



By Dan Howard  
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

*Christmas is a wondrous and joyous time of year. It's a time of giving, caring and sharing. That time of beauty is also a time of fires, carbon monoxide poisonings, falls and other tragedies in homes.*

These stories are sad any time of year, but particularly during the time that is supposed to be a celebration of joy. Many times a few timely gifts like smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, proper extension cords or a service call for a furnace could make the difference between life and death, or inconvenience and homelessness.

Sometimes it's a senior, sometimes a financially struggling family, other times it is a person with health challenges. It is those people who have the toughest time recognizing what they need to do or buy to keep themselves and their homes safe. What better gift to give than one that could save the life of someone you love?

Writing this article reminds me about what my dad did during winter weather. When all of the kids came over for dinner on Sundays, he would disappear for about 15 minutes. He would sneak outside with rags and a bucket of windshield washer

liquid. He cleaned all of our windshields and headlights. He quietly came back in when he was done. We usually didn't even know a thing about it until we went to our cars. Never, ever did we ever talk about it. The message was simple, and we all knew that he loved us. That is exactly the kind of gift I am suggesting here.

Giving new smoke detectors, or even changing the batteries in existing smoke detectors is easy to do and inexpensive. Even 15 seconds of warning about a fire can be the difference in survival. If the "change the battery" idea sounds strange to you, imagine the senior that can't climb a ladder or the young family that used all of their batteries for their children's toys. Getting up to a smoke detector to change the battery could be as far as the moon for a senior that had a broken hip.

Carbon monoxide detectors are as important as smoke detectors. Purchase carbon monoxide detectors that have both a digital readout and a loud alarm. The "sound only" CO detectors have a delay that allows levels in some models as high as 400 PPM (parts per million) without making a peep. The threshold level that is considered unsafe is 10 PPM. The digital readout allows earlier warnings and is well worth the difference in

cost. Make sure the detectors are installed near gas appliances or warm air furnace vents and where the residents can see the reading.

There will be many tragic news stories over the holidays that have their start with a furnace that was defective or not working at all. People freezing or ill from a malfunctioning furnace is one set of problems. Carbon monoxide poisoning or fires can be another outcome.

Having a furnace serviced and the needed repairs completed for someone in need can be a very loving gift. A service call where the furnace operation and vent system are checked and adjusted usually costs between \$75 and \$150. It is a great idea to make sure that the gas lines or oil lines and tanks are checked at the same time.



Taking the time to help someone apply of LIHEAP fuel assistance could be a gift of an hour's time that makes winter bearable for someone in need. This can be done online at [www.dhs.pa.gov](http://www.dhs.pa.gov).

There are a number of things to check in



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Stephanie Oswald



Jon Doerr



Marilyn Stahl & Joyce Hutterer



Brenda Berger



*N. Buffalo Township*



*Saxonsburg Borough*



*Buffalo Township*



*Leechburg Borough*



*Lower Burrell*



*New Kensington*

Charming 2 story cape cod minutes from Rt 28. Interior walls redone w/beautiful plaster work in 02'. 2 Full baths, & newer electric heat pump w/internet thermostat, phone app can control it from anywhere. Formal dining room & 1st floor laundry. Home is all electric, only 1 utility bill. There is also a detached garage/workshop.

Stephanie Oswald  
\$115,900

724.996.6139  
MLS#1086529

This home offers an open floor plan. MBR features 2 WICs & full bath w/separate tub & shower. 2nd BR has full bath & 13x8 sitting area. 3rd BR has large closet. Heated breezeway w/2 skylights & French doors on either side. A heated 22x15 storage rm between breezeway & oversized heated gar. Cov. front porch, large patio on back. Level lot on country setting yet close conveniences!

Jon Doerr  
\$184,900

724.816.2386  
MLS#1085762

Build your DREAM HOME in THE OAKS! Photo is representation of home that can be built by custom home builder M.A. Gasbarro. 3 Car att gar, 1st flr MBR, custom kit w/granite counters, crown molding, recessed lighting, 9' ceilings on 1st flr & so much more! Bonus rm above gar will be finished to be used as 4th BR or extra GR. Fantastic flr plan w/all the amenities! Plenty of time to make all selections!

