

Holiday hints

Drunk driving a holiday problem

by Sarah Oates

Battalion Staff
The holidays are traditionally a time for parties and good cheer. However, the results can be tragic when a partygoer who has consumed too much of that "good cheer" tries to drive. Drinking and driving are a dangerous combination that is difficult to avoid during the holiday season.

"People need to stop and think about how much to drink,

to be aware of drinking and driving," says Jan Winniford, assistant director of student affairs at Texas A&M University.

Winniford says party hosts and guests need to respect each other's right to drink as much or as little as they wish. She suggests that party hosts "watch out" for their guests. "It's unrealistic to assume that people won't drink and drive during the holidays," she said.

In its "First a friend, then a Host," program, the American

Automobile Association (AAA) offers the following tips on making holiday parties a safe success:

- Provide plenty of starchy and high-protein snacks and main dishes, such as vegetable dips and cheeses. These foods help slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream.
- Allow guests to serve themselves and mix their own drinks. Chances are that they will drink less and mix less potent drinks.
- One-third of the adult population does not drink, so a variety of low and non-alcoholic beverages should be offered for those who choose not to drink. Hosts should also not rush refills, especially if someone seems to be drinking too fast.
- Guests should be kept busy dancing or playing games to divert attention from the bar. Hosts should set a personal example and drink in moderation.
- Time is a very important factor in overcoming the effects

of alcohol, so about an hour before the party ends, liquor should be discreetly put away and a dessert and plenty of hot coffee should be provided. Neither will have a sobering effect, but both are valuable time gainers. The average person can metabolize (burn off) only one drink an hour. That works out to one ounce of hard liquor, 12 ounces of beer or four ounces of wine.

• Prepare a plan of action in case someone drinks too much. Suggest calling a cab, having guests car-pool, or allow the guest to "sleep it off" at your home.

"Jan. 1 is the deadliest day of the year," says Dr. Kirk Brown, president of the Brazos Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

"About one person per month is killed in Brazos County due to drunk driving," he said, "and that percentage goes up during the holiday season."

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Turkey is high-nutrition, low-calorie holiday food

People shouldn't have problems putting a turkey on their Christmas dinner menu this year, because prices are low and availability is high, says a Texas A&M poultry specialist.

Dr. David Mellor, from the Texas A&M Agricultural Extension Service says that turkey prices should be the same or only slightly higher than last year. One reason for the stability is a large supply of red meat keeping prices stable in spite of increased costs for producers and a reduction in the turkey stock, he says.

Tradition and low prices aren't the only reasons that Americans consume an average of 11 pounds of turkey per year, says Dr. Dymple Cooksey, a nutrition expert with the extension service. Cooksey says turkey is one of the most high-nutrition, low calorie foods around.

Cooksey also gives some tips when shopping for the holiday bird:

First look for the white, circular USDA inspection mark on the package, because this assures the buyer that the turkey was processed under sanitary conditions. Turkeys are not required to be graded by the USDA, but many turkeys carry an A, B, or C grading. Cooksey says that buyers shouldn't hesitate to buy a turkey with a C grading because the price will be lower and the reason the bird was given a C grading (such as a tear in the skin) has nothing to do with the wholesomeness of the bird.

To select a tender turkey, look for the words "young" or "fryer roasted." The age of the bird determines its tenderness, not the grade, size or sex.

Cooksey says to plan on buying a turkey big enough to allow for three-fourths pound per person, or one pound if leftovers are wanted. Leftovers can be frozen in a vapor-proof material for up to one year without losing quality.

Holiday greenery poisonous

People who will be using holly and other holiday greenery for Christmas decorations this year should be careful to keep them out of children's reach, a Texas A&M plant scientist has warned.

"Holly berries are poisonous, though not fatally, and are particularly dangerous to children," said Dr. Roberta Smith of Texas A&M's Soil and Crop Sciences Department. "Ingestion can cause violent vomiting, stomach aches and diarrhea."

Smith also said that mistletoe berries are poisonous also because they contain toxic amines and proteins that can cause inflammation of the stomach and intestine. This could result in vomiting and diarrhea. It also might slow the pulse, causing critical complications. She warned that they should be kept away from children.

Concerned people can call a poison control center at Galveston to find out about the possibilities of ingesting a poisonous plant. The toll-free number is 1-800-392-8548.

Give something useful

Gifts chosen for elderly can send wrong message

by Karen Wallace

Battalion Staff

Picking out a gift for an elderly friend or relative can be a difficult thing to do. And as the shopping days dwindle, the shopper sometimes ends up having to buy the first thing he sees, which can create a problem.

The gift you give an elderly friend or relative may send an unintended message, said Judith L. Warren, a family life education-aging specialist with the Texas A&M University Agricultural Extension Service home economics program.

For example, with the pair of slippers or pajamas you give Grandpa, you could be telling him that he doesn't do anything but sleep, she said.

Selecting a gift for an elderly person should be no different than selecting a gift for a younger person. The idea is to give something useful or something the person will find pleasure in.

Consider the elderly person's life now or past related experience for a clue to gift ideas, Warren said.

For example, the woman who used to have a beautiful flower garden might enjoy a pictorial book about floral gardens, a painting of a garden to hang in her room, a favorite photo of her garden enlarged and framed, or a monthly gift of cut flowers from the florist, she said.

Sometimes, the best gift for an elderly person would be something that you use everyday, said Janet Neel, secretary for Crestview Retirement Community in Bryan.

"Things you take for granted everyday that are very useful and not expensive at all make wonderful gifts," Neel said.

For example, a package of stamps would be a good idea for someone who loves to send letters, birthday cards or just has to pay bills, she said.

If you know someone who doesn't see as well as

they used to, a package of wide tip pens would be a good idea, Neel said.

"That way, they can write and see what they've written," she said.

Here are some suggestions for the type of gift that many elderly people would enjoy:

- A home-made certificate for a lunch either at a new restaurant or a favorite eating place.
- Fruit, flowers, plants or food gifts that are on a monthly basis. Many local shops or order firms offer this service.
- Home-baked goods, especially if they are made by the grandchildren.
- A special treat for the elderly person on a special diet. There are now many recipes and products on the market for sugar-free, sodium free desserts, candies or other treats that can be made at home or purchased at specialty stores.
- A membership in a local health spa where an older person can enjoy a swim, the whirlpool, sauna.
- A gift certificate at the local beauty salon or barber shop.
- Pre-packaged frozen meals that you prepared at home are especially nice for the person who lives alone and does little cooking.
- A home-made certificate for your services. You could offer "spring cleaning," driving services, garden-planting, catering a luncheon dinner for your relative and several guests, taking a pet to the veterinarian for check-up.
- A subscription to a specialty magazine of interest to the person. For example, the man can no longer play golf may still enjoy reading about current players and tournaments in a golfing magazine.

Once you start thinking of your friend or relative as just a person, rather than an elderly person, the selection of gifts becomes easier, Warren said.

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