

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

Let hosts enjoy the party

Here's a horrid holiday scenario:

Just days away from your holiday party, the host you sent an invite to but hoped wouldn't show has responded with a resounding yes. You sent out 50 invitations hoping that only 20 or so could make it. Now you find yourself entertaining not just the boss but the entire management team and even the new neighbors down the block.

Needless to say, Chees Whiz on a Ritz wouldn't set the right mood. Ditto for the old standby of hot artichoke dip. You know that everyone has seen and tasted the hollowed out black bread filled with Knorr's soup mix and sour cream. Even holiday recipes using Buffalo chicken wings and asparagus wrapped in prosciutto just won't fit into the scheme of things. What's a host (or hostess) to do?

Relax. Anyone who has thrown a party for the holidays will surely conjure up the Golden Rule: Relax and have fun! First off, realize that holiday revelers are inundated with invites that are featuring everything from plain cookies to caviar.

If you are throwing a holiday bash, concentrate on a few trusty standby recipes that are always enjoyed but include a sampling of something new that will serve as a conversation piece by themselves. Meatballs are always appreciated and can be light on the budget. They also make good "filler-uppers" for those who tend to imbibe heartily. Another good standby includes assorted spreads and dips already prepared on bread, toast, and crackers. A simple pastry bag filled with a large star tip can turn ordinary ground baloney into a masterpiece on some homemade rye circles when garnished with a sprig of fresh dill or parsley.

Dieters welcome the omnipresent trays of fresh veggies but how about including a smattering of fresh fruit? At a recent party, yours truly injected fresh pineapples with a few shots of light rum. I sliced them and arranged them on a platter with frosted grapes and watched everyone say "ohhhhh" as they chomped on the chunks.

Looking for the "perfect munchies"? Chees party mix and canned cocktail nuts are passe. The yuppie muncher now prefers mini-popcorn balls (look for recipes in any basic cookbook) scattered with baskets of sugared nuts (homemade, of course) and bountiful baskets of homemade flavored croutons.

Catch the guests in their holiday bests by having an inexpensive "instant" type camera handy and loaded with film. Commemorate the party with candid shots — or better, something you can use at the next performance review.

If you are expecting boards of folks over an extended period of time, incorporate your kitchen into the floor plan. Set up the bar by the sink and use the stovetop to house a simmering kettle of hot spiced cider.

If you find yourself calling Aunt Julia at the last minute looking for appropriate serving trays and dishes, check out the local rent-all agency for mini chafing dishes, some of which come with dividers. This will make it much easier on the host/hostess for refilling and better yet — you won't have to rely on hot trays with plugs to trip over.

You can help set the mood for the festivities with a smattering of holiday decorations and lots of candles. The small scented variety are the

Please turn to Page 2

Big families on campus mark season



In the dining room of Searn House, Roy Slade (above) toasts the holidays with a Bloody Mary made from his own mix recipe. At right: Schoolcraft president Richard McDowell and his wife, Ann, look forward to such holiday fare as her Pumpkin Squared.



Joseph E. and Emilie Champagne (above) continue her family's tradition of including a Swedish Christmas Bake Cake in the holiday meal. He's the president of Oakland University, Rochester Hills. Stephen and Carol Nicholson have been married for one year. This year, holidays in the household of the Oakland Community College chancellor and his wife will include her California Vegetable Fluff casserole.

Holiday tables: family tradition

By Ethel Simmons
Mary Roderique
staff writers

Good food, family and friends is the successful formula for any holiday gathering and scholarly college presidents are no exception.

When Ann McDowell bakes for husband Dick, president of Schoolcraft Community College in Livonia, and their three daughters, healthfulness is a main consideration.

Her Pumpkin Squares are a family holiday hit and can be eaten without too much guilt.

"We try to be weight conscious. Someone in the family is always on a diet," she said.

"I like the Pumpkin Squares because you can use no cholesterol oil, oatmeal, and eliminate the egg yolks."

Daughter Sue, who works as a chef for Weight Watchers, has probably heightened the family's nutritionally sound habits, she said. The family also includes Kathy, a student at Madonna College in Livonia, and Karen, in her first year at Schoolcraft.

McDowell doesn't start the holiday baking too early for fear the goodies will be eaten before Christmas arrives.

"I usually have a marathon baking session with my daughters. It stays fresh and doesn't get eaten right away," she said.

After a Christmas celebration here, the McDowells will head for their native Pittsburgh area.

"I usually bake cookies to take to my mom and (Dick's) mom," she said.

The McDowells have made their home in Michigan for the last seven years.

CAROL NICHOLSON's recipe for California Vegetable Fluff is a combination of old and new family traditions. Married for just one year to Stephen Nicholson, chancellor of Oakland Community College, she was glad to learn her longtime family favorite is also a hit with her husband's daughter and her family.

"I do the casserole for the holidays each year," she said. "The base is fresh broccoli and cauliflower lightly steamed. The sauce has egg, light mayonnaise and pimientos. The whole thing is topped with breadcrumbs and sliced almonds. It's incredible."

"I couldn't cheat and get away with frozen vegetables."

The Nicholsons were married in San Diego, which also makes the casserole with California in its title more heartwarming.

This year the family had a major celebration at Thanksgiving. The family includes Carol's son and daughter (with whom she runs a studio called Color Me Beautiful in the Lansing area) and Steve's married daughter and 10-year-old twins who live in Lansing.

Christmas will be a smaller celebration for the Nicholsons this year because they are leaving for the Orient on Dec. 26.

EMILIE CHAMPAGNE, and her husband Joseph, who is president of Oakland University in Rochester Hills, celebrate Christmas with a family tradition of eating Swedish Christmas Bake Cake. She said, "It's from a cookbook my mother and grandmother had. It was published by a Swedish Covenant Church in Minneapolis."

Her mother is one of five sisters, and each had her own copy of the cookbook. The family lived in Texas, where Grandmother always made this cake at the holidays.

"They didn't care for the traditional fruitcake," Champagne explained. "They thought it was too much. This contains only dates, maraschino cherries and pecans, which they added because they are plentiful in Texas. Champagne still puts pecans in her recipe."

Recipes for Yule

PUMPKIN SQUARES
(from Ann McDowell)

- 1 16 ounce can pumpkin
- 1 1/2 cups brown sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 1/2 cups oats
- 1 tablespoon cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 1 teaspoon salt

CREAM CHEESE FROSTING

- 1 3 ounce cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup margarine, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups confectioners sugar
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts

Combine pumpkin, sugar, eggs and oil, mixing until well blended. Add combined oats, cinnamon, baking powder, soda and salt. Mix well. Pour into 15 by 10 inch jelly roll pan, spreading evenly. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool completely.

For frosting, beat together cream cheese, butter and vanilla until well blended. Gradually add sugar, beating until smooth. Spread frosting over cooled cake. Sprinkle with nuts. Cut into squares. Note: You can eliminate egg yolks if you are watching cholesterol.

Please turn to Page 2