an undeserved burden. Last year, because of the financial crisis, we supported the proposal of lag payroll and furloughs as a means of easing the immediate crisis. We don't support the proposals this year. The employees have done their part, the legislators haven't. It goes beyond the point of fairness to ask the county employees to bail out the lack of legislative action to resolve the financial problem.

It's time for the legislators to stop skirting the issue, to face reality. It's not easy to call for layoffs, but in these trying times it has become necessary. But layoffs focused on all levels, most especially the top political appointees where the salary levels are the highest. The time for deputies for the deputies,

and assistants for the assistant department head are over. The fluff must go. Political patronage payoff appointments must end.

Two other proposals, holding back \$5.2 million from the drinking water protection program funds earmarked for town use for capping and closing landfills, and transferring \$5.8 million in out-of-county tuition expenses into the towns' laps, are downright highway robbery. The county has no moral right to hold back revenues due to the towns or transfer a financial obligation for out-of-county community college tuition, which the county paid previously, back to the town taxpayers. That's not a savings for the taxpayers. That's not fiscal management. That's a shell game, blatantly dishonest, morally wrong.

There are many other projected savings in the legislative omnibus bill put forth by 11 legislators, six opposed and one abstained, that will go poof under careful scrutiny. The document which received approval is a sham, a shame, and a confession that the sponsors of this "solution" don't have the slightest ability to resolve the problem.

Keep tuned. The fur is about to fly!

And why not?

## Why doesn't workfare work here?

Welfare is an entitlement program that has been growing by leaps and bounds here in Suffolk County. It is one of those programs that politicians point to as an example of the cost of government being out of control.

The same rules and regulations that apply to Suffolk County apply to Westchester County, a suburban county that borders New York City. What is not known to many people is that New York State has a workfare program in which able-bodied individuals who are on welfare are required to work if they wish to continue to receive benefits.

In Westchester County, 55 percent of the people on welfare are engaged in workfare. In Suffolk County, only five percent participate. We were alarmed when we heard these comparisons, stunned to realize that better than half of the Westchester welfare recipients are being forced to participate in productive employment while 95 percent of those in Suffolk County are allowed to do nothing.

Why is it that Westchester has been so successful in implementing this program while Suffolk has not

even scratched the surface? We were told the primary difference between the two programs are the commissioners of welfare.

In Suffolk County, the welfare commissioner is Ruth Brandwein, a holdover from the Halpin administration who can't be replaced until her term of office, set by the state, expires. She claims to be an employee of the state rather than of the county. If her claim is true, why is Governor Mario Cuomo, who bragged about the New York State workfare program on television, allowing her to continue in of-

fice? If she is paid by the county of Suffolk, why not stop paying her if she is not doing her job?

Work has proven to be a great motivator in getting people off the dole when they find out they have to put in 40 hours just like everyone else. Some have been known to seek out better jobs than they are being forced to take under the workfare program.

Suffolk should start dealing with the mandates more effectively, instead of using them as a crutch for skyrocketing taxes.

And why not?



# Creating jobs: fact or fiction

The votes are tallied. The decision has been made. Governor Mario Cuomo's jobs bond act has been rejected by Suffolk County residents by a 23,459 vote plurality. The vote was 149,202 opposed vs. 125,743 in favor. The proposal, which would have added \$800 million to the debt service of the state, and another \$800 million in interest, was accompanied by optimistic, say it nicely, estimates of jobs it would create. Fortunately for taxpayers who would have borne the burden, voters didn't swallow these estimates.

The jobs situation here on Long Island is hardly rosy. Despite the job claim schemes offered by public officials and the claims of union officials

and others, the future is equally grim. There is little hope that a surge in new businesses and jobs will come our way until we resolve some very obvious problems.

