Pass along ripples of kindness

By Jan Hovey

Once in a blue moon you come across a person who makes a mighty positive change in the community. "Exploding exhuberance" is how I'd describe Jim Bergantz.

Since 1994, Jim has spearheaded the Seeds of Kindness program in Angels Camp, as well as many other vital projects – all on a volunteer basis. That's 15 years of dedication to making a difference in the lives of the people in that community.

In those early years as owner of Bergantz Nursery in the city, it all started with roses – thousands and thousands of long-stemmed red roses given to those who did a kind deed. They'd then be passed on to the next kind person and so on.

After two years, the roses transformed into the signature light blue ribbons tied around trees, businesses, schools and light posts, and the passing of little blue ribbons pinned on jackets, shirts and blouses.

"We give them ribbons and hopes and ideas to get a good dose of kindness circulating," beams Jim.

But, Jim has even bigger plans for 2010; he wants to bring the Seeds of Kindness to communities and schools throughout Calaveras County.

How does Seeds of Kindness work? Kindness Week, proclaimed by the Angels Camp City Council in 1995, is the second week of February – every year. Jim and his spirited team of volunteers seek donations to provide the light blue Kindness ribbons for display, as well as the pinned ribbons. The ribbon and the kind act are then passed forward the entire week.

Plans are blossoming for Feb. 15 to 21, 2010, and that includes providing Kindness Kits to all 22 Calaveras County schools. The kits will include the official diamond-shaped Kindness Zone sign, 600 feet of light blue ribbon for students to tie around their schools, light blue Kindness ribbons for each student and teacher, instructions on how to best utilize the pinned ribbons and a list of Kindness activities, opportunities and participation ideas.

There is talk about expanding the kits to include banks and post offices. In addition, Mark Twain St. Joseph's Hospital will not only be participating, it has already made a healthy donation toward the project.

Alongside Jim and his daughter, Jill, there is a core gold mine of good folks involved in making this happen. But they could use more help.

"We're just chipping away at a big slab of marble," commented Jan Alcalde, committee member and good person. At a recent Kindness meeting, Jan suggested that the group create a button for bank tellers that reads, "Kindness Compounds with Interest." Brilliant!

Honestly, once the kindness stuff starts, it explodes into greater things.

For 2010, the group is brainstorming on names, including "The Ripple of Kindness – Pass it Forward." Plans are to order 13,000 ribbons and pins, 50 bolts (almost three miles) of light blue satin ribbon and about 25 Kindness Zone signs, as well as flyers, information cards and posters. For all this, the money needed to complete the material list is modest – $3,670.03 (Jim likes to be exact).

Donations have already been received from the Calaveras County Office of Education and the hospital, but the Kindness committee is only one-third of the way there. John Brophy has kindly offered for CCOE to handle the accounting part, so checks should be made out to the Calaveras County Office of Education (CCOE), with a notation that it's for the "Kindness Fund," but mailed to Jim Bergantz, Seeds of Kindness, P.O. Box 677, Murphys, CA 95247.

As Jim emphatically proclaims, "Just $100 provides 357 Kindness messages." Exactly.

In addition to the Kindness activities, schools are encouraged to hold "Hero" letter-writing contests, in which students write about their Kindness heros and that little nugget then gets read aloud by the author with neigh a dry eye in the house.

To learn more about this program, visit actsofkindness.org. The group hopes to have a simple Web site up shortly.

Jim, once again, your kind spirit is contagious and your message hopefully will continue to burgeon into neighboring counties as well. Just think about what the Kindness future holds. Ripple … ripple … ripple …

E-mail me if you're interested in joining the Kindness team: jhovey@sierralodestar.com