

## ***Xerox Holiday Party at Lambert House*** *(every year since 1980!)*



It was the week before Christmas, and all through Lambert House, the usual group of seniors and disabled adults is filled with the sense that something special is about to happen. A staff member wears a red and green crown reading, "I believe... North Pole, Alaska." A man and woman appear with an electric keyboard and sack of percussion instruments. Then, businessmen and women begin arriving, their white cuffs rolled up as they carry in steaming trays of turkey, pork, mashed potatoes, and pie. It is the day of the annual Lambert House Christmas party that the local Portland Xerox office has sponsored for 31 years.

Serving as emcee for the event, Xerox's Gordy Winterrowd welcomes everyone. "I've been involved with this event for the full 30 plus years," he shares. "Our employees look forward to serving and being with you. It is a good start to the season, a great way to get into the spirit, and creates a great feeling for all." As all Lambert House staff, volunteers, and participants are invited to sit and be served, it is clear that this event is about more than just a sense of doing good for the Xerox employees. It is about connecting with one another in a way they don't at the office - talking, laughing, serving one another, and providing a tangible touch of class to the plastic silver utensils and paper plates.

"Doing this yearly volunteering reminds me of the real spirit of the holidays," shares Steve Haines, the Xerox Community Involvement Committee chair who has been returning faithfully for the last 20 years. "We had a special lunch at the office on Monday to wrap gifts." Steve finds it easy to recruit volunteers from their small office when so many have been coming for decades. The longtime volunteers enjoy teasing newcomers.

"Last year was my first year," says Kirsten Drucker. "When we got here, they told me I was going to have to sing a solo!" A live "God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman" duet begins between keyboardist Fritz Weber and his wife Julie, on flute.

Fritz used to be Steve's piano teacher. When Steve asked him about providing entertainment at the event, the professional musician had the time and interest to pitch in. Fritz and Julie play jazzy renditions of traditional Christmas carols, which staff members coax participants to get up and dance to.

Then Xerox shifts gears to presents. All participants get a raffle ticket and they call off numbers until everyone is a winner. One elderly lady who was unmoved by the music and the meal sits smiling down at her colorful gift long after everyone else has opened theirs. And when the groups comes together to sing carols, even the more reluctant Xerox employees find the groove.

"I love your dedication, hugs, and love," Tiffany McKenna, Lambert House Program Director, tells Xerox employees in a group expression of gratitude.

Xerox and Volunteers of America Oregon's Adult Day Centers have a long history together. Gordy sold a copier at the Velma Joy Burnie center before it became an adult day center; Steve was there when the adult day centers moved from the Velma Joy Burnie Center to Lambert House on the edge of Gresham, and both companies have survived downsizing. But history shows that despite it all, this holiday tradition will continue to thrive.

*By Nancy Loso & Celeste Munden*

