

LET THIS PARTY STARTED

Throwing a holiday party for the student on a budget

By Katie Wigginton
THE BATTALION

Gabrysch, a senior animal science major, gobbles up his pile of stuffing while soaking in the happiness of his extended family sitting around him. After enjoying his favorite dishes and a glass of eggnog, he realizes that just around the corner he will be returning to College Station to face finals and return to work during the semester.

At the same time, Brooke McElroy, a senior theatre major, heads to the store to pick up more Christmas decorations. As she scans the shelves, she notices how many snowflake ornaments and ingredients for her favorite holiday cookies, her exam blues are zapped by that excitement and spark of preparing for her Christmas party.

Things of a good holiday party

"The people and the atmosphere are important to having a good holiday party," McElroy said. "The least important is your watch and the time and stay 'til you feel content."

The atmosphere is cozy, McElroy suggests that parties are best when they are at friends' houses rather than the upscale commercial centers. Friends can provide a less stressful, more decorated environment.

"I spend my holiday party sitting with friends, drinking wine and watching my favorite Christmas movies," McElroy said.

"The holiday parties are being around people I care about and having fun," Gabrysch said.

"I would rather spend my holiday gatherings hunting for a good deal than at my ranch and meeting up with old friends who are still in college."

"Decorations are not as important because I would rather spend on good presents or the food and beverages,"

If the host catches it in time, "remove the dip and spoon out the offensive part," Post said.

Being invited to a holiday gathering often means arriving with a gift. Before stressing over what to bring, Post said that not every event requires the guest to bring more than an empty stomach and Christmas spirit.

"Cocktail parties and causal events such as brunches are optional for gifts. You can offer a bottle of wine, a side dish or an ornament for the Christmas season," Post said.

When it comes to sit-down dinners or overnight stays, though, Post says gifts are a mandatory.

"Anything such as a small potted plant, candles or an item they could keep are perfect gifts for the host," Post said.

Can't afford a gift? Post has the answer.

"Everyone likes a thank you. Even the simplest token can have an impact," Post said.

To send a specific question about etiquette for various occasions, visit to www.emilypost.com

"The company makes the feast"

"Amidst all the stress of finals, I love to get friends I have made all semester together at my place and enjoy some down time to eat, drink and be merry for the holidays," McElroy said.

Every year when the last tests, research papers and graduation fees come around, McElroy throws a stress-free Christmas party at her apartment.

"It's a way for everyone to bring their favorite appetizer, forget about finals for a night and try to enjoy the Christmas season," McElroy said.

"Plus, it's a way for the friends I have made throughout the semester to meet each other and make new friends."

For the party to be a success, McElroy tries to make every square inch of her place as comfortable and Christmas as possible.

"I put out lights, a tree, candles and mistletoe. I make all the food from scratch - cookies, wassail, brownies, everything. I love to serve them on Christmas dishes too," McElroy said.

After the party is through, McElroy extends the courtesy for the guests who cannot make it.

"I'll bring some of the leftover food to classes or to my neighbor's house," she said. "It just brightens their day when they're worried about finals."

"I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams..."

"The only day I'm going to get off work is Christmas Day and a couple of days off for a wedding that I am in," Gabrysch said.

Gabrysch is one of the many students who will not get all Christmas break off to go to holiday parties with friends or rest up for the upcoming spring semester on the family couch. Instead, he will spend the majority of his break working.

"I would rather be at home for the holidays with my family. I think you can make money anytime but holidays only happen once," Gabrysch said.

To compensate for the time lost working, Gabrysch plans his events as close together as possible when he is at home.

"I'll plan to hunt and open presents with family and friends so I can try to cover everything with as many people as possible," Gabrysch said.

For others who are spending the Christmas season in College Station, Gabrysch said people should make the most of the situation and be thankful you have a family to miss.

McElroy points to benefits of her own.

"Enjoy the peace of no traffic, clean out your closets and donate to a shelter," McElroy said. "Helping someone have a merry Christmas will brighten yours as well."

What happens when someone...

While the wine is being sipped and the good times are rolling, there are occasions when the uninvited guest or even worse, an uninvited guest with rude behavior, pops in. Etiquette expert Peggy Post of the Emily Post Institute, a service organization providing etiquette lessons and advice for all occasions, offered some answers to pesky guest questions in "Oprah" magazine.

For instance, when people do not RSVP and time is running out, Post recommends that it is acceptable for the host to make a follow-up call to the guest. That is, as long as the request is made "in a non-naggy, oh-so-gracious way," Post said. This way, the host does not appear too pushy.

