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Arts&culture

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Free from A to Z

How to enjoy life without spending a dime

By **Becca Costello**

News outlets worldwide

are abuzz with the announcement that psychologists have determined that this is the most depressing time of year. Holiday highs have given way to credit-card debt and the pressures of tax time. Many of us are struggling with our New Year's resolutions and finding it hard to kick-start new exercise programs when the near-freezing temperatures won't let up. Toss in a little seasonal affective disorder and stress over finding a valentine, and it's no wonder all of humanity is ready to put on its sweatpants and curl up with the television and a bag of Cheetos until springtime. (Note to our species: Next year, consider hibernating like bears?)



These are tight times for most of us, especially financially, but before you call it a season and set your alarm clock for April, consider this list of freebies. Even in the dark days of winter, Sacramento boasts a plenitude of cultural and material offerings to keep your spirits light while leaving your wallets heavy. We've compiled this list of gratis gifts--including movies, music, furniture, books and kids' activities--to remind you that the best things in life, like SN&R, are free.

A Art: Most of Sacramento's art galleries offer free admission every day. The Crocker Art Museum, located at 216 O Street, offers free entry every Sunday from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. The Center for Contemporary Art, Sacramento, located at 1519 19th Street, follows suit on Sundays from 2 to 5 p.m.

B Beer Dawgs: Sacramento's most established bar band is capable of drawing hefty cover charges for its boogie-inducing rock repertoire, but the band still plays an average of one "no cover" gig per week. Visit www.beerdawgs.com for the band's monthly calendar.

Blues jams: There are free blues jams for local musicians, like the Sunday-night jam at Louie's Cocktail Lounge (3030 Mather Field Road in Rancho Cordova), practically every night of the week. The Sacramento Blues Society has an extensive list on its Web site, SacBlues.com. Some of these have cover charges, so call ahead to find the free ones.

C Chapbooks: The 24th Street Irregular Press publishes new Poems-For-All mini-chapbooks every month featuring poems by local and nationally known writers. They're free for the taking from the counter of the Book Collector, located at 1008 24th Street.

February 0

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College prep: Acquire advice about college and career planning at the Schwab-Rosenhouse College Resource Center, located on the second floor of the central branch of the Sacramento Public Library at 828 I Street. Counselors are available on Wednesdays from 4 to 6 p.m. and on Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. Call (916) 264-2920 for a schedule of free college-application and SAT workshops.

Dance clubs: Every week, NapkinNights doles out free admission to nightclubs like 815 L Street, the 7440 Club, and the Capitol Garage at www.napkinnights.com. Click on the "guest list" link and print out your e-mail confirmation, and you and a guest are in free. You don't even have to wait in line!

Entertainment: Unique Programs at California State University, Sacramento, is a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing a variety of quality entertainment to the campus's University Union. Though some of the events cost money, there are plenty of free offerings this semester, including a free screening of *Occupation: Dreamland* on March 1, a concert by Sacramento Taiko Dan on March 8, and a night with hypnotist Tom DeLuca on April 13. Visit www.csus.edu/union/unique/event.html for a complete schedule.

Firewood: While researching this article, we regularly checked the free list on Craigslist for weeks. With the possible exception of kittens, there was no more plentiful item than firewood. It's possible this glut was a one-time anomaly, but if you're heating your house with wood (or kittens), you'd better check it out.

Gardening tips: The Master Gardeners of the University of California Cooperative Extension are available five days a week to answer your "What are these bugs?" and "Why did all the leaves turn yellow?" questions. Just call (916) 875-6913, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Homework help: The California State Library offers online help from live tutors daily from 1 p.m. until 10 p.m. The subjects covered include math, English, science and social studies for grades four through 12. Spanish-speaking tutors are available Sunday through Thursday from 1 to 7 p.m. Visit www.tutor.com/csl2/ to get started.

Indie music: The music-blog universe is expanding at an alarming rate. Indie rockers should check out Fluxblog at www.fluxblog.org. Cocaine Blunts and Hip Hop Tapes offers new and classic rap cuts almost daily at www.cocaineblunts.com. 1960s and '70s funk aficionados will get their fill at Funky16Corners at <http://funky16corners.blogspot.com>. Find a daily music mix from the blogosphere with The Hype Machine Audio Blog Aggregator at <http://hype.non-standard.net>.

Jazz: The Urban Jazz Workshop, an improvised jam with various members of the Urban Jazz Sessions collective, is still going strong every Wednesday night at 7:30 p.m. at the Fox & Goose, located at 1001 R Street. And jazz vocalist Gayiel Von performs with Jimmy "Fingerz" Jordan every weekend in the lounge on the Delta King, located at 1000 Front Street in Old Sacramento. The duo livens up the riverboat from 8 to 10 p.m. on Thursdays and from 8 to 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

Karaoke: There are so many free karaoke events each week that there isn't enough room to list them here. Check SN&R's Nightbeat calendar for details.

Kids' activities: The Sacramento Public Library is the best place for free kids' entertainment. Every branch has weekly story times, and most offer an ever-changing schedule of activities led by local artists, musicians, clowns, magicians, puppeteers and comedians. Visit www.saclibrary.org for details.

The L Word: No need to buy Showtime to keep up with the twists and turns in this

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lesbian-themed soap opera starring Pam Grier and Jennifer Beals. See the latest episode every Monday night at 7 p.m. at The Depot Video Bar, located at 2001 K Street. The bar also screens *Queer as Folk*, *Fat Actress*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Will & Grace* and *Desperate Housewives* throughout the week. Find a complete schedule at www.thedepot.net.