Our area suffers with the highest electrical rates in the nation. These high rates are the motor for many other financial impacts. They are included in the taxes we pay to support our governments, county, towns, schools, villages, lighting, fire and other special districts. They impact on the energy costs for state facilities, courts, and public water. Suffolk County Water Authority Chairman Michael LoGrande recently noted that the water authority pays LILCO \$80,-

000 per day in electricity costs for its facilities and pumping operations. The impact of these high rates are reflected in the prices we pay, and the services we receive.

The sweetheart deal Governor Mario Cuomo signed with LILCO for the closing of the Shoreham nuclear power plant is going to drive these rates ever higher in years ahead. The Holtsville generating plant scheme now underway with the New York Power Authority is going to drive rates even higher despite the fact that the energy it will produce is not needed, according to Public Service Commission Chairman Peter Bradford. Just this past September Brad-

ford noted, "New York is in a surplus condition. Basic fuel prices on oil and natural gas have been very low over the last year. To talk of building a new plant at a time when the value of a kilowatt hour of electricity is low and the cost of the kilowatt hour is low is going to be a challenge."

The Holtsville facility is going to provide LILCO with power at a cost of 7.5 cents per kilowatt hour averaged out over the next 20 years. According to a NYPA (New York Power Authority) spokesperson, the \$150 million cost of the Holtsville plant, and another \$150 million in interest, will be added to the rate base. This future cost impact is highly questionable when you consider that NYPA and Cuomo killed the Hydro-Quebec Project which would have provided hydropower at 5.5 cents per kilowatt hour.

The cost of electricity, and the spending by our governments and school districts must be addressed if we are going to turn things around in this area. All the grandiose plans of development under the guise of economic benefit and job creation must be subject to careful scrutiny. The proposals to build baseball stadiums and cargoports are little more than job welfare programs. The "promised" job figures are pulled from midair. An example: The Calverton cargoport proposal includes a foreign trade zone modeled on the one at MacArthur Airport in Islip, launched in 1982. The Calverton trade zone, according to a recent report by the Long Island Regional Planning Board, envisions the creation of "11,580 permanent jobs and 4,215 indirect jobs." The Islip trade zone includes about 25 businesses, with, currently, approximately 400 employees. The Islip figures are reality. The Calverton figures are fantasy.

Hopefully, the defeat of the jobs bond act will put an end to the "get rich quickly with jobs" schemes that are being pushed our way. Hopefully, instead of trying to cure our real sickness with a sugarcoated pill, a placebo, we will concentrate on the real medicine that it will take to bring economic soundness back to our area. That includes, for a start, giving Long Island a fair share of the low cost power available in this state, low cost power for our schools, our governments, and our people.

Let's get on with it!  
And why not?

# Stifled in bureaucracy

If you wished to learn up-to-date statistics of the rate of breast cancer cases on Long Island, you could call the New York State Department of Health's cancer registry. But you wouldn't get an accurate figure. The state cancer registry is about four years behind in compiling such data.

If you called the Suffolk County Department of Health, you would strike out there as well. The county's health department doesn't concern itself with such information, yielding, instead, to the state health department.

This serious problem is stifled in bureaucracy.

In comparison, a group of very active, very dedicated, women in the West Islip area can tell you the somewhat alarming statistics about the rate of breast cancer in their small community. They know this information because they cared enough to survey their community to determine the extent of the problem. They know firsthand the human impact suffered by those who suffer this disease. They know because many of these women have breast cancer themselves. They want to know why so many of their friends have the disease. They want to find out if there is a common denominator, a link to the rate of breast cancer cases in their community. They are not concerned about themselves, the majority of women active in this cause are already victims. They are working to protect their children, their neighbors, friends, and you.

They have been successful in compiling valuable information because they are not stifled by bureaucracy. They reached out to the local hospital, they prepared a survey, and they reached out to this newspaper which published their survey. They and the hospital did a second mailing. And, they charted each return on a large map, an effort which clearly showed where clusters of breast cancer exist.

