

Holy Cow



Give the gift of livestock this Christmas

Don't have a cow? How about a goat, a llama or a water buffalo? While these might not be ideal gifts for your typical urbanite or suburbanite, in some parts of the world these animals can lift a family out of poverty.

At www.heifer.org, the website of Heifer International, you can buy livestock and plants for needy families around the world.



KEVIN O'NEILL

InSites

The site's gift catalog features a variety of farm animals in different price ranges. You can buy a cow for \$500, or just a share of a cow for \$50. A flock of chicks will cost you \$20, while a hive of honeybees goes for \$30. Buy a tree for \$60, or a complete garden kit for \$170. If you're feeling especially generous you can buy the Gift Ark for \$5,000. It consists of 15 pairs of animals, such as cows, camels, or sheep, that you can give to different families all over the world, including the U.S.

Sustainable gifts

The premise behind Heifer International is based on the adage, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach him to fish, you feed him for life." The charity delivers an animal to a family in need and provides training so they can properly care for it.

A dairy cow will provide enough nutritious milk for a family to feed its children and sell the excess to earn money. The family agrees to give any of the animal's offspring to a neighbor to perpetuate the cycle. Heifer refers to this as "Passing on the Gift." Over time, families, and eventually entire villages, are able to take care of and educate their children, increasing the odds that they can escape poverty.

You can buy livestock in your

Pennsylvania charities

Here's some local charities you can donate to this season:

United Way of Lackawanna and Wayne Counties

www.uwlc.net

Mission is to improve the quality of life in Lackawanna and Wayne Counties.

Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture)

www.pennfuture.org

Works to create a just future where nature, communities and the economy thrive.

Griffin Pond Animal Shelter

www.griffinpondanimalshelter.com

Provides shelter for homeless, unwanted, and abused animals.

own name, or you can give it in someone else's name, in essence giving two gifts for the price of one. Heifer will send a card to the person you designate, informing him or her of the gift given in the person's name. You can also form or join a team that can combine efforts to raise more money for the charity. The site has a section with team-building information and tips for fundraising activities.

In addition to the livestock program, the organization has several educational programs you can learn about on the website. These include several centers around the U.S. where people can learn more about the charity's poverty programs. There are youth programs to educate kids about the causes and challenges of hunger and poverty. Adult programs run the gamut from learning about the charity's model, to learning agricultural skills, to visiting Heifer projects around the world to see their impact.

The site also has resources for schools and colleges to educate students about hunger and poverty, and, of course, to give them an opportunity to raise funds for the charity. There are educational kids' games online, and sections

where individuals, groups or congregations can volunteer their time or money to help.

The website is well designed and organized, with tons of content. It appears to be the work of an organization with significant resources. There may be too much content for those who just want to give a gift. The seven section tabs across the top of the page all have submenus with multiple sections in each. Clicking on any of the submenu links brings you to pages with synopses of the subjects. Each of these in turn has links to take you to pages with even more information. It seems like it never ends.

Robust site

There are, of course, the requisite links to its Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blog sites. There are downloadable media kits, links to corporate sponsors and information on their institutional donors. The curiously named "Inside Heifer" section has loads of information on the organization's mission, board of directors, partners and much more. It even has an online magazine called "World Ark" and a quarterly newsletter. All of it is written about in great detail and interspersed with more links, photos and videos.

It's probably a good thing for an organization that's asking you for money to have so much information about itself readily available. The site also has downloadable annual reports and IRS information. The website Charity Navigator, which claims to be an unbiased evaluator of charities, gives Heifer International three out of four stars.

The organization's concept of giving resources that are enduring is a good one. Plus, how cool is it to give someone a cow for Christmas?

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.