Lunchtime concerts: Westminster Presbyterian Church hosts free noontime concerts every Wednesday at 1300 N Street, where all are welcome to enjoy the cathedral's impressive acoustics. View the current schedule at www.westminsac.org. The UC Davis music department offers a free concert every Thursday at 12:05 p.m. inside Room 115 of the campus's Music Building. Call (530) 752-0948 for a complete schedule.

M Molten metal: Sacramento's Art Foundry Inc. casts bronze sculptures and monuments for artists the world over. Witness the delicate art of working with white-hot metal at a free bronze-pouring demonstration, offered every Second Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at 1025 R Street.

Mothering support: The locally produced Mamazine.com offers parenting advice and humorous columns by hip Sacramento moms--including SN&R's own Kate Washington.

Museums: Twenty-four Sacramento-area museums will offer free admission this Saturday from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. for the eighth annual Sacramento Museum Day. Visit www.sacmuseums.org for a guide to participating venues and free shuttle service.

N Night of the Living Dead: This 1968 horror classic is just one of the dozens of public-domain movies available for downloading at Entertainment Magazine's site www.emol.org/movies. If you can brave the lengthy download times, you'll have access to films with Charlie Chaplin, Shirley Temple, Frank Sinatra, Cary Grant and other screen giants from the 1920s through the 1950s. For shorter acquisition times, try the classic cartoons with Bugs Bunny, Felix the Cat, Popeye and Woody Woodpecker.

O Outdoor treks: Take a free tour of the gorgeously diverse landscapes at the UC Davis Arboretum. Every guided walk has a different theme, from plant identification to practical gardening advice. Visit <http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu> for a list of tour themes and times.

P Poetry readings: Luna's Café, located at 1414 16th Street, is home to Sacramento's longest-running poetry series, Thursday night's Poetry Unplugged. Each 8 p.m. show offers a featured reader and plenty of open-mic opportunities. There are a number of other free poetry series in town, including the monthly Urban Voices Poetry Series at South Natomas Library and the Monday-night readings at the Sacramento Poetry Center, located inside HQ at 25th and R streets. Find a useful poetry calendar, and new work by area poets, inside the center's free monthly publication Poetry Now.

Q Quackery: Admission is always free at the Sierra Sacramento Valley Museum of Medical History, which offers visitors a rare glimpse at medical techniques dating back to the gold-rush era, including a quackery exhibit. The museum, located at 5380 Elvas Avenue No. 100, is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

R Relationship advice: E-mail the details of your tangled love life to askjoey@newsreview.com and let certified spiritual counselor Joey Garcia sort things out for you.

S Shakespeare: The Sacramento Shakespeare Festival performs condensed versions of Shakespeare's plays in various public locations throughout downtown Sacramento every summer. The 2006 schedule hasn't been released yet, but keep your eye on www.sacramentoshakespeare.net for details. Until then, content yourself with studying the Bard's plays and sonnets at www.shakespeare-online.com.

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Sneak previews: SN&R gives out free passes to sneak previews of upcoming movies every Friday morning. The distribution location varies weekly, so check the ad in each week's SN&R for details.

T Trivia contests: The Streets of London Pubs, located at 1804 J Street in Sacramento and 649 East Bidwell Street in Folsom, host a pub quiz every Sunday night at 9 p.m., in which patrons battle each other for prizes. There's no admission charge, so it's free if you can get your friends to buy the beer.

U Ulysses: James Joyce's classic has frustrated many an English student. If you find it impenetrable, simply download one of the hundreds of other public-domain novels--including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*--available from Project Gutenberg, at www.gutenberg.org.

V Videos: Catching the latest music videos is easy now that big-screen TVs are *de rigueur* at most bars and restaurants around town. Of course, at many places, you're more likely to find a televised golf tournament than a dance routine. For a guaranteed stream of music videos, try Hamburger Mary's at 1630 J Street or Hot Rod's Burgers at 2007 K Street.

W Wi-Fi: Use the city search at www.metrofreefi.com to find the public Wi-Fi hot spots in Sacramento, or any of its neighboring cities.

Wildlife: The Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, located off Elk Grove Boulevard and Interstate 5, is open twice a month to enthusiastic bird-watchers. The refuge can be explored solo or on a free docent-guided tour. Visit www.stonelakes.org for a schedule.

Wine: You can't get much more affordable than the \$5 Friday-night wine tastings at Enotria Café and Wine Bar, located at 1431 Del Paso Boulevard. Unless you wait for Second Saturday art openings, of course, when the Two Buck Chuck flows through Midtown and Uptown galleries like, well, wine.

X Xeriscaping: Any home or business connected to the city of Sacramento water supply is eligible for a free Water-Wise House Call from the Water Conservation Office. A water-conservation specialist will bring you free gifts, including a CD-ROM with thousands of tips for xeriscaping (landscaping with less water), and help you learn how to conserve water and curb your water bill. Call (916) 808-5605 to set up an appointment.

Y You name it: It seems like everything on Earth eventually surfaces on Freecycle, where people giveth and people taketh away. Use the group finder at www.freecycle.org to sign up for the Yahoo group in your area. Each day, you'll receive an e-mailed compendium of offers and requests. We've seen everything from televisions, beds and dryers to "an opened bag of spicy snacks I didn't like very much" up for grabs. If you see something you want, contact the giver and make arrangements for a pickup.

Z Zoo: The Sacramento Zoo offers free admission three days per year: the day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Museum Day--which is this Saturday! Free red pandas! Free lions! Free chimpanzees!

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