It boggles the mind to understand why the state health department's cancer registry is four years behind in compiling such statistics. It's not that such information is not readily avail-

able to them. By law all cases of diagnosed cancer must be reported to the registry. Health department spokespersons explain that there is insufficient staff to input this data on a timely basis. So it just sits there, piling up, performing no useful function. But we simply can't buy that excuse. In this day and age of computer technology, there is no excuse for being four years behind. Modem links to the state registry from reporting hospitals and computer forms which can be scanned into a data system are not dreams of the future, they are realities of today.

Assemblyman Robert Wertz, a member of the assembly's health committee, echoed these words in a recent letter to Mark Chassin, state health department commissioner. "To continue on our present course is sheer lunacy which puts the health of every New York resident at risk," Wertz declared, adding:

"I would like to see a state-wide cancer registry program run by the Department of Health. I would like to be able to know, at the touch of a computer key, exactly how many cases of cancer have been reported, when they were reported, where they were reported and if there is a history of cancer in the victim's family. We cannot continue to use a registry that is four or five years behind in its data."

Wertz vowed to introduce legislation to support such a cancer registry, promising to galvanize the Long Island delegation in Albany and actively fight to see that the registry becomes a reality. He urged Chassin, "Please see your way clear to do the responsible thing. The necessary thing. The right thing." To which we add: do the job or get out of the way and let someone else do it.

Having waited in vain for government to respond to the problem, the group of West Islip volunteers are ready to spread their efforts throughout the county. They encourage the creation of local groups which could combine efforts through a county-wide coalition. They envision local groups centered around hospitals throughout the county, working in partnership with the medical profession to seek a cause to the growing problem. A story concerning this effort appears elsewhere in this issue.

The breast cancer problem in Suffolk County must be elevated in priority, today, not tomorrow. If government won't provide the leadership to bring this to reality, the citizens will. The women in West Islip have set the example. It can be done, it must be done.

And why not?

# 'The nicest Christmas ever'

The annual Christmas activity of The Group is underway. The goal is to provide a meaningful Christmas for the children of parents who have fallen into dire circumstances beyond their control. They may have suffered from the loss of a job or business, or a catastrophic illness. As a result, youngsters will face a bleak Christmas, a time that should be filled with anticipation and joy. Our goal is to instill in those youngsters, and their parents, the realization that they are not alone, that someone really cares.

We would like to share with you a letter we received from one of last year's recipients:

"On behalf of my family, I would like to extend a very special thank you to your organization for making a Christmas dream come true. Knowing I was with the ranks of the unemployed and knowing I would not be able to give my

children a Christmas really made me feel depressed.

"However, a wonderful little 'elfette' came to my house with Christmas gifts and told me The Group was giving us a Christmas. It's nice to know in this day and age, with all the troubles in this world that we live in, that someone really cared.

"I would like to say thank you again for giving my children the nicest Christmas ever this year."

The motto of "The Group" is the old Irish saying, "There but for the grace of God go I." None of us ever know when we will be in need and someone will reach out to us. If you can make a contribution, please send it to The Group, PO Box 167, Riverhead, New York 11901.

And why not?



# Just another couple of nails . . .

The Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO) and the state Public Service Commission (PSC) hammered in a couple more nails in the economy of this area last week. In a double hit, the PSC granted LILCO a 4.1 percent increase in electric rates, and a 7.1 percent hike in natural gas rates. As a result, the highest electric rates in the nation went higher still.

As we noted last week, the region's high electric rates are the motor which drives taxes and costs upward in all areas. Elevating those rates, and boosting the gas rate as well, at this time, to give LILCO a \$100.2 million boost in revenues strikes us as a callous disregard for the economic welfare of our area and our people. Just this last July, an uproar developed over reports that LILCO experienced a 23 percent increase in profits for the second quarter of this year. That report brought a flurry of com-

ment, including one by Anne Mead, who heads the Citizens Advisory Panel established by court order in the wake of the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) suit against LILCO, that called for a review of the Shoreham settlement agreement that closed the nuclear facility. LILCO countered that the company "is operating with a negative cash flow" and nothing more was heard about the matter.

