



Briar

Patch

Briar Patch Homeowners' Association, Inc. Website: briarpatchnpr.com

6525 Thicket Trail, New Port Richey, FL 34653

December CELEBRATIONS



CHRISTMAS

Christmas time for some is a celebration of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity was not widely observed until after Emperor Constantine (272-337AD) converted to Christianity and declared it the Roman Empire's religion in 336AD.

The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries ago, many people rejoiced during the winter solstice, while the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours on sunlight.

Saturnalia was a Roman festival during the winter solstice, and was dedicated to the agricultural god, Saturn. For many it was the only time of year when they had a fresh supply of meat, and the wine and beer made during the year was finally fermented and ready for drinking. The festival included much merriment and gift giving. The bible does not mention the date of Jesus' birth. It is believed that during the reign of Pope Julius I (337-352AD) the date was chosen December 25 in an effort to Christianize and absorb the traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival (also called the "Feast of the Nativity"). (*Christian writers frequently allude to the symbolism of the rebirth of the sun and the birth of the Son.*)

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Much later, in the early 17th century, a wave of religious reform changed the way Christmas was celebrated in Europe. Puritan forces took over England in 1645; they vowed to rid England of decadence. As part of their effort, Christmas was no longer a raucous celebration from 1659 to 1681. After the American Revolution, English customs eventually fell out of favor. It wasn't until the 19th century that Americans re-invented Christmas. It was declared a Federal Holiday on June 16, 1870. Thereafter, the practice of giving gifts to family members became well established.

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None of the contemporary Christmas customs have their origin in theological or liturgical affirmations, and most are of fairly recent date. Today, most Americans blend religious and secular customs with their own family traditions, often incorporating food, decorations, and rituals from places they or their ancestors once called home. Thus, the Christmas Tree and Advent Calendar came from Germany, Christmas carols and treats came from England, the traditional bakery came from the French, and the name Santa Claus comes from the Dutch Sinterklaas. Some traditions are: picking out a Christmas tree, watching a tree light ceremony, decorating your house and yard with Christmas lights, sending Christmas cards, hanging stockings, baking holiday treats, giving presents, hanging the mistletoe, giving gifts, enjoying a traditional or newly created dinner.

Whether your Christmas celebration is secular or religious, get into the spirit, enjoy the fun of the season, give back to others, feel the love, and delight in the time spent with family and friends.



HANUKKAH

In December, Jewish people around the world recognize the holiday of Hanukkah to celebrate an important battle for their people. It commemorates the victory of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel against their Syrian overlord in a battle (led by a priestly family named Maccabee) to win the right to practice their religion freely (approximately 167 BC to 160 BCE).

According to tradition, the holiday lasts eight days because the Maccabees found only enough oil to kindle the Menorah lamp (the oldest continuously used symbol of Judaism) for one day; but the oil miraculously lasted for eight! One candle is lit on each of the eight days using a shamash (a “helper” candle) so that at the end of the eighth day, nine candles are lit. That is why Hanukkah is also called the “Festival of Lights.”

Unlike many Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is celebrated primarily in the home. It’s considered a “family” holiday; there is no synagogue ritual for it. Some delicious traditional desserts are latkes (potato/onion pancakes) as well as sufganiyot (jelly-filled doughnuts) which are fried in oil symbolizing the miracle of enough oil for the eight candles those many years ago. Games such as Dreidel (a word game) are played by all ages. Gelt (small discs of chocolate wrapped in gold/silver foil) are often used as coins for betting in games. Gifts are exchanged usually on the sixth night and may be monetary but can also be a gift of time as a volunteer. It’s customary during Hanukkah to make donations to nonprofits and other charitable organizations.

The date for the beginning of Hanukkah shifts every year in relation to the solar calendar because the Jewish calendar is both a solar and a lunar. The dates change to address the discrepancy between the two calendars, but the Hebrew date is the 25th of the month of Kislev. (a month that occurs in November-December on the Gregorian calendar.)

This year, Hanukkah begins the evening of Sunday, December 18 and ends on the evening of Monday, December 26. May you have a warm and joyous Festival of Lights!



NEW YEARS EVE

The New Year wasn't always celebrated in January. Throughout antiquity, civilizations around the world developed increasingly sophisticated calendars, typically pinning the first day of the year to an agricultural or astronomical event. The Ancient Roman calendar used to follow the lunar cycle, and had the New Year beginning in March. Sosigenes, an astronomer, convinced Julius Caesar to follow the solar year instead. From 46 BC on, the new year began in January.

The use of a baby as a personification of the New Year has been traced to ancient Greece, where an infant in a basket was paraded around to mark the annual rebirth of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility. Sometimes accompanied by Father Time, “Baby New Year” has appeared in banners, cartoons, posters and cards for several hundred years.

