

Holiday Cheer



Met Area clubs find popular ways to celebrate the holidays and ring in the New Year

BY HANK GOLA

They say there's no place like home for the holidays, but the clubs of the MGA provide a nice alternative. As golf winds down in the winter, the parties heat up.

From the Thanksgiving Deli Nosh at Alpine Country Club to the Family Chanukah Brunch at Old Oaks to Christmas Eve dinner at Huntington Country Club and New Year's Day Champagne Brunch at Garden City Country Club, many clubs get into the spirit of the season.

At Beacon Hill Country Club in Atlantic Highlands, N.J., it all starts with the end of the golf season and the Black Friday Old Course Scramble where, as shoppers mob the malls elsewhere, the original nine holes of the layout are mobbed by more than 90 golfers in a fun format.

From there, the attention turns from the tee to the tree.

No one celebrates Thanksgiving like Alpine, where, the day before, members warm up their palates with a traditional assortment of deli items like corned beef, pastrami, and tongue, at what Food and Beverage Manager Carson Petrea says is the most popular event of the year.

Several clubs, including Beacon Hill, Huntington, and Garden City CC, host holiday Ladies Luncheons where vendors offer their wares. Salem Country Club holds a Holiday Wine Sale where it sells off its wine inventory at cost.

Kids parties are also popular. At Apawamis, general manager and CEO Rory Godfrey jokes that it entails "thousands of kids running around playing and making a mess.... Santa Claus is there, of course, and we have a room dedicated to fake snow they can play in. They all dress up formally and it's very cute."



Holiday revelry includes story-telling by Santa and decorating gingerbread houses at Huntington Country Club (top and right), and an Ugly Sweater Sing-A-Long at Beacon Hill Country Club.

At Huntington, the children's party grew so large they had to split it in half. There is a story-telling session around Santa and the club puts up a giant gingerbread house the kids decorate.

But nothing beats the popularity of kids' Christmas at Garden City. "Every club does a Santa-type day with the kids. We do five of them," says Manny Gugliuzza, Garden City CC's general manager and chief operating officer. "We do two brunches and three dinners, all of them sold out, with between 250 and 280 people at each one. There's a DJ, games for kids, and Christmas characters dressed up and walking around. We have a professional photographer with the pictures on our web page so they can be downloaded."

Huntington's tree lighting is run in combination with a Pro Shop Christmas cocktail party. The club brings in a large tree, a

of their own. "This will be our first year doing it but we've gotten a lot of good response," reports GM Scott Garvin. "It's good networking, it's good for the community, and it highlights the club."

Christmas parties are traditional at most clubs. Apawamis has an annual ball, a black tie event that draws between 250 to 300. Huntington is one of the few clubs open on Christmas Eve.

"It shocked me when they first proposed it three years ago," Meluso admits. "I thought, Who goes out on Christmas Eve? We get 250-300 people. We sell out. It's crazy. They come before or right after Mass. Instead of having to do Christmas Eve and Christmas Dinner at their house, they get Mom out of the kitchen for a night and she only has to worry about the one."

Most clubs have scaled back New Year's Eve. Garden City once



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la Rockefeller Center, and displays it on the lawn where it is lit as carolers sing and hot chocolate, hot toddies, hot pretzels, and roasted chestnuts are passed around; the honor of pulling the switch that lights the tree at Garden City goes to a chosen member and the ceremony is followed by an elegant yet casual candlelight dinner.

Beacon Hill and Garden City both host Ugly Christmas Sweater Night. Beacon Hill GM Alexander Mueller calls his a "fun family dinner" that includes a singalong with one of the members playing the piano. This year, Garden City is hosting the event at its new platform tennis hut.

Salem is inviting the community in with a small-business holiday party, providing a venue for local businesses that can't have a large party

hosted an old school black tie event and has tripled the amount of attendees at its lower-key party that gets everyone, including staff, home early. Gugliuzza sets the tone with an acoustic band and deluxe cocktail stations.

Alpine doesn't go black tie but its champagne toast New Year's Eve bash is still the club's "best party of the year," according to Petrea. Alpine uses the entire clubhouse for it, with a band, entertainment, and several bars. Chef Alex Lee, new to Alpine from Glen Oaks, will be serving up Peking Duck.

"That flips us right into our New Year's Day brunch," Petrea said.

Most clubs shut down for at least a few weeks after that. Everyone is too full anyway. ■