

CHRISTMAS

Guilt-free giving on the rise

Katie Snell, a teacher in London, Ont., dreaded the long lines and crowds of last minute Christmas shoppers. So instead of plodding to the mall this year, she helped feed an impoverished family for a friend.

"Through Heifer International, I was able to buy one-dozen chicks in my friend's name for a family in a developing country who will raise them to produce food and make money," said Snell.

Charitable gifts are becoming a popular alternative with many online catalogues and donation suggestions to choose from.

"Because we find ourselves feeling materially saturated this time of year, charitable giving provides us with an opportunity to give something that won't accumulate in our inventories," said Russell Belk, a professor of Marketing at The Schulich School of Business at York University. He said guilt associated with over-consumption also plagues many of us during the holidays and charitable-gift catalogues present us with an opportunity to relieve some of that guilt and feel a sense of altruism.

"Now the meaning of giving can extend beyond immediate family and friends and involve giving to others as well," said Marc Kielburger, famed child rights advocate and co-author of the best-selling book "Me to We: Finding Meaning in a Material World."

"When you give a goat to a family in a rural area of Kenya, for example, you can help break the cycle of poverty for a child. The goat will



help generate income for the family which may then allow the child the opportunity to go to school."

A quick Google search turns up many holiday gift ideas that give back to Canadian and international charities and development organizations. Plan Canada's Gifts of Hope program offers gifts ranging in price from \$15 to \$2,000 and includes school supplies, tree seedlings, clean water systems, library books, immunization programs, cows, pigs and goats.

"Last year this program alone raised \$2 million and we hope to double that this year," said Steve Theobald from Plan Canada's head office

in Toronto. "It not only feels really good to give a gift that's so worthwhile but you also get a tax receipt for the gifts purchased."

If you want to buy a meaningful present but still give the recipient the opportunity to unwrap something under the tree, the WWF Canada's Adopt an Animal Program might be your preference. For \$40 you can symbolically adopt one of 10 endangered species and receive an adorable plush animal and a personalized adoption certificate all wrapped up in a reusable gift bag.

And, unlike most toys you'll buy, the proceeds support WWF's ongoing conservation work.

For those who want their gift to have a local impact, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation's Shop Pink campaign partners with a number of Canadian manufacturers and retailers. Look for the little pink ribbon on KitchenAid blenders and mixers, The Running Room fleece jackets and athletic gear, Rose Reisman healthy living cookbooks and Wilson golf balls and know that your gift is funding breast cancer research and education programs throughout the country.

"Christmas isn't the only time of year we should think about others in need," said Snell. "But it's really a perfect opportunity to get our friends and family involved in doing good."

For further information on registered Canadian charities and gift ideas visit charityvillage.com.

— Hailey Eisen, for 24 hours

need to know

SHOPPING IDEAS...

- It is becoming much easier to shop with a conscience with fair-trade coffee and food products, sustainable clothing lines, and empowering books all available in stores across Canada. "You can buy socially responsible, sweatshop-free, certified organic cotton and bamboo, fair-trade T-shirts and stylish clothing from metowestyle.com," said Kielburger.

- You can choose to shop at your local Ten Thousand Villages store, a not-for-profit, Fair Trade Organization that sells handcrafted accessories, jewelry, home decor and clothing from around the world.

- For an original stocking-stuffer idea, consider a Putumayo Christmas Around the World CD from putumayo.com. This feel-good album features talented global musicians and gives a portion of all proceeds to the non-profit Putumayo Cross-Cultural Initiative.

- You can give the gift of carbon offsets and help your loved ones give something back to the planet. For \$75 from cleanairpass.com, you can buy five-tons of carbon offsets. That's enough to cover the operation of your car for an entire year! Buying a CleanAirPass allows you to invest in sustainable projects such as tree planting and methane capture.

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