Richard Kessel, executive director of the Consumer Protection Board, termed LILCO's profits "excessive" at the time, and last week was recorded as saying: "LILCO did not need rate relief in 1993. Right now Long Island is mired in a terrible recession, and the last thing we need is another LILCO rate increase."

Hold the applause. Kessel's comments are somewhat humorous, because Kessel, and the PSC he lambastes, were part and parcel with Governor Mario

Cuomo in creating the deal which included the rate increases that have come since the deal, the one last week, and still others coming in the future. Kessel went on a road tour to promote the merits of the deal. The words he speaks are right—"...the last thing we need is another LILCO rate increase"—but coming from him they are meaningless and carry little weight.

The Shoreham deal called for 10 years of rate increases, guaranteed five percent each year for the first three years, and seven more years of targeted rate increases of about five percent. Those rate increases were wrong then and are wrong now. They are going to drive taxes up, businesses out, and ratepayers into poverty.

What hope do we have for the future? Very little. The people who made the decisions which led to the Shoreham fiasco are still making the same bad de-

isions. The latest example is the Holtsville generating plant currently under construction. PSC Commissioner Peter Bradford, in an interview this past September, reported "New York is in a surplus condition. Basic fuel prices on oil and natural gas have been very low over the last year. To talk of building a new plant at a time when the value of a kilowatt of electricity is low and the cost of the kilowatt hour is low is going to be a challenge." Bradford was talking about the possible conversion of Shoreham, not the construction of Holtsville. But shouldn't the same apply to that facility?

Apparently not. Holtsville is the product of a very bad projection by the Public Service Commission that 150 megawatts of power would be needed in 1994, and directed LILCO to go out to bid on a new generating facility. LILCO did, and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) won the right to build the plant.

Well, the power is not needed now, it won't be needed in 1994, it won't be needed until at least the year 2000, and perhaps further into the future. LILCO concedes it doesn't need the power. But based on the bad PSC projection, NYPA claims it would cost over \$100 million to cancel construction of the plant now. Considering the fact that the environmental impact statement (EIS) wasn't approved until this last August, and the permit granted by the DEC for Holtsville was not granted until September 1, we find that claim questionable. The same comments were made about Shoreham. They weren't true then, we doubt them now.

Why would NYPA spend two-thirds of the cost of a \$150 million plant before the EIS and permit approval. Did NYPA, a state agency, get an assurance, or quite possibly preferential treatment, from another state agency, the DEC, to build a plant ordered by still another state agency, the PSC, based on erroneous projections? Deja vu. All over again. We're heading down another Shoreham path, building plants we don't need which will drive rates even higher.

The rank and file public, for the most part, ignored the Shoreham fiasco until LILCO began to put into place the evacuation sirens. "What are those things?" people began to ask. When they found out one day the sirens might sound, and the public would be forced to leave their homes to flee for safety, the tide turned. The public got up in arms. And the death knell began to sound for Shoreham.

Well folks, the sirens are about to sound. This time you will be forced from your homes by rates you can't afford, rates motivated by the bad decisions being made today.

What have you learned from Shoreham? One important lesson should be that an aroused citizenry can, indeed, make a difference and turn things around. If you learned that lesson, the time for action is now. Contact your state representatives, demand that they get involved. Halt this madness until a sound energy plan for our future is prepared, investigate the claimed cancellation costs cited by NYPA, demand actual documentation and copies of contracts which prove the expenditures NYPA claims it made. Insist that nothing more be done until a comparison of the costs of Holtsville and a conversion of Shoreham are made. Look more closely at conservation to determine how our energy needs can be cut.

Show your interest now, or pay the price later.

And why not?

# Budget game scheduled

The members of the Suffolk County Legislature, known in some circles as the Suffolk County Deficits because of the way they play games with county tax dollars, are scheduled to tackle the 1993 budget tomorrow. It should be a beaut of a game.

