



Our holiday rush hits high gear

O y vey! Hanukkah comes early this year.

That was the shocking revelation around our house a couple of Sundays ago, as the football games wound down and the dinner dishes hit the table. My wife, Lori, happened to glance at the kitchen calendar and immediately threw our lives into a tizzy of planning and worrying.

It all centers around our very blended family's annual Hanukkah/Christmas blowout. Hands down, it's my favorite family get-together. The one party where everyone goes home with a smiling face, full stomach and a basket full of goodies, regardless of their religious affiliation. It's even better when Hanukkah begins right around Christmas (sometimes even on Christmas Eve), putting an extra special zing in the holiday air.

This year though, the lunar-based Jewish calendar is just not playing fair. The Jewish festival of lights begins at sundown Friday, Nov. 29. Yes, that's the day after Thanksgiving. And so, throwing a few potato latkes onto a plate of leftover turkey as we light the menorah isn't going to cut it.

So, a quick conference call with my sister-in-law (and party host) Heidi yielded the following plan: We would gather on the following Saturday, the last day of Hanukkah. We'd still get to light candles, sing songs and play dreidel - minus the post-Thanksgiving lethargy. By that time, brother-in-law Ray might also have the Christmas tree up (OK, I'm being a tad optimistic here).

Before you get too confused, here's the religious skinny on my family. I'm Jewish and so is Lori. Her sister, Heidi (Jewish) is married to Ray (Christian). Her other sister, Suzette (Jewish) is a single mom. My sister, Ruth Ann (Jewish) is married to Michael (Christian). My sister, Judith (Jewish) is married to Paul (Christian). My brother, David (Jewish) is married to Dahlia (Jewish).

The next hurdle is the gift thing. We're not the type to be holiday shopping in July - or even October, for that matter. The who-wants-what and who-buys-for-whom negotiation was brief and to the point. The economy played a factor, too. We decided to go all out for the kids (there are seven) and cut back on the adults.

Then there's the matter of decorating. In a moment of foolish optimism, I promise Lori that I will find the time to trade in those old decorations in the basement for some sparkling new ones to hang in the front window. In return, I get a look that says she's not holding her breath, but anything will look OK as long as the menorah is polished and the candles shine brightly.

Of course, the flip side of an early Hanukkah is an almost awkward, three-week gap for family members who do celebrate Christmas. There will be visits with relatives from "the other side" to plan and still more holiday preparations. I'm sure the kids don't have much of a problem with a second round of parties and gift-giving, though.

With nearly everything settled for our special night, it's time to think ahead to the kids' faces as they split up the presents and Uncle Ray's famous potato pancakes. I

PLEASE SEE SCHNEIDER, C6



The action is non-stop as the Japanese Mother/Baby Club meets at Botsford Center for Health Improvement in Novi.

PHOTOS BY BILL BRISLEY / OBSERVER

Mother to mother

Botsford Health offers classes, clubs to help Japanese moms

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

Imagine shopping for baby food when you're not really sure what your baby should be eating.

Or trying to buy diapers when you're not able to make sense of the label on the package.

That's the dilemma faced by members of Botsford Health Care Continuum's Japanese Mother/Baby Club, who meet on the second Thursday of every month to discuss the kinds of questions most new mothers face - in their own language.

Translator Tomoko DeBaker

listens carefully to a question then relates it to facilitator Judy Beyersdorf.

After one animated conversation, DeBaker explains the mother is confused about which disposable diapers to buy for her child.

"A lot depends on his weight in pounds," Beyersdorf says as she explains how diapers are sized.

As DeBaker translates, her own toddler, Nicholas, cruises around the room, claiming toys in typical 2-year-old fashion. He engages in a game of "catch" as Beyersdorf talks about umbilical cord care with a young woman who will deliver her first child in a few weeks and

others talk amongst themselves, creating friendships.

Through DeBaker, Mayumi Harada of Novi said she came to the club for just that reason. New to the United States, she would like to meet other mothers of the same age.

"This is a good group to do some networking," Beyersdorf said. "I'll make sure you get a copy of the sign-up sheet so you can have other people's phone numbers."

DeBaker takes a break from her duties to tend to Nicholas, who has thrown a toy across the room, but she's quickly drawn into a conversation about potty training and "pull-up" style disposable training pants.

