

Holiday Traditions Bring Cultures Together

■ **City employees share the special ways they celebrate the many traditions of the season.**

Do you trim the tree for Christmas? Spin the dreidel at Hanukkah? Hold a Karumu event for Kwanzaa? Celebrate the holidays in some other way?

Our City's employees bring a wealth of diverse cultural and ethnic experiences to the December holiday season. Here are just a few of the ways members of the City family mark this special time of year.

However you celebrate, at your City Employees Club, we send you and yours our best wishes for a very happy, healthy, peaceful and prosperous holiday and New Year!

Bringing Faiths Together

John Popoch, Recreation Coordinator, Department of Recreation and Parks

Popoch, who was raised Jewish, and his wife, Denise, brought up Catholic, combine their faiths in their holiday celebrations. For Hanukkah, the couple reads from the prayer book, lights the menorah, and enjoys meals featuring the traditional latkes (potato pancakes fried in oil). They then partake in a big Christmas dinner, when a gift exchange usually takes place.

According to Popoch, sometimes he and Denise celebrate Hanukkah with her family in Palm Springs, and other times share



Christmas with his family in Montreal. "We recognize our religions and how important they are to both of us," he said. "We make it work and I'm very proud of that. We're fortunate because we have the unconditional love and support of our respective families."

Christmas, Mother Earth and Father Sky

Sharon Redditt, Executive Secretary, Bureau of Contract Administration, Department of Public Works

Christmas dinner for about 10 to 15 friends and members of Redditt's family, including her grown daughter, Keisha, takes place at the home of her niece Faith. Before dinner, the oldest member of the family—currently Redditt's 96-year-old uncle, Simon—leads a prayer of thanks. Following a dinner of turkey, dressing, cranberry sauce, ham, roast beef, macaroni and cheese, and more, the family exchanges gifts based on names pulled at Thanksgiving.

Redditt's family then marks Kwanzaa on New Year's Day with a get-together featuring African customs, including giving homemade gifts. Wearing African outfits and headdresses, the family enjoys a dinner of chicken, black-eyed peas, okra, rice and beans. This year, the celebration will include a ritual offering up newborn Kyle Ahmad, the son of Redditt's oldest niece, Faith, and Faith's husband, Ba'Ron. Redditt said the father will hold Kyle to the sky and say, "As the sun rises in the east, I raise my child from birth of Mother Earth to be blessed by Father Sky. I present Kyle to the family."

Hawaiian Holidays

Adrene Briones, Environmental Specialist, Department of Water and Power

The Hawaiian native travels home to Oahu each Christmas, because "it's not the same unless you spend the holiday with family." On Christmas Eve, about 20 to 30 members of Briones' family, including her brother, Kellen (who attends USC), eat dinner and then open presents. Given Hawaii's cultural variety, the dinner menu changes each year, ranging from turkey, to sushi, to ribs.

On Christmas Day, Briones' family also enjoys brunch together, and then she often joins in the celebration of a friend's family. She and her old school friends also make a point of having a party with a "white elephant" gift exchange, where each person gets "really

creative" in bringing an item he/she already has that someone else might want.

The most unusual part of her holiday experience, Briones said, is the warm weather, adding, "You can spend the day at the beach if you want."

Making Merry with Manicotti

Scott Read, Management Analyst, Los Angeles International Airport

Read enjoys a busy Christmas season with his wife, Shelly, stepson Andrew (18), and kids Abby (2) and Jack (11 months). On Christmas Eve, the family goes to Shelly's parents' house for a manicotti dinner. (Read said he doesn't know how that became the Christmas Eve meal of choice.)

And on Christmas Day, after opening presents at home in the morning, they join Read's family at the home of either his mother or sister, for Christmas dinner featuring turkey and all the trimmings, plus his mom's famous grated potatoes with cheddar cheese and sour cream. However, last year Christmas Day found Read in the hospital, eating takeout from Jack in the Box for dinner. The occasion was happy, though, as his wife had just given birth the night before to their son.

Trying to fit in visits with everyone during the holidays can get hectic, and now that his toddler daughter can begin to enjoy Christmas, Read cherishes his own family's time together. "The best part for me now is that time we have Christmas morning just together with the kids," he said, noting that it gets "more fun" as the kids get older.

South of the Border

Michelle Fleenor, Field Deputy, City Councilmember Tom LaBonge

The holiday season means vacation time for the family of Fleenor's fiancé, Tim. More than 15 members of his family from across the United States fly to Mexico, usually for the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. They get the opportunity to see how the locals spend their holiday, and also exchange gifts, often related to the trip. "It's really kind of fascinating to explore another country," Fleenor said, adding that her favorite part is "taking a vacation in the middle of all the hoopla. It's really nice to go somewhere to relax where it's warm and sunny, and just get into that holiday spirit and spend time with family and close friends."


Fleenor and her fiancé usually go to Mexico on Dec. 26, following a traditional Christmas dinner with her family at her aunt's house. She points with pride to the City employee connections at that gathering, noting that her 85-year-old grandfather is a retired Los Angeles Police Department officer, and that her mom works for the Department of Water and Power and her uncle for the Department of Public Works' Bureau of Street Lighting.

