

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Make 'em smile!

Make 'em laugh. Make 'em smile. Maybe make it a Merry Christmas, or a Happy Hanukkah, or a happy whatever you like to celebrate.

When you woke up to start your day, when you looked in the mirror, and checked your face, you probably took it for granted that everything you saw was where it is supposed to be, and then headed out the door to greet the world.

Instinctively, we smile as we meet each other. We smile as we greet each other. When we wish each other a Merry Christmas, regardless of what religion we're brought up in, we instinctively smile at each other. It's just something that we don't really think about.

Throughout the day, our warmth, our attitude and our basic communications all center on the ability to smile at each other. When I mention wishing someone a Merry Christmas, I have to deal with the concept that we have become so politically correct that we hesitate to wish each other any particular holiday greeting. I think we've overdone it.

Most of my Jewish friends understand that if I wish a Merry Christmas, I'm offering friendship, warmth and a wonderful holiday season. They aren't offended by it, anymore than I am if someone wishes me a Happy Hanukkah.

I think we need to stop dancing around the obvious. We are at a time when our society should accept each citizen's diverse thoughts, fears and especially particular variations of faith. I hope that we can soon overcome our collective denial, and just get back to basics. Whatever the greeting, the intent is to make 'em smile.

I really like the recent trend that I've heard about, and which some members of my family have started to discuss in earnest. My wife has a small group of friends who decided that they will forgo gift giving in exchange for a collective donation to help someone or some group of people who are in need. That really sounds like the greatest gift of all.

Don't get me wrong, I enjoy the excitement of opening up a gift. But the thought that someone may have changed someone else's life for the better, with the money that they would have used to buy me a gift, brings about overwhelming warmth that no beautifully wrapped package could ever approach.

I've heard that Dr. Vito Quatela has traveled to help fix the smiles of Third World babies and young children. He has

donated his time and the talents he was given by God, or fate, or by whatever you deem to be the origin of our individual innate abilities. He has gone to find babies who have serious cleft palates and in many cases severe hare-lip deformities. He makes 'em smile, when they never really could before.

For any of you who've ever been victimized by bullies, or love someone who has been victimized, just imagine how exponentially compounded their suffering would be if they had a serious facial deformity. If they couldn't really smile. If they couldn't really laugh.

Maybe this year we should all consider forgoing just one or two gifts, and send someone the gift of smiles, the gift of new life. I realize we can't all have the skills of Dr. Quatela or the numerous other doctors who donate their time, talents and efforts to help others whom they've never even met.

We decided this year to help at least one more young soul, someone who has not been given a childhood filled with good fortune and advantages that so many of us fortunate ones have been blessed with.

For purposes of full disclosure, I'll remind you that I wrote a column early last year, where I discussed the fact that I had been through two surgeries as a baby, and that Dr. Warren George was a saintly human being who fixed my cleft palette when the supposedly top doctors in New York City had told my parents that I would never talk. That basically there was no hope for a surgical fix to a seriously difficult problem.

So it's easy for me to say that I really appreciate the efforts of Dr. Quatela, and the many other wonderful doctors who donate their time to help facially deformed babies throughout the world. If you happen to see him, tell him I said "hello" and more importantly, tell him that I said thank you. He has no idea that I'm writing about him.

You also may want to check out a charity simply called "Smile-Train." For only \$250 you can pay for the cost of a complete cleft surgery. Talk about changing a life! Talk about making a difference in the world! Count me in.

I don't know a great deal about SmileTrain (www.smiletrain.org), and I have nothing to do with that group, but I have seen many people I greatly respect, such as Warren Buffett, endorse the group enthusiastically. I trust them enough to support them again this year.

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By **ROBERT L. BRENN JR.**

Daily Record
Columnist

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Continued ...

If the time I've spent over the past few years writing the columns you have been kind enough to read, has done nothing else other than inspire you and hopefully a few others to consider sending something — even 25 bucks — to help change the life of a fellow human being, to give them opportunities to contribute to the world, and to end the pain they feel on a daily basis, it's all been worth it.

One or two less packages under the tree, one or two people agreeing to give a gift in each other's name, or to collectively give a gift that makes a difference, is really all it takes.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season regardless of your religion or lack of religion, and I hope you will allow me to wish you a Merry Christmas — in the spirit with which it is given to you all.

And remember, make 'em smile

Robert L. Brenna Jr. is a partner in the Rochester law firm of Brenna, Brenna & Boyce PLLC, which his father founded. He is the past president of the New York State Academy of Trial Lawyers and hosts a Sunday morning radio program, "The Brenna & Brenna Law Forum," on WHAM 1180 AM at 8 a.m., online at www.wham1180.com.