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MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR *Manfred and Carol Heindl*



Manfred & Carol Heindl

We have been enjoying life in Briar Patch for the last six years. I was born in New Jersey and lived there until moving to Florida. Manfred was born in Germany and came to the United States as a young man in 1958. He first lived in New York City, working many hours in two hospitals in order to get his apartment. He eventually married a nurse, bought a house, and started his own business in Metal Finishing for which he studied while in Germany. He named his company Rockland Polishing. He retired after 36 years and sold the business. But, he could not stay home. He got a job at Morrison Parking Authority where he was responsible for the maintenance of the parking meters and collection of the coins every Friday. He left this job primarily because he worked outdoors and the cold, snowy winters got to him. The next job he got was an indoor job working at the Weichert Headquarters in Morris Plains, NJ as an assistant to the office manager. During the ensuing years we both married and divorced. We both attended singles dances and that was where we met on Christmas Eve 1991, started dating, and became engaged several years later.

I eventually moved in with him to his home on Lake Hopatcong, NJ. We had a very good life together, living on the lake and traveling mainly to Bavaria and Tyrol. During this time, I was working at GFI in the payroll department. I worked there for 25 years.

Manfred was ready to retire in 1999 and he sold the house. He wanted to move to Florida, which caught me off guard. I had never thought about moving and leaving New Jersey and my family behind. I have three sisters, one brother, mother, father and a daughter. I decided if we married I would go to Florida. So we married in May 1999 and moved to Florida January 2000. We bought a home on Ellington Way in New Port Richey. Manfred again went back to work at the YMCA as a Certified Personal Trainer. He was contracted out to work at Heritage Spring as their Fitness Director in their gym. I got a job as a Security Officer and later Payroll Coordinator/Office Manager at a security company in Tampa.

After working 16 years it was time for Manfred to finally retire. I also retired. We sold our house and moved to Briar Patch. We adopted a cat which we named Patches. You may have seen him in the lanai sitting on a table watching the neighborhood. We are happy to have bought a home in this lovely community!

December 4 “National” Holiday ~ COOKIE DAY

We are sure glad that cookies were invented and that they are easy to come by whenever a craving strikes. Some home-baked cookies are distributed to family and friends all season long but especially around the holidays.

The origin of the cookie began in Persia in the 7th century, soon after the use of sugar became common in the region. Cake bakers would put a small amount of cake batter in the oven to test the temperature. Voila! The cookie was invented.

Eventually cookie baking spread to Europe. Cookies were common at all levels of society throughout Europe by the 14th century. In most English-speaking countries outside of North America, the most common word for cookie is “biscuit.” In American English, the word “cookie” was derived from the Dutch word “koekje” (little cake).

Cookie baking arrived in America in the 17th century; macaroons and gingerbread cookies were among the popular early American cookies. Before long, these recipes were adapted to fit the life in the New World. As the railroad in the United States expanded in the 1800s and moved west, cookie recipes started to evolve. With the railroad came the ability for people to purchase more varieties of fruits and nuts to add to the recipes.

Soon bakers across the country will be warming up their ovens for holiday baking. So whenever you are enjoying a cookie, dedicate a moment to thank the events and people along the way that led us to this simple pleasure.

MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Getting Ready for a New Year ...

Time to begin welcoming in the new year with all it's promise of fresh goals to be achieved. My friends and I celebrate by playing a game with two resolutions and a lie. We each say three resolutions, one of which we have NO intention of ever attempting. Then the other friends have to guess which one is the fake resolution. It is fun, but can be insightful. At least you will know what your friends think of them.

Resolutions can be a handy guide into the new year. Many people have given up on making any such proclamations. I've hear the refrain, "My resolution is not to make any new year's resolutions." I have to admit, public knowledge of my goals can be held against me, if I don't end up making at least some progress on them. Accountability can be helpful and it can also be too much pressure. Sometime during the new year I like a good reset. Looking back on the past year and noticing accomplishments as well as projecting forward to my next steps can be very helpful with my next steps. The new year is as good a time to do it then any other. So, I will keep on my quest towards personal growth. It beats being stagnant. What will your choice be? I hope you achieve it in your new year!

Jillian LaVelle, Director at Large



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Now every year on December 31, about 1 billion people around the world hold their breath as the clock nears midnight. Eyes once more are turned to the dazzling lights and bustling energy of Times Square. Anticipation runs high. New Year's Eve has become more than just a celebration - it's a global tradition. As the famous New Year's Eve Ball descends atop One Times Square, countless people will be watching nationwide and throughout the world to bid farewell to the departing year and express joy and hope for the year ahead.

So this New Year's Eve, as tradition goes, light some sparklers, sing Auld Lang Syne, make a toast, watch the Times Square Ball drop, kiss at midnight, and make some wonderful memories in the new year!