

## **Ashland Shows Holiday Spirit** **By John Petrin, Town Manager**

I write this article smack dab in the middle of the holiday season. You will get to read this article at the conclusion of that season. At this point in time, I can safely report that Ashlanders have found the holiday spirit well and thriving. Preparations have been ongoing for some time. It all started with the Sha'arei Shalom celebrating Chanukah with menorah lighting. This was followed a couple of days later with the jolly guy in red arriving for the Holiday Lighting Celebration on Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup>. He was in great spirit and arrived to a large group of kids and big kids. I tried to get in line to tell Santa my wish list but was informed by my wife that there was no weight limit for Santa but there was one for kids sitting on Santa's lap. Out of deference to Santa's health, I reluctantly stepped out of line. If I could have stayed in line, I probably would have mentioned State Aid and the hope that the economy is getting stronger as my monetary wishes. As to the spiritual, I probably would have given thanks for the good will in Town and that people maintain their spirit as we enter the new year.

Thanks to all those involved in putting these events together. There is always a lot of preparation that goes into an undertaking of this nature. The decorations in Montenegro Square warm the spirits during the season. I am sure that Benny and Betty Montenegro appreciate it as they make their ritual appearances downtown.

As always, the Ashland Day Committee coordinated and got the various folks together to make the event a great success. Bill Gath once again used his gift of gab to keep the audience entertained while waiting for Santa Claus with the able assistance of Jack LeDuc. Thanks to the Ashland Business Association, Police Association, Fire Department/Association and the Fire Explorers for their support. The hot chocolate is always appreciated by all that time of year.

There are many other events that are taking place celebrating the season. Parents are attending holiday concerts and seniors the annual holiday dinner at the VFW. The Ashland Coalition for teens held their second event with a dance at the Ashland Federated Church. Thank you to all those people who truly care to put their time to organizing great events such as this for our kids.

According to Youth and Family Services Director Cara Tirrell, they processed over 100 applications for Thanksgiving meals and applications for meals and gifts for the Christmas/Hanukkah holiday season. In order to ensure that these families had a proper holiday season, a dedicated group of people went into action. There is no way that I can list everyone who helps to make this happen. The list begins with the volunteers who come to sort all the donations and prepare the baskets as well as make sure they are distributed. At this time of year, the Community Center's open area downstairs becomes a warehouse.

In order to have the food and gifts available, families and individuals adopt and give clothes and toys for families. In addition, we receive donations of gift cards, clothes, toys, stocking stuffers, \$ and food from various local schools, churches, individuals, town employees, and local groups. This ensures that every child that asked for something specific gets it. Commendations to Cara Tirrell, Tammy Griffin and the large number of volunteers who make this program such a success.

The food pantry was nearly dry back in October. The shelves were bare and the volunteers were wondering how they were going to fill the next food orders. The Ashland Emergency Fund came through with some emergency funding to purchase food to hold us over until the machine went to work. The machine, Ashland residents, kicked into action. Food drives by the Scouts, Post Office, churches and schools brought in an unbelievable amount of food. Thanks to all for heeding the call for action. The shelves are now overflowing.

It was good to see over 500 people at the start of the Special Town Meeting on November 29. The crowd tickled down to about 100 by the end of the meeting. Our typical crowd for special town meetings has been under 100. Hopefully we get this average to increase with time.

The Town is in its 4th year of implementing the exemption for seniors who own their property that they live in referred to as the Clause 41 C ½. We are only 1 of 2 communities to adopt this provision to help our

senior citizens. In order to be eligible, the applicant must prove he or she was 65 years old as of July 1, 2010 and earned less than \$48,000 in calendar year 2009. There are also minimum standards for how long you have lived in Massachusetts. The deadline for filing for this new exemption is February 1, 2011. Please contact the Assessors at 508-881-0100 X. 631 for further information.

Please remember the Food Pantry for donations of food and household goods. Donations can be made by dropping off items at public buildings such as the Post Office. Your consideration is appreciated. Please also consider a financial donation to **The Ashland Emergency Fund**, at P.O. Box 112, Ashland, MA 01721. The Fund supports residents in need and the Food Pantry.

To follow what is happening in your community, follow the events and happenings in the MetroWest Daily News and WACA-TV as they provide superb coverage. Our website at [www.AshlandMass.com](http://www.AshlandMass.com) has been recently revamped. There is much information on the site for you to peruse. We are the recipient of the Common Cause Massachusetts 2010 e-Government Award with Distinction for our website. We are proud recipients of their highest award.