It’s hard to believe but it’s almost holiday season again. But don’t let that stress you out! Whether you want to think of gifts early, or things to do for your company holiday party, the articles in the following pages should help you make it a stress-free season to remember.
The holidays are fast approaching. To get in the spirit of the season, or get some shopping done, or even simply to take a break from it all, consider that stunning neighbor to the north, Ventura County! The fun activities listed below are great for the holidays...or anytime!

**BE A BEACH BUM**
Pack your beach towels, a picnic and plenty of sunscreen to soak up the sun on one of the region’s many pristine, uncrowded beaches. The local shores of Oxnard and Ventura have promenades and piers that will keep you entertained until the sun sets over the Pacific.

**SPLURGE OR SAVE**
Stop and shop at some of California’s best shopping destinations, including Camarillo Premium Outlets and The Collection in Oxnard. Old Town Camarillo, Ventura Harbor Village and Downtown Ventura are teeming with trendy boutiques, cool vintage shops and quirky antique stores that would put a smile on any shopper’s face regardless of budget.

**GET CULTURED**
Home to dozens of theaters, art galleries, museums and historic sites, like Mission San Buenaventura, founded in 1782, Ventura County Coast has a rich early California history with many stories to tell.

**SAVOR LOCAL GOODS**
Located on one of the most bountiful agricultural regions in the country, Ventura County Coast is a great culinary destination to dine farm-to-fork. Visit the local farmers markets for fresh goods, or cruise through the downtown areas to discover new ethnic restaurants, artisan wines and craft beers with local flavor.

**CRUISE AROUND**
Just an hour or two from most SoCal cities, Ventura County Coast is the type of destination you drive to and then leave your keys behind. Hop on the free trolleys in Ventura or the local shuttles in Oxnard; take the Amtrak Surfliner – or better yet, rent a bike and spend a few days on two-wheels, letting the ocean breeze blow through your hair.

**HAVE AN ADVENTURE**
Get in touch with your wild side at the Channel Islands National Park, a collection of five pristine, primitive islands that offer awe-inspiring views and unforgettable experiences. Island activities include hiking, picnicking, whale watching, kayaking, fishing and scuba diving.

**EXPLORE A CLASSIC SEASIDE VILLAGE**
Escape to yesteryear at Ventura Harbor Village, where you can ride a vintage carousel, play arcade games, get your fill of double-scoops at the ice cream parlor, eat fresh-caught fish, rent gear for all kinds of watersports, indulge in a harbor yacht cruise and much more.

**CATCH WAVES**
The Beach Boys sang about the killer surf spots in Ventura so if you’ve ever wanted to learn to surf, this is the place to do it. Sign up for lessons with one of the many organizations in the region and then try your skills at the famous Rincon or Surfer’s Point, regarded as some of the best beach breaks in California.

Learn more at venturacountycoast.com.
Planning for That Big Holiday Office Party

By SYDNEY CHAFFEE

If you have decided to have a holiday office party this year, you have to do some planning. And depending on the size of your business, you may have to start planning well in advance. You can make your holiday office party one to remember – provided you know what is involved in planning the perfect office party. Here are some tips for your holiday party planning:

GET EVERYONE INVOLVED

Discuss the party with your employees and colleagues. Solicit company holiday party ideas from everyone who is interested. This helps in forging a sense of unity and avoiding resentment.

Then, consider forming a committee to organize the party. If your business is smaller, then everyone should be involved.

HOLIDAY PARTY THEMES

Decide on a theme for your holiday party. Having a holiday party theme helps in organizing a more entertaining party.

Try to think a bit differently; go for something new and exciting. Consider taking the company to play a round of golf, visit historical places, or taking a dinner cruise or going to a fine dining restaurant.

The idea here is to opt for a holiday party theme that takes you away from the mundane office environment.

PICK A SUITABLE DATE

Decide on a date that is good for everyone. Christmas Eve usually isn’t very good, as most people want to take off early to be with their families. Make sure your inform everybody well in advance, and that your holiday office party date does not clash with a holiday or fall on the date of an important company event.

Ask your employees if they think it should be held on a weekday or the weekend. This will ensure that everyone will be able to participate.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT LOCATION

The idea behind a holiday office party is for everyone to unwind and enjoy themselves.

Choose a location that is festive, comfortable, and beautiful. When you choose the location, make sure that it is in a location that is convenient for everyone.

FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONSIDERATIONS

Food and beverages are important considerations.

The food should match the season and the holiday.

While doing your holiday party planning, pay special attention to the decorations. They should match the season and the holiday.

GAMES AND ACTIVITIES TO ENJOY

Be sure to plan games and activities that help break the ice.

For example, you can organize games and have singing competitions. You can have prizes for the best-dressed person. Play lively music in the background. Try to hire a DJ if your budget permits.

Remember, this is your opportunity to show your employees your appreciation.

COOL GIFTS AND PRIZES

At the party, give gifts and prizes that are cool, fun, and useful. They can be the latest electronic gadgets, party favors or gift certificates.

Ask all your employees to pitch in when it comes to gift ideas – that way, everyone will feel that they have an opportunity to contribute.

Organizing a great holiday office party can be fun for everyone. Follow the tips above and make your party one to remember!