The word is that County Executive Robert Gaffney is prepared to cut and slash the legislature's omnibus proposal which contains some actual savings, some imagined cost-cutting measures, and some transferred obligations from county to town. Gaffney is prepared, the word is, to veto many of the omnibus provisions, and it is questionable if the legislators have enough voting power to override.

Curiously, however, Gaffney has backed off one measure that he vowed to support. The legislators voted to transfer the cost of out-of-county community college tuition payments, which total \$5.8 million, onto the backs of the towns. They did the same thing last year and only one town, Shelter Island, actually paid the bill. The towns declare they

will not pay these charges, that they have been a county obligation in the past and should continue to be. And they're right. Gaffney initially agreed. The word now is, however, he will not veto this transfer of county obligation.

The county operates the community college which makes available a two-year college curriculum for county residents. If a Suffolk student chooses to attend another community college, Nassau Community College, for example, Suffolk County must pick up a part of that tab. The reasoning behind this requirement of state law escapes us, although we suspect it was designed to help students living in counties where community colleges did not exist. But if the county has its own college, and a student chooses an out-of-county school because the curriculum is better or the athletic program is stronger, that should be another matter.

A more sensible solution to this problem is to fight for an amendment to the law. Should the state pick up the tab if a student wants to attend Harvard or

Yale instead of a state college? Doesn't the privilege of choice carry the obligation of footing the bill? Why should the taxpayers be hit with the costs of college for those who do not wish to take advantage of the county's own facility, which is already costing the taxpayers a bundle?

Instead, county officials choose the easy way out. Just transfer the costs back to the towns. They had a year to push for state legislation eliminating this charge. They could have launched a legal effort to bring about change. They didn't. They complain and moan, and rightfully so, about the costs of mandates thrust upon them by other levels of government, and then do the same to the towns?

They're playing games again! Why don't we just buy them some uniforms and let them take the field in the baseball stadium they voted to build? Then, if we could find some unsuspecting county somewhere, we could trade them all.

And why not?

# On the threshold of change

The nation is on the threshold of change. The electorate has spoken. President-elect Bill Clinton will take over the reigns of government in two short months. We wish him well, for if he succeeds we all benefit.

While we have voiced reservations about the financial merits of economic programs which were a keynote of the Clinton campaign, we can only hope the many new faces, and the returning incumbents as well, in the new Congress will put partisan politics aside and work together for the benefit of the people rather than political gain.

A start toward that goal would be serious consideration for a balanced budget amendment and giving the new President line-item veto power. During our interviews with incumbents prior to the election, they voiced expressions of concern that giving the President line-item veto power would be offering him

"too much power." Without it, however, we will never weed out the wasteful thinking that leads to the expenditure of millions of dollars to study the amount of methane gas that belching cows release into the atmosphere. Our guess is that it is a lot less than the amount that is released in Congress on a daily basis.

Cutting into this wasteful pork barrel spending might not make a significant impact on our nation's deficit, but it is a start. The amount of waste that is rampant in Washington and throughout the federal system is staggering. The stories about the purchase of \$80 screwdrivers by our defense department, tools that can be purchased for under \$10 in the competitive market, are legendary. A cost-cutting panel which could tackle, no holds barred, the wasteful spending of tax dollars could do wonders for our federal budget.

We would hope the atmosphere of

change would also come to those returning to power in our state government, another headquarters of waste which has gone unchecked. If partisan politics could be put on the back burner, and legislators acted on the merits of proposals rather than their political origin, the state's finances could be steered back to the black from its ever-growing deficit.

We sincerely hope that the atmosphere for change continues strong where it began, in the ranks of the people where the debut of an Independent candidate, Ross Perot, caused a shock wave of concern in political circles. As long as that interest on the part of the public exists, there is hope that the changes we all seek, less wasteful spending, less politics and better government, are possible. The lesson we learned in Campaign 1992 is that the people who care can, and certainly should, have a stronger voice in their government.

And why not?