"When children are really tired, oftentimes they'll wet the bed," Beyersdorf said, recommending the use of pull-ups until the child stays dry two to three weeks at a time. "I think boys have a greater tendency to do that than girls," she adds with a smile.

The afternoon also includes a visit from registered dietitian Denise Holmes, who leads moms and their children

through a couple of songs before she begins to talk about which foods are appropriate for children of which age.

Dressed as a pumpkin in honor of the season, Holmes stresses the importance of breast-feeding for at least six months. "Your milk has all the vitamins and nutrients he needs."

Introducing solid foods one at a time is important to identify food allergies, Holmes said, and she especially stressed foods that create a choking hazard - from popcorn, nuts and seeds to a simple spoonful of peanut butter.



Facilitator Judy Beyersdorf (left) watches Nicholas DeBaker play while his mother, Tomoko, translates for the group.

"The No. 1 thing children choke on is whole grapes. What you want to do is cut them lengthwise."

Holmes is also not recommended for infants and toddlers because it contains spores that could cause botulism that could poison the baby, Holmes said, sitting back as DeBaker translated.

While the nutritional handouts Holmes distributes are written in English, Beyersdorf also provides a handbook for new mothers that's written in Japanese.

The club began five years ago, as an outgrowth of the 11-year-old Japanese childbirth class. Beyersdorf, a certified childbirth educator and a lactation specialist, said because

corporations like Nissan and Hitachi tend to bring people from Japan to work in the United States for three or four years at a time, many young couples end up going through the most wonderful experience of their lives without the benefit of family ties.

New mothers in Japan are pampered even before they give birth, Beyersdorf said. For two or three weeks before the due date, a pregnant woman will go to her mother's home, where she will stay for at least six weeks after the child is born.

"Their mother takes care of them, and they just take care of their baby. ... The whole philosophy of giving birth in the U.S.

PLEASE SEE PARENTS, C6



Izumi Murakoshi enjoys a banana as her mother, Sunire, looks on.

Longacre House decked for busy season

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

From the first to the last of the month, December is packed with activity at The Longacre House in Farmington Hills.

The festivities kick off on Sunday, Dec. 1, with a Musical Interlude Holiday Open House, featuring performers with the Farmington Musicals and Miss Farmington Oakland County Kelly Zander. Continuous performances from 1-6 p.m. include Musicals scholarship winners Tom Kociela on the trombone and Beverly and Bonnie Smith in a piano and flute duet.

"The Musicals will be selling

baked goods as a fund-raiser, and The Longacre House chef will provide a variety of what executive director Denise Thwyee calls "exquisite delicacies." Desserts will include various holiday pastries, some of which will be geared toward the health-conscious diet.

Spotlighting the house's entering staff helps kick off a membership drive. Thwyee said memberships were included in plans when the Spicer family first donated the 20-room Georgian manor as a community center.

"Until recently, we had 1,200 members," she said. "It's part of how the house is supposed to function."

Annual memberships that help preserve the community treasure begin at \$100 for an individual. Family and corporate memberships are also available, at a cost of \$150 and \$250, respectively.

Those who become members before Dec. 1 will receive free admission to the Musical Interlude Holiday Open House. Additionally, membership benefits include a 10 percent discount for the Dec. 8 holiday brunch and Jan. 17 Chef's Cookout, as well as a 5 percent discount on events, registrations and catering in 2003, Thwyee said.

The idea behind increasing the number of events and offer-

ing memberships is a simple one.

"If you're a member, you feel some ownership of the house," Thwyee said, "and you use the house more."

The Sunday brunch features the culinary stylings of chef Russell Chessin, a West Bloomfield native and graduate of North Farmington High. Chef Russell has 20 years of experience in the field, having trained at The Golden Mushroom under Certified Master Chef Mihos Chelika and worked in various metropolitan area restaurants. He also teaches culinary arts.

PLEASE SEE LONGACRE, C6

DECEMBER EVENTS AT THE LONGACRE HOUSE

Sunday, Dec. 1: Musical Interlude ... a Holiday Open House
Sunday, Dec. 8: Brunch at The Longacre House
Saturday, Dec. 14: Lunch with Santa
Tuesday, Dec. 31: New Year's Eve at The Longacre

Coming Jan. 17 - the Chef's Cookout returns