By Carl Medford, CRS

Special to the Times

I laugh when the song, “It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas” hits the airwaves. I grew up in Canada and we KNEW when Christmas was near — not because stores had Santa stuff plastered everywhere, but because it was 20° below zero with snow on the ground and the Northern Lights warming up for their evening show.

I know lots of folks try to be “politically correct” and call this time of year a “seasonal holiday” — I’m afraid I’m not one. I’m personally celebrating Christmas because our family celebrates the birth of Jesus.

I have Jewish buddies that will be celebrating Hanukkah — my celebration won’t ruin their festivities. Some of my friends are of Arabic descent and have no particular event this time of year to commemorate. I won’t ask them to be quiet about Ramadan, and I know they won’t mind my celebrations either.

Acquaintances from India also don't have seasonal celebrations of their own, but many love taking their kids to see Christmas lights and manger scenes. I know a few who'll have Kwanza Mishumaa saba candles.

For all of us, however, it's definitely a season of giving. No matter our traditions, nationality or religious backgrounds, local stores are targeting *all* of us with this in mind! And, the advertising is a stark reminder that, as residents of the U.S.A., we live lifestyles in contrast with much of the world. Although we've endured local economic hardships and some have lost homes to foreclosure, we're still so much better off than many in other countries.

Therefore, on behalf of Central Alameda County Realtors, I want to challenge you this Christmas.

To be honest, financial excesses have been at the heart of our current economic woes. So, first of all, we recommend that you don't go into debt this year when buying gifts. It's no fun paying for Christmas the following June while you may be having trouble making the house payment. If you don't have it, don't spend it. Give your family the gift of your time instead.

Second, consider buying gifts that will sustain families in need. Our family is giving a cow through World Vision.* Others will be supplying goats, chickens and more. You can also support

local food banks. As an example, donation containers can be found at 3811 E. Castro Valley Blvd. in Castro Valley and other Central County locations.

**For more information about giving gifts that can change lives, go to www.worldvisiongifts.org.*

Carl Medford is a licensed Realtor with Prudential California Realty in Castro Valley and a licensed general contractor. This article is sponsored by the Central County Marketing Association at www.ccmgtoday.com.