Hutterer/Stahl  
\$449,900

724.996.2647  
MLS#1075933

Extremely well maintained home. All brick exterior with park-like backyard with pond. Open floor plan with kitchen island. Large finished game room. Large master bedroom with walk-in closets and bath. Jedco built home. Addition has heated floor overlooking private fenced in yard.

Hutterer/Stahl  
\$159,900

724.996.2647  
MLS#1065926

Brick ranch features gorgeous, updated ELK w/new appliances, spacious formal DR, LR w/sliders to oversized cov deck & gleaming HW floors! LL offers GR, full bath, work shop, & tons of storage space! Privacy tree lined backyard, manicured landscaping & storage shed for all your equipment! Updates include new electric panel 15', roof 13', furnace & AC 10'.

Brenda Berger  
\$169,900

724.996.6139  
MLS#1067098

Move Right In! This 2 bedroom home offers a spacious living room and formal dining room, both bedrooms have large closets, the covered deck overlooks the tree lined back yard, and the lower level can easily be converted to a family/ game room with tons of storage space!

Brenda Berger  
\$69,900

724.996.6139  
MLS#1081205

a home when someone is using supplemental heaters to try to stay warm. Check the heaters themselves for evidence of wear, fraying or burning. If there is any damage to the heater, it needs replaced.

Check the area where the heater is located. Make sure there is a safe distance to combustible materials and surfaces. Oil filled heaters are generally safer than those with exposed elements.

Giving heavy duty electrical extension cords and checking that they are plugged into outlets designed to carry the load can save lives. Too many people fall victim to the logic that the cord that did not burn the last time they used it, will be safe the next time. That's just not how that works. Go to a quality hardware store and purchase cords that are rated at 14-2 for 15 amp circuits or 12-2 for 20 amp circuits.

If there is a fireplace or wood burner in use, have the chimney checked. The high temperatures of burning wood and then cooling off can damage the chimney. Wood leaves a flammable creosote coating that can ignite and start a house fire. The cost of cleaning and

checking a chimney is typically between \$150.00 and \$200.00. That is a wonderful gift for a family you care about. Check with the National Chimney Sweep Guild ([www.ncsg.org](http://www.ncsg.org)) to find a qualified technician.

The issues of home health and safety can become more complicated than these examples. Just as parents, family and friends can help with the other important issues mentioned, a significant portion of Sick Building Syndrome work is arranged by caring family members rather than the residents of the sick or moldy building.

Picture the family with asthmatic children, or the senior that has pneumonia four times in a year. These and hundreds of other health issues are often the result of environmental problems that need corrected. Caring relatives or friends can arrange for the needed assessment and testing.

The big problem with this issue is finding qualified professionals working with accurate laboratories. A recent development is helping bring dependable environmental testing across the country. Testall.com is a source to find the right person serving where your family member lives.



The Christmas season is the time of year we give the very best. Taking the time to notice what someone you love really needs is about as good as the joy of gift giving gets. I can clean my own windshield and lights, but do miss my dad being there and sneaking out to do it, just because he cared.

Dan Howard is the owner of EnviroSpect. For environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. For more information visit their website at [www.EnviroSpect.info](http://www.EnviroSpect.info) Email questions to: [Dan@EnviroSpectofWesternPA.com](mailto:Dan@EnviroSpectofWesternPA.com). Like us on Facebook or connect @DanHoward251. For more information and additional links go to [www.envirospect.info/ChristmasGifts](http://www.envirospect.info/ChristmasGifts).

# Prune and protect your roses

By Dave Vargo  
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

If the lawn is looking a little shaggy, mow it one last time. Keeping the grass as short as possible going into winter will help prevent snow mold. Mowing will also remove any leaves from the lawn so as not to smother the grass through the winter.