# Thanksgiving 1992: Offering thanks

The focus of attention during the past few months has been on the problems faced by our nation and its people. The economy is bad, unemployment figures are up, doom and gloom have reigned. Much of this has been caused by the rhetoric of politics which decrees one must dwell on the bad in order to make a case for change. While there is some bad, there is also much good. The glass may be half-empty for some, but it's half-full for others.

Our prayer on Thanksgiving Day 1992, is one of hope for the future. Hope that our economy brightens, that our governmental officials will be able to sort out the problems of health care and ensure that proper medical attention is available for all. Hope that there will be breakthroughs in research for the diseases that cause many to suffer, that life can become more meaningful for those who strive for better things.

Our thanksgiving prayer will also include words of humble thanks for all of those blessings which cause our glass to be half-full rather than half-empty. We offer thanks that while there is still much strife in the world, the threat of nuclear holocaust has been diminished. Our American troops are not stationed in foreign lands facing the threat of war. We offer thanks that for all the woes in our land, we have the blessing of living in a democracy where the change we seek is within reach, at the ballot box, where we can voice our approval or discontent with the leadership of our various levels of government. That a mood of political independence has taken hold in our land, with a growing number of people putting political labels aside in favor of strong stands on important issues. This offers a sign of health, a promise of change which can only give our democracy a transfusion of strength.

While we fully realize the problems and suffering experienced by many in our land, we prefer this Thanksgiving Day to dwell on the blessings we have enjoyed. To this end we have asked several members of Suffolk Life's family to share the blessings they will offer thanks for in their prayers of thanksgiving.

Lisa McPhillips of our news staff offers these words of thanks:

"Since 1992 was a rather tumultuous year for me, I learned to be very thankful for what most of us take for granted--the ones we love. Having spent over 10 months of this year with my husband working out-of-state, his return home just this week was an occasion for deep gratitude. You really don't know what you've got until it's gone. Thank you.

"My husband's absence, however, gave me the opportunity to spend time one-on-one with our daughter. I've discovered that besides being generous, loving and well-behaved, which I've always known, she is also very strong and supportive, admirable traits in anyone. She has become my best buddy during the last 10 months. Thank you.

"Although both of my parents were critically ill at different times during the past year, they have both recovered and are feeling well, and will be sharing the holidays with us. Thank you.

"And finally, the 'family' of friends who rallied to make sure I was OK on my own this past year are a group whose kindness I will never forget. Thank you."

Stefanie Gilheany, also a member of our news staff, includes these blessings for which she is thankful:

"Of all my many blessings, and I have

been especially blessed in my life with health, happiness and family, the one I most cherish is my marriage. I have truly found my soul mate in my husband--someone I can share every good and bad thing with.

"It isn't that we couldn't or don't exist without the other, but our whole is more than just a sum of its parts. I am loved for who I am, not what I do. And for that, I am grateful.

"God has blessed us with something extraordinary and neither of us take it for granted because we realize how rare it is. Nobody seems to say grace before meals much any more, but we do, at every meal at our table. We have too much to thank God for not to acknowledge His generosity.

"I am also grateful for the courage to have moved far from my home and start a new life in a completely strange place. From New Orleans to eastern Long Island is quite a distance, both in miles and atmosphere.

"My colleagues at Suffolk Life took me in and provided me with a second family. They try to shelter me from hurricanes and snow and they keep me company when my husband stands duty for the Coast Guard. They have invested themselves in my life even though I will be leaving soon enough. And for that, I am grateful.

"Lastly, I am grateful for my family back home and my husband's family who I have only recently gotten to know. Without these special people none of the rest of our blessings would have been possible. As satisfying as my life here is, it's good to know there's always someplace to return where I will be welcomed with open arms.

"For my husband, my family, my friends, I give thanks."

Reporter Mona Schultz reflects on her blessings:

"Looking back at this past year, I realize how much I have to be thankful for in my life. A glimmer of light was cast onto my family recently. My sister-in-law announced only a short month ago that she is going to have a baby, the start of the next generation of Schultzes. It will be so wonderful to finally have a little baby around, a fresh, new face with no major problems to contend with.