While the party is hopping, the host spots a guest who is a double dipper. Post advises that the host, "discreetly, politely - and firmly - ask the person to stop."

CHRISTMAS



on the small screen

Christmas is the time for giving. Every year, families gather around the tree to give and receive presents of joy and happiness. Not to be outdone, the almost omnipresent electronic talking box that is the family television set joins the festivities and, like a beloved aunt, gives viewers many Christmas presents in its seasonal showings of holiday classics. And, like Aunt Mildred, the television set is notorious for giving questionable presents. From holiday specials to obscure escapees from holiday wastelands, a lot of what comes on the television this season would make Frosty the Snowman cringe. With the sheer mass of holiday movies out there, what should people watch this year as they deck their halls? Put down that copy of "Santa Conquers the Martians" and "The Santa Clause 2" and look at this handy dandy list of modern holiday classics:

"A Christmas Story" Warner Brothers

This definitive holiday classic has wormed its way into public consciousness, but with good reason. The touching and hilarious story of one all-American family's quest for a perfect Christmas has managed to become a slice of Americana.

Little Ralphie's quest for an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle marks a zany series of misadventures and observations of suburban life in the 1940s. This movie contains a plethora of memorable scenes and lines of dialogue that have become a staple of pop culture.

With an annual 24-hour marathon on TNT and almost weekly showings in the upcoming month, viewers will have plenty of chances to catch bits and pieces of this holiday neo-classic. Before the holiday is over, though, anybody who has yet to have a chance to glimpse the movie in all its glory should watch a complete showing of this wonderful piece of cinema.

"The Nightmare Before Christmas" Touchstone

A brilliantly animated film using stop-motion animation that is a treat to the eyes, the movie features top-notch music from modern music genius Danny Elfman. Answering the long asked question of what would happen if the ghost and ghouls of Halloween were to run Christmas, this movie is a sensory delight of epic proportions.

"The Nightmare Before Christmas" has managed to develop a huge fan following of ironic teenagers and animation enthusiasts. The bizarre brainchild of "Beetlejuice" director Tim Burton, "The Nightmare Before Christmas" may have flopped at the box office, but it has managed to develop a sizable market in video.

Holiday video renters looking for something a little different from the claymation Christmas cartoons of yesteryear should not miss a chance to check out this ambitious musical monster smash.

"Jingle all the Way" Fox

"It's Turbo Time!" One of the most underappreciated seasonal movies around, "Jingle All The Way" has Arnold Schwarzenegger stumbling around for an hour-and-a-half spouting out amazingly accented bits of unintentionally hilarious dialogue.

Arnold's quest to procure a Turbo Man doll for his son leads him deeper and deeper into trouble as he battles an irate postal man played by Sinbad; the comedian. While the movie will not be championed as the best seasonal movie anytime soon, it is a pleasant surprise that even Schwarzenegger himself is susceptible to pratfalls and bad comedic timing.

When a movie gets so bad that it becomes funny, audiences are in for a night of guffaws and snickers at the sheer absurdity of this movie's half-baked attempt at a life lesson about materialism and holiday greed. Unfortunately, it's difficult to take any movie seriously that preaches anti-materialism while marketing a line of action figures at the same time.

But ignoring all that, if you're looking for a night of laughing at movies instead of with them, "Jingle All The Way" is your holiday pick.

--Reviews by Robert Saucedo

DECEMBER

DECORATIONS

Naughty Northpole

Decorations: Decorate your home in your own personal naughty or nice lists.

Invite all those fellow college students who are getting coal in their stockings this Christmas to this cocktail party with a twist. Have your guests dress up as North Pole characters on their worst behavior. If you're looking for a Christmas party that is a bit more adult-rated, this theme is the one for you!

Tree decorating party

Decorations: None

With finals looming ahead, who has time to decorate and prepare for a Christmas party? Don't fret though, we have a party that is fun and quick with no

Snowflake cut outs and snowmen will disguise your home into this winter get away.

X-mas shopping party

Decorations: None

One of the hardest things about Christmas is deciding which presents to buy for people. Who would be more helpful than your closest friends? Have your friends meet at your house and then compose a list of all the shops everyone wants to go to. Then drive to join in with the mad rush of Christmas shoppers. After shopping everyone can meet at a coffee shop to relax and enjoy a hot cup of cocoa.

--Compiled by Tori Foster

Winter Wonderland

Decorations: Paper and ribbons in blue, white and silver. Snowflake cut outs. Icicle lights.

Take a break from the Texas heat and transform your apartment into an arctic Christmas. Hang icicle lights inside and outside your home will add the perfect lighting to your party. Take paper and ribbons and cover anything that will stand still in these wintery colors.