Christmas in the Philippines

Sharon Juzon-Isip, Human Resources, DWP


Christmas in the Philippines revolves mainly around the spirit of giving and merry-making, and even without snow or pine trees, there is no doubt it is Christmas in the Philippines. The Philippines is the only Asian country where Christians predominate, and Filipinos are proud to proclaim this holiday to be the longest and merriest.

Many Filipino yuletide traditions have their roots from the Spanish colonial era. The



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Traditions

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Misa de Gallo, for example, is a pre-dawn Mass celebrated during the nine days preceding Christmas. These dawn Masses begin December 16 to 24 and could usually start as early as 4 a.m. The liturgical point was not to get people to sacrifice a few hours of precious sleep but to heighten their expectation for Christmas; and it is at this Mass where the story behind the birth of Christ is read from the Bible.

It is also customary for Filipino families to sit down to a feast on Christmas Eve after the Misa de Gallo Mass. Called the Noche Buena, the feast is in part a thanksgiving for the blessings of the year past, as well as a prayerful feast for a prosperous year to come. Traditionally served on every table are the jamon (ham), queso de bola (cheese), lechon (roasted pig), pancit, barbeque, fresh lumpia (spring roll), a variety of desserts from native rice cakes to buko (coconut) fruit salad, leche flan, and much more. Christmas Eve is a night without sleep and a continuous celebration moving right into Christmas Day. On Christmas morning, it is a Filipino tradition for children to visit their

godparents, where they are presented with a gift, usually money.

Another tradition is the hanging of lanterns in front of the house. Not content with having a Christmas tree (green, white or aluminum—it does not really matter), the Filipino home will not be found without a parol (lantern) during the Christmas season. The parol emits a warm, unparalleled representation among holiday adornments and is unique to the Philippines.



The celebration continues through the welcoming of the New Year's and at the strike of midnight, New Year's day is greeted by bursts of firecrackers, folks blowing horns, playing music ever so loud, setting off fireworks,

beliefs such as opening all doors and windows during the first day of the New Year to bring in good luck, noise-banging of pots and pans believed that the noise drives off evil spirits.

Christmas celebration ends after the Feast of the Three Kings January 6. Indeed, while songs may mention snow and sleds, in the Philippines, Christmas has gone beyond a changing of seasons. It has become a state of mind shared by an entire people. 🏠

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Political Forum



It's Important to Shorten Distance Between City Hall, Neighborhoods

by Mayor James K. Hahn

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the City of Los Angeles.

In a short time, with your help, I have worked hard to shorten the distance between City Hall and the neighborhoods we serve. We have made important strides in improving the city by providing better opportunities for our children, implementing a public safety action plan, seeking to increase our affordable housing stock, and making L.A. more business-friendly.

I urge you to join me in welcoming Police Chief William Bratton to our City family. I am confident that Chief Bratton shares my goals for the City of Los Angeles and will help

rebuild the Los Angeles Police Department to restore trust between the Department and the community.

Our city is entering a new phase. I invite you to join me in my efforts to move Los Angeles forward. The voters of Los Angeles sent a strong and clear message recently to keep Los Angeles united. And I encourage you to join with me as we work together to make City government work better for every resident, every business and every neighborhood.

We have a lot to look forward to. Let's work together to make it happen! 🏠

Wanna be heard?

Tell *Alive!* what you think about the mayor's thoughts: talkback@cityemployeesclub.com



Making the West Valley Safer, More Enjoyable

by Dennis P. Zine
Councilmember, Third District

It is with great pleasure that I represent the citizens of the Third Council District in the West San Fernando Valley, which encompasses Canoga Park, Reseda, Tarzana, West Hills, Winnetka and Woodland Hills.

I have promised to work diligently on the problems that affect my constituents so that they may enjoy a better quality of life. I have spent 33 years of my life dedicated to public safety as a member of the Los Angeles Police Department, a vice chair of the Charter Reform Commission, a member of the Board of Directors of The Los Angeles Police Protective League, and I currently serve as the city's representative on the Public Safety and Crime Prevention Steering Committee for the National League of Cities.

Recently, I was sworn in as a Los Angeles Police Department Line Reserve Officer, and had the opportunity to patrol the West Valley with newly appointed Los Angeles Chief of Police William Bratton. I am hard at work on programs that address graffiti abatement, the promotion of Neighborhood Councils and transportation, and I am a firm believer in community policing.

I support educational programs and have created annual scholarships for high schools in

my District amounting to \$10,000. I have formed the Zine P.O.S.S.E. (People Organizing for a Safe Secure Environment), which professionally trains volunteer groups of concerned citizens to rid their communities of blight such as graffiti, abandoned cars, illegal dumping, unkempt properties, illegally posted signs, potholes, etc.

I have been involved with numerous community service organizations such as MADD, Haven Hills Home For Battered Women, and the Jewish Home For The Aging. In order to aid and enhance the communities I serve, I have committed \$25,000 per year from my Council salary to non-profit organizations.

As Chairman of the Personnel Committee, my goal for the next year will be to address the fraud and prevention issues relating to Worker's Compensation.

I will continue to address quality of life and public safety issues throughout my term in office, and remain steadfast in my conviction and desire to make the communities of The West San Fernando Valley safer, more enjoyable places in which to live, work, and play. 🏠

Each month, Alive! invites political leaders to speak directly to City and DWP employees and retirees. Alive! brings you these views as a public service. The opinions of those on this monthly page are independent of Alive! and the City Employees Club of Los Angeles.