

# They do Santa's hard work

and he gets all the credit!

BY DEBBIE KOONTZ

LEBANON — The eager little workers packed in the building to hear all the latest news on Christmas toys, gifts, and decorations before preparing their battle plan for the upcoming holiday season. They've gathered annually like this for years, sharing ideas and techniques to make their chore a little bit easier. They buzzed on and on about too much to do in so little time and about how they always have to help old Saint Nick because he never seems to come through in the end. Wrapped packages, toys, wreaths and goodies filled the room and the workers took the time to examine each.

No, it's not the annual convention of the North Pole Elves, Santa's Central Pennsylvania Fan Club, or even the Supporters for the Betterment of Saint Nick, but rather the annual homemaker's holiday program for Lebanon County, held each day, Monday through Wednesday.

The little elves of Lebanon County are so enthusiastic about Christmas, in fact, that plans for a four-day program are being discussed for next year. Although 1140 homemakers were able to see the program this year, over 200 were turned away. Next year the program will be held at the Prescott Fire Company Hall the first week of November.

Though the Extension home economists will begin preparing next year's program already this week, the participants are busy preparing for this Christmas

thanks to ideas they received at the holiday program.

Five speakers addressed the homemakers, the first being Donald Laysar from Laysar's Flowers in Myerstown, who spoke on care and buying of poinsettias.

"Don't expose the plant to too high or too low temperatures. Don't let the clerk talk you in to running from the store to your car with it uncovered. And don't place it by your car heater," he advised.

Next, Karen Sandoe, Extension home economist, presented "Hang it, pack it, show it off," a talk on several gifts to make at home. For the man, often known as the hardest to buy for at Christmas, Karen displayed a travel kit she created from a finger towel and a checked washcloth.

Alletta Schadler showed the members how to wrap gifts in a special way. Several ideas were to dip neatly folded tissue paper in food colors and liquid fabric dye and allow to dry; stamp a child's name on wrapping paper making it a personal gift; and dropping string in dye and dropping on plain paper to create an abstract effect.

Following a brief show and tell time in which several participants displayed and explained their own crafts, Ann Wertsner Wood, gardener and author, presented "make your own holiday decorations."

Wood's most important tip in creating decorations was to "include something dull, something bright and something shuny — then you will have a successful cen-



For a Christmas idea that can be used for or by children, cut out Christmas characters, presents, bells, etc., and paste them on construction paper for tree decorations, cards,

placemats, table cards and gift wrapping. Find figures to cut in catalogs, wrapping paper, old books, and old Christmas cards.

terpiece and a beautifully decorated home."

More advice included, "Freeze your candles and then they'll burn up to twice as long."

Following a vegetable soup luncheon, Susan Doyle offered recipes for a healthier holiday. Included were recipes intended to cut down on calories and sugar, reduce fat and salt, and boost the nutritive value of foods.

Find several of her recipes below.

#### SUGARLESS COOKIES

1 3/4 c. flour  
2 t. baking powder  
1/2 t. salt  
1/2 t. cinnamon  
3/4 c. orange juice  
1/2 t. grated orange rind  
1/2 c. minus 1 T. vegetable oil  
1 egg  
1/2 c. chopped walnuts  
1/2 c. raisins

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Combine dry ingredients. Add remaining ingredients; mix well.

Drop by teaspoon on ungreased cookie sheet to make 32-34 cookies

When done, remove from pan and cool.

For a variation, add 1/4 t. ground cloves for a spice drop OR instead of raisins, add 1/2 c. chopped or whole cranberries.



Gather homemade leaves into a beautiful Thanksgiving wreath made of rust, brown, and gold. Stuff them with fiberfill for a full effect, then sew them to a wire wreath circle. Add a bow and stand back and admire your work.

#### DIET STRAWBERRY CHEESECAKE

2 T. margarine  
1/2 c. graham cracker crumbs  
8 oz. low-fat cottage cheese  
1/3 c. evaporated skim milk  
2 envelopes unflavored gelatin  
2 T. sugar  
1/2 c. orange juice  
1/2 t. grated orange rind  
2 egg whites  
1/8 t. salt  
2 T. water

1 c. fresh strawberries, crushed

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Melt margarine in 9-inch cake pan. Add crumbs, mix. Press mixture over bottom of pan. Bake 5 to 7 minutes. Cool.

Sieve cottage cheese or puree in blender or food processor. Add milk and stir until smooth. Chill.

In saucepan, mix 1 1/2 envelope gelatin and 1 T. sugar. Add juice and rind. Heat over low heat, stirring constantly until gelatin is dissolved. Remove from heat. Let stand at room temperature.

In medium bowl, beat egg whites with salt until stiff.

Fold in gelatin and cottage cheese. Pour over crumbs. Refrigerate until set before adding glaze.

#### GLAZE

Mix remaining gelatin with water and 1 T. sugar. Heat until gelatin is dissolved. Stir in strawberries. Pour mixture over cheesecake and spread with spatula.

Refrigerate until firm

#### HOT SPICED CIDER

2 2/3 c. apple cider  
1 1/3 c. water  
1 cinnamon stick  
1/2 t. whole cloves  
1/2 t. whole allspice

orange or lemon slice for garnish

Simmer ingredients (except fruit slices) together in saucepan for 10 minutes. Strain. Serve hot with orange or lemon slice and cinnamon stick for garnish. Makes 8 servings at 44 calories per serving.



With some bright colored material you can make leaves to produce a wall hanging, left, or a pumpkin, right. Simply cut a pattern like shown in the center, sew together, and top stitch. It's as simple as falling leaves.



You can make these cute clowns and dolls too if you use your imagination. The designer says she just cuts until it fits. The clowns begin

with a styrofoam ball placed on a piece of wood, as shown at left.