Roses can also be cut back this weekend. Cut regular rose bushes back to 18 to 24 inches, and cut climbing roses back to 36 to 42 inches. Remove all but 3 to 5 of the healthiest canes. Leaving too many canes will make for smaller roses next season. Secure climbing rose canes so they do not whip in the wind.

Remove any litter such as decaying rose leaves and petals. These are places where rose disease spore can overwinter. Once debris has been removed, apply mulch around the base of the plant. Be sure to cover several inches up the stem as this will protect the graft. The pile of mulch should be at least 12 to 18 inches across the top to protect the graft from freezing.

Take a walk around the yard with pruners in hand and remove any wild, misshapen or broken branches. Branches that are blocking walkways should also be removed.

Any shrubs that are susceptible to splitting due to heavy snow fall should be secured with twine or fishing line to prevent damaging from occurring.

Prune landscape roses such as Knock Out's or Oso Easy Roses. First remove any dead or broken branches, then prune to



shape. If bushes seem too thick, remove some of the inner branches.

Continue to keep deer repellents fresh on shrubs. The sooner you can break their habit from feeding on your shrubs the better.

Grass seed can still be planted. If it doesn't come up this fall it will come up next spring. We may have a run of warm days

this winter and it may germinate then. Grass seed won't freeze. It's better to sow now than to wait until spring. If we have a warm, wet spring you may not be able to prepare the soil for planting.

Give that lawn an extra fertilizing. Even though the top may not be growing the roots are still actively growing. Apply a fall fertilizer such as Espoma Organic Lawn Food. It will be available to the grass now, and what the grass doesn't use will be available next spring.

Dave Vargo is the owner of Arnold Feed & Garden Center 724-335-1821 and Kiski Plaza Garden & Feed Center 724-845-8201. Any questions, call or email [dvargokiski@comcast.net](mailto:dvargokiski@comcast.net).

**GARDEN TIP:** Prepare a section of the vegetable garden now for the early planting of lettuce, onions, spinach and broccoli. Come spring you will be glad you did.



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New Listing!



Armstrong/Shelocta

12x46 mobile home with similar size frame add on, interior has been stripped down and needs to be completed to suit potential buyer. Well and septic on site, great country setting. Low traffic area minutes from the town of Indiana.

\$34,900

ML#1026633 \$104,900

New Listing!



Bell-Twp.

Well maintained 3 bedroom brick house with small town atmosphere. 2 car detached garage with nice yard and large deck. Newer remodeled kitchen. House has built in laundry shoot and solid floors. Many inclusions.

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Worthington

Charming, bright clean and updated are just a few adjectives describing this classic cape cod home. Numerous updates including windows, roof, and exterior paint, kitchen and bath makeovers, flooring and decking. This "little" home isn't so little when you see in person the interior living space it offers. A detached garage and level yard add to the appeal of this fabulous home.

ML#1026263 \$147,000

ML#1071550 \$174,900



Brian McIntyre



Gretchen Snyder & Kelly Bowers



Walter Elash



Jim Libengood



Chris Small



Julia Schaffer



Greg Tox & Jack



Boretta



Traci Slagle



East-Franklin-Twp.

Well appointed, two bedroom with two baths, one story easy living, ready to move in, large private deck with seasonal awning. Breakfast area in kitchen area, extra finished den or family room.



Rayburn-Twp.

If space is what you are looking for you could turn this distinctive home into a beautiful investment. It is a 3 bedroom farmhouse that is surrounded inside & out with timeless character. This home needs someone to restore it to its original beauty. Gorgeous decorative fireplaces throughout. Spacious rooms, open kitchen with built in cabinets. Sits on 8.2 acres!!



Ford City-Boro

If you are looking for a well kept 3 bedroom home in town with a detached garage you need to check this house out!! Many updates include newer roof, boiler system, hot water tank paint and a garage. Inside flooring has been totally redone to really accent all this home has to offer. Fenced in yard for little ones or pets.

ML#1061715 \$79,900

ML#1071679 \$199,900

ML#1055145