

Gifts That Last All Year

by Lisa S. Beane

This holiday season plan to give gift memberships and subscriptions that last all year long. Museum memberships not only provide top experiences throughout the year, they encourage time spent together, avoid post-holiday letdown and create lasting good memories, plus they help support local cultural institutions.

Today's memberships are value-packed. Besides free admission, many include discounts on parking, dining, bookstores, gift shopping, films and concerts.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, the new American wing showcases Boston's illustrious history in such an elegant fashion, your gift membership will inspire friends and loved ones to stroll there on many a snowy afternoon this winter. MFA memberships include *Preview* magazine, with information on concerts and lectures. That is a gift in itself. They will always have something positive to look forward to and enjoy.

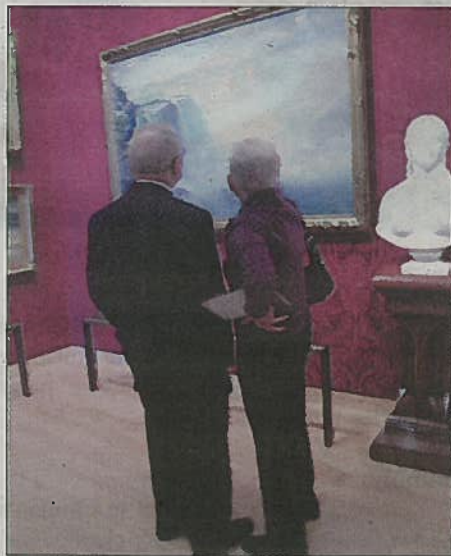
At the Museum of Science, a membership includes free or discounted admission to more than 400 science centers, museums, zoos and aquariums around the world. Its present exhibit on reptiles brings some of the world's strangest creatures to Boston.

House museums offer a fascinating way for today's families to understand local history by relating to families who lived here in the past. At the Nichols House Museum on Beacon Hill and the Gibson House Museum in the Back Bay, gift memberships include free admission and a newsletter with a calendar of events and lectures. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum may be one of the most elaborate house museums of all. This favorite Fenway palace has gift memberships with tasty perks, like free dessert in its café on your birthday. All three museums are decorated for the holidays.

Gift memberships are easy to give. You can subscribe on websites. At the Boston Symphony Orchestra's website, you can purchase a new digital music subscription for a year or a grand gift package. These are

quality gifts that will be appreciated all year.

What do you value and would like to share with others? Perhaps a gift membership to an organization would be the perfect idea. Memberships in the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay or Beacon Hill Village would make great gifts. And the South End Historical Society has a new South End History Calendar for 2011 that would make a great gift paired with its membership. This gift will give a sense of belonging.



Visiting the new wing at the Museum of Fine Arts

Magazine subscriptions, like memberships, are also value-packed. Paced to be enjoyed all year long, a gift subscription to *Smithsonian* magazine comes with a free membership to the Smithsonian Institution and a gift umbrella. *Art New England* keeps people informed about the vibrant contemporary art communities, schools and museums in New England. *Writer's Digest* teaches writing and even has contests.

Although they may not initially be the "oh, wow" gifts that light up people's eyes, these are the kind of quiet quality gifts that over the course of a year are a more thoughtful way to say "I love you, am staying in touch and want the best for you."

'Tis the Season To Do Good

Here are some local charities that could use your help this holiday season.

Pru Events

The Shops at the Prudential Center are collecting toys through Monday, December 20 to benefit the Action for Boston Community Development Early Head Start Program. New and unwrapped toys, books and clothing may be dropped off at the customer service desk during business hours. Another charitable effort at the Pru is a Giving Tree to benefit Room to Grow. Choose a child from the tree at the customer service desk and fulfill a holiday wish and need. Through Friday, December 24 the Pru is also offering free gift-wrapping, with donations benefiting local organizations, in the Huntington Arcade. For more information visit prudentialcenter.com.

Toys for Tickets

For those who have been naughty and received a parking ticket, here's something nice to redeem yourselves: The Boston Transportation Department will accept a toy donation in lieu of payment for any non-safety related ticket received on December 1, 2 and 3. New, non-violent, unwrapped toys of an equal or greater value than the fine will be accepted Monday, December 6 through Friday, December 10 between 9 am and 4 pm on the second floor of Boston City Hall. A receipt for the toy, as well as the ticket, must be presented. Toys will be donated to Boston charities. For more information call 635-4BTD.

Coat Drive

Barbour, in partnership with One Warm Coat, is hosting a coat drive through Thursday, December 30 to benefit the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program. Located at 134 Newbury Street, Barbour is offering 25 percent off the purchase of a jacket for each coat donated. For more information call 375-7829.

Holiday Cards

Project Place holiday greeting cards, fea-

turing inspirational words from Project 90 students, are sold in sets of 5 for \$10. Customized options are also available. Proceeds benefit Project Place's work to help people transition out of homelessness. For more information visit project-place.org or call 542-3740.

Pine Street Inn holiday greeting cards are sold in sets of 10 for \$15, including shipping and handling. Customized and large quantities are also available. Proceeds benefit the Pine Street Inn's services for homeless people. To order call 892-9178 or visit pinestreetinn.org.

Gifts for Guests

The Women's Lunch Place is accepting \$25 holiday gift cards for the poor and homeless women they serve. Gift cards are available for purchase at Target, CVS, Shaw's, Walgreens, Marshalls or TJ Maxx locations.

Raising a Reader

Raising a Reader Massachusetts, which encourages low-income parents to read books with their children daily, is accepting donations. A \$25 donation provides one book and an instructional DVD, "Story Time: How to Share Books with Your Child," for a child and their family. A \$125 donation provides books, training and support for a year. A \$2,500 donation supports children and families in one classroom for a year. And \$5,000 supports children and families in a childcare center for a year.

Holiday Bazaar

Party of Gold will buy used silver and gold jewelry at the Friends of the Mass Eye and Ear's Holiday Bazaar on Thursday, December 2 from 9 am to 4 pm at Mass Eye and Ear, 243 Charles Street. Discounted restaurant and salon gift certificates, baked goods, customized clothing, accessories and more will be provided by local vendors. Proceeds will benefit Mass Eye and Ear's Child Life Program. For more information, call 523-7900 or visit masseyeandear.org.