"My parents' recent health problems have been the major worries in my life, but finding out about the upcoming arrival of my little niece or nephew has given me a lot of hope for a healthy future for my family. Everytime a family member starts to get concerned or worried, I remind them about holding that little child in their arms and the nervousness seems to subside.

"A new life is always something to be thankful for, but I am also glad that I have my health so that I can remain strong in my family's time of need. My friends have supported me throughout my times of doubt about my future, professionally and personally, and I am thankful that they are part of my life."

One staff member summed up her views in a very positive way. "I offer thanks for all my blessings every day of my life," she observed. Amen!

We're also thankful for the Suffolk Life family which makes this publication possible, and for you, our readers, who make these efforts worthwhile.

Happy Thanksgiving.  
And why not?

## There but for the grace of God . . .

When The Group came into being years back, it was built on a foundation of thankfulness for the blessings of life enjoyed, and a desire to share with those less fortunate. Over the years that spirit has prevailed, and the number of those who have joined in this endeavor has swelled. The Group has been built on the philosophy of "There but for the grace of God go I."

The goal of The Group from the very beginning was to offer help and encouragement to those who have fallen on hard times through no fault of their own. People who have fallen through the cracks, without a helping hand being offered. They may have suffered a serious illness, the loss of a job, or were injured in a serious accident. Because of such a circumstance, their children would not share in the happiness of a bright Christmas holiday. There was no money for food, or clothes, or toys. They would not experience the joy enjoyed by more fortunate children.

It is the goal of The Group to bring happiness into these lives as witness to the fact they are not alone. That someone cares. It is our fervent hope that this helping hand will provide the boost that can help turn things around, to build on a happy experience with the determination and desire to make things better.

The front page article this week by Janine Giordano is a prime example of what we envision can be accomplished by the efforts of The Group and its growing number of members. It tells the story of a young couple and a small son whose life had hit bottom, and has now rebounded. A story of new hope and meaning.

Because of the current state of the economy, the number of families in need of assistance this year has grown. We have received many more requests for assistance than we have had in the past. Our resources will be stretched thin and we will be forced to restrict the assistance we can offer unless we can also experience an increase in the contributions to our cause.

Every dollar collected goes to help the families. With the help of generous retail merchants who offer discounts to make our dollars stretch further, and another who provides boxes, wrapping paper and bows, the contributions we receive are spent on the needs of children. After the family's need is verified, we receive personalized lists of the clothes needed, the toys they dream of. Shoppers go forth and con-

centrate on "their family," "their child," and each present is individually wrapped and labeled. The presents are delivered before Christmas to ensure the thrill of surprise and joy. The recipients only know they have been befriended by The Group, and the families are identified only by a letter of the alphabet. The members of The Group are anonymous, the recipients are unnamed. There is no embarrassment, no desire for credit, just the warm feeling on Christmas Day that you helped bring joy into someone's life.

We know we have a big mission this year. Last year we provided Christmas for over 150 children. Unless there is a real outpouring of donations, we are not going to be able to

come close to this number. The difference will be up to you. If you can take part in this community effort to help those who won't be able to help themselves this year, please do.

Many of you have responded to our previous appeals for help, and on behalf of those who benefit we offer our gratitude. If you haven't yet joined our effort, and would like to be part of this effort to reach out with a hand of support, we would welcome your participation. A contribution can be sent to The Group, PO Box 167, Riverhead, New York 11901.

Remember, "There but for the grace of God..."  
And why not?

**Dear Group:**

**Thank you for a wonderful, joyful and very happy Christmas.**

**We had so much fun watching all their faces. They took turns opening each gift (and there were plenty) one at a time, so we could really feel the excitement.**

**Everything you gave to them was needed and it all fit.**

**We all went to the store and they picked out their shoes. It really was a lovely time.**

**We had a delicious Christmas dinner, and more, with your gift.**

**All and all, with your love, concern and reaching out to others, may the Lord bless you and yours for being wonderful servants to your fellowman.**