Sydney Chaffee is a freelance writer.

Nine Gift Exchange Ideas for Your Holiday Party

By TINA DIXON

Whether it’s to save money, boost the fun or create a new tradition, many corporate event planners are looking for new ways to engage in gift giving for those forthcoming holiday parties. Discover nine great holiday gift exchange ideas below:

Drawing Names - To cut down on having to buy for many different people, a group of employees can draw names out of a hat! Instead of each person having to buy for everyone in the group, now each person just buys for one other person. Be sure no one draws their own name, though.

Secret Santa - Building on the drawing names gift exchange idea, Secret Santa keeps it a secret who each person will buy for! Many times even after the gift is given, the identity of their “Santa” is kept secret from the gift recipient.

White Elephant - This is a fun holiday gift exchange idea that goes by many different names! The main idea here is that everyone attending a party brings a gift and for however many gifts are bought, numbers are drawn for opening order. Although they won’t know who will be opening the gift, it doesn’t have to be generic or gender neutral because others will have the opportunity to take it home! The first person to choose a gift opens it. The second person to choose a gift opens theirs and then has the option to keep their own or swap for any other. After the last person picks and opts to swap or not swap, the first person is given the opportunity to swap the gift they ended up with. It’s great fun and a very popular gift exchange idea!

Grab Bag - In this gift exchange, every party attendee brings an unusually shaped gift and secretly sneaks it into a grab bag so no one sees the gifts that are being added. When it comes time for gifts, the bag is brought out with all the mysterious gifts inside. Each person then reaches in and feels around for a gift that they might like to take home!

Auction (live or silent) - Going once! Going twice! Auctions can be great fun and a terrific way to exchange gifts! Each party attendee brings a few gifts (or the hostess can provide all the gifts if the idea is) and they are put on display and up for auction. Each party guest is given a certain number (usually 100) of points with which to bid. Once all of their points have been used to “purchase” auction items, guests can no longer bid on items. A live auction is great fun for a lively party, but if you prefer a more subdued auction, guests can write their bids on paper for each gift.

Best Guess - If your party attendees are big fans of guessing games like Charades or Pictionary, you’re bound to love this fun gift exchange idea! Each person brings a gift or two. When it comes time for gift giving, each is given a turn to hold up their wrapped gift and the group guesses what might be inside. You can give clues or use charades or sketches to help them along (especially if it’s a particularly obscure gift to guess), and the first person to guess just what the gift is gets to keep it!

Charitable Giving - For those organizations passionate about philanthropy, this is a great option. Decide on a charity to donate the money you would ordinarily spend on gift giving to help others. You can all pool your money into a single charity or let each would-be gift recipient choose their own charity.

Recycled Gifts - No, we don’t want you to go rummaging through your cardboards and plastics looking for gifts. This idea is about re-gifting! Rather than holding your holiday party before the holidays, opt for a delayed party in the New Year. The only gift requirement is that you bring a gift you have already received! We all get presents around the holidays that we don’t necessarily need or want. And as they say, one man’s trash is another man’s treasure. Recycle those unwanted gifts for a creative gift exchange idea that won’t cost anyone a single dime!

Homemade Gifts - This is a great frugal gift exchange idea that can be just as exciting as any of the others. Have a holiday party where any of the others. Have a holiday party where the only gifts exchanged are homemade gifts. From homemade cookies to original paintings and ornaments, quilts, knit hats and more, discover how talented your coworkers really are!

Tina Dixon is a freelance writer.
How Holiday Parties Improve Company Morale

If you’re thinking about canceling the annual company holiday party, don’t! Get creative instead. It’s been a tough year with the country experiencing layoffs, skyrocketing unemployment and budget cuts, and your employees are probably long overdue for a morale boost. Planning a successful party takes time, but doesn’t have to break the bank.

Venue: If possible, get out of the office. An afternoon affair for 2-3 hours at a local restaurant or hotel will be less expensive than an evening event on a premium holiday date.

Date: Have a few dates and times to run by the boss to make sure all important people are available for the party. Finding out the boss is in Tahiti on your party date would be a disaster.

Time: Start your party after lunch and end before dinner to eliminate the need to serve a full meal.

Invitations: Once you have your date, time and venue, order fabulous invitations. An awesome holiday party invitation sets the tone for the occasion and lets employees know what you have planned. Don’t send out a boring memo or uninteresting letter sheet of “who, what, where and when” stats. There are affordable custom printed invitations available that will get party goers excited about your event.

Food: Choosing an array of appetizers and sandwiches will lower your food costs, eliminate chefs and limit the number of attendants needed.

Desserts: A dessert station with mini bite-size portions cuts costs as most guests take a few bites and leave the rest.

Drinks: With an afternoon party, you could eliminate alcoholic beverages and potential liabilities too. Choosing to serve only wine and beer might be another alternative and skips the expense of an open bar that might be expected at an evening party.

Entertainment: You can hire a DJ instead of live entertainment or maybe a magician or a fortune teller (only good news) would be fun for your crowd.

Appreciation: No matter what type of party you decide on, be sure to emphasise that you value your employees. Give them a boost to bring in a wonderful new year, your company’s morale might depend on it.

Information for this article was provided by AnnouncingIt.com. More information can be found online at announcingit.com.