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The policy that eschews gifts from outside vendors and contractors is valid throughout the year but never more so than during the holiday season, when glad tidings from contractors, vendors and business associates attempt to make their way down Metro's chimney. Above, Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman and Ethics Officer Rebecca Gilden remind us that these gifts make the holidays a little brighter for someone in need: Gifts ranging in value from \$10 to about \$150 or more are bundled up and distributed to various charities each week.

## The Gifts That Keep on Giving

**Ethics Department Rebundles Gifts from Outside Vendors and Contractors for Local A-rated Human Services Charities.**

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Dec. 15, 2007) Chief Ethics Officer Karen Gorman encourages any employee who receives a gift from an outside company to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest by turning it over to the Ethics Office.

"It's very easy to want to be gracious and not see any harm in a gift and just accept it," says Gorman, but in the long run, "It's easier to say thanks, but no thanks."

Under the law a gift valued at \$10 or more from a Metro contractor and those doing business with a public agency such as Metro must be

returned or donated to a charity. In such instances, the Ethics Department can collect the gifts from employees and donate the items to charity, and provide the employees with records of the transaction.

"We do this as a service to our employees to make it easier for them to comply with the law, to do something nice for a person in need, and help maintain Metro's credibility with the public," said Gorman.

This program should not be confused with a solicitation of gifts from employees, which is not permitted, or contributions to charities affiliated with any employee, said Gorman.

Recently, Metro's gift policy was cited in a San Jose Mercury News article by Judy Nadler, a director of the Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University, as the model gift program in the nation that makes it easy for employees to comply to state law.

"When employees learn how happy these gifts makes someone in need, it's a very rewarding experience worth far more than the gift itself," said Gorman.

The gift policy is in effect the whole year round.

A case in point: An employee received four tickets to the Dodger game last summer and dutifully turned them in to the Ethics Office, recalls Ethics Officer Rebecca Gilden. "We turned them over to a non-profit foster care center who gave them to children who had never been to a major league baseball game. The kids were absolutely thrilled."

The [Employee Code of Conduct](#), which can be accessed on the Ethics & Lobbyist web pages from the "Select a Department" drop-down menu on the myMetro.net homepage, includes a description of the gift rules in Section 5-15-130.

The purpose of the rule on gifts, according to the Code, is "to assure the public that public employees are not influenced to show favoritism to a contractor based on receiving gifts or for being rewarded for doing his or her job in a way that will benefit the giver of the gift."