Helpful holiday gifts for older, impaired persons

Fidget quilts make great gifts for those who suffer from memory loss.

They often are restless and want “work” to do with their hands. Betty Jacobs made this quilt.

Vision loss

The Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss is located at 4505 West Superior St. in Duluth. If you are making a trip there, check out their low vision store that is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

Your visually-impaired friend might like a watch or clock that talks the time to them when a button is pressed.

Large-button television remote controls or large-button phones are great options.

Liquid level indicators can be placed in your coffee cup and set off a beep or vibrate when the cup is full so it won’t be overfilled. Other choices for the kitchen are measuring cups and spoons with large numbers that are easy to see.

Large print crossword puzzle books, bingo cards and wall calendars are appreciated.

Bold line markers can assist with writing a grocery or to-do list that’s easy to see.

If you can’t get to the vision store, keep in mind that adequate lighting is one tool that helps those with low vision.

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Hearing-impaired individuals

Cheryl Blue of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services of the Northeast Region suggests many adaptive devices that would make great gifts. While she doesn’t recommend any one vendor, most of these devices can be found online, or call 800-234-1322 for more information.

Also popular are TV sound boxes, with a little box that they can set next to their chair and adjust the volume of the television.

“Serene” two-way pagers are nice for communicating in a household. These come in handy for hearing impaired people and anyone who is caring for another household member.

Speech amplifiers can be used for those who are weak-voiced or reaching the end of life. This device projects their voice so a hard-of-hearing spouse or friend can communicate with them as the end of life nears.

Captioned telephones, computers, computer tablets or mobile phones are also very much appreciated.

Communicating during a visit

Another important gift to give a hearing-impaired senior is an in-person visit. These are some tips to make the visit go smoothly.

Turn off all background noise when you are trying to talk. Have only one person talk at a time – no background conversations. Maintain eye contact with the person. Repeat as needed. Express an idea in more than one fashion and try to carefully enunciate.

When talking with the hearing-impaired person, look right at them. Don’t look down or away. Try not to have food, candy or gum in your mouth. Don’t put your hands or a pencil or another object in front of your mouth. Trim your beard or mustache so your lips are visible. Keep the room well-lit but don’t stand in front of a lighted window as you will appear in silhouette.

Caregivers

While there are many and varied gifts to give the person suffering from Alzheimer’s at different stages, let’s focus on the caregivers for this article. Persons caring for loved ones with memory loss and other disabilities have an exhausting and challenging job just to get through each day.

Caregivers need the gift of listening. We at Aitkin County CARE know that caregivers need that and we do a lot of listening here. But you can be a listening ear to a caregiver who is homebound, tired and restless from routine caregiving chores and worn out mentally from absorbing the behavior of the care receiver.

Anything you can do to give the caregiver time to themselves is extremely valuable. Plan a shopping spree, tickets to a show, gift certificates to a spa, restaurant, clothing store or movie theater. Remember, whenever the caregiver leaves home, they will need to know that the care receiver is in safe hands. So, plan to offer the respite care yourself, by sitting with the care receiver so the caregiver can leave. Or pay to hire CARE or another agency to have a trained respite worker come into the home.

A box of stamped cards or envelopes is a big time-saver. Also welcome are care packages with necessities such as paper towels, dish soap, laundry detergent, toothpaste, etc.

Soothing music or relaxation tapes make a great gift. So do ready-made meals such as frozen hot dish.
Offer to drive the caregiver and care receiver to their appointments, or, if you feel comfortable and are able, arrange to stay overnight so the caregiver can take a vacation. Again, you can also offer to pay the fee for this respite service.

**Support groups for caregivers**

Encourage caregivers to attend support groups where they can talk to others who understand what is involved in caring for a person with memory loss.

Aitkin groups are held the first Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at the Birch Street Center, 20 3rd St. NE, Aitkin. Call 218-927-1383 for information.

McGregor groups are held the first Thursday of the month at 1 p.m. at the Angels Activity Center, 7 South Maddy St. in McGregor. Angels can be reached at 218-768-2762.

Do your best to demonstrate a giving spirit to your senior citizen friends and their caregivers this holiday season. Some gift ideas have been offered but if your budget is tight, a gift of your time and help with their chores may be just what the doctor ordered to lighten their load this season.

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1. Keep it Clean. Please avoid obscene, vulgar, lewd, racist or sexually-oriented language.

2. Don't Threaten or Abuse. Threats of harming another person will not be tolerated. AND PLEASE TURN OFF CAPS LOCK.

3. Be Truthful. Don't knowingly lie about anyone or anything.

4. Be Nice. No racism, sexism or any sort of -ism that is degrading to another person.

5. Be Proactive. Use the 'Report' link on each comment to let us know of abusive posts.

6. Share with Us. We'd love to hear eyewitness accounts, the history behind an article.

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