

TAKING TIME

by Rebecca Escott
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Extension Home Economist
For Lehigh County



The fall and winter months bring many families together for Thanksgiving, Kwanza, Hanukkah, Christmas, and other holiday family reunions. These are times when families are celebrated, and yet many times this past week, I heard people lamenting—regretting that not everyone would be together this week or that they wouldn't be able to travel this year. Staying connected with family even when you're physically miles apart is very important. I just commented to a friend that perhaps her

sister-in-law was afraid that if everyone didn't gather for the meal that they weren't really "connected" and committed to being a family anymore. I believe that a family can be connected and committed to each other even when they are miles apart.

According to research, traditions and rituals help families maintain strong bonds. If you're feeling disconnected and want to strengthen the ties with family (or even special friends), here are some ideas to try.

You might make a ritual of calling members who are not present in the late afternoon or set aside time to write letters to people who are in different communities to share how you spent your day and to convey your hopes and holiday wishes with them. Assemble a letter writing kit with stationery, postcards, stamps, envelopes, return address labels, ink pads and stamps, stickers, etc. For one half hour, sit as a family and write to relatives. Each person selects a different person to write to. Young children can draw pictures. At the end of the letter, other family members can add a P.S. if they wish. These letters can be sent in advance and then read before the meal or opening of gifts.

Even though you may not be together, family members may agree to all serve a special menu item that has been a part of your past family gatherings. Or, send a piece of dinnerware, serving plate, or table decoration to a family member in another state. On the

special days when you can't be together, you can celebrate your relationship by using the china, bread basket, or candlesticks. On some dinner tables, that will mean having quite a collection of unmatched items—each with a story. Your family can take time out from feasting to talk about the members who are "with you" through the memorabilia.

Another alternative is to tape record yourself reading a storybook and send the recording to a child or grandchild in another place. For an added treat, include the book so they can "read along."

Some families stay connected to "family" and to their heritage by participating in similar routines even though they are not in the same households. In my growing

up family, keeping an advent calendar was an important family ritual. Now as an adult, I purchase calendars for all my siblings' families. Periodically, I check in with them to see how theirs is. Just knowing that each day they are opening a window like I am keeps me feeling connected.

Consider spending the afternoon doing one of those jobs that always gets put off—label photos and place them in albums. You can reminisce and sense your connections to family and friends (and get some work done, too).

These are just a few of the hundreds of ways that you can stay connected mentally and emotionally to family members when the holidays find you physically miles apart.

Holiday Decorating

Get in the holiday spirit by participating in the "Holiday Decorating Workshop", December 3, 1994 from 1:00 PM-3:00 PM at PECO Energy Company's Muddy Run Information Center. This is a family event where each can make and take a simple holiday craft decoration.

There will be candy ornaments, wreaths, swags, and additional natural items that can be made in one

afternoon. A small fee may be charged for particular supplies, however, most ornaments will be free of charge. Participants can drop in anytime between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. at the Muddy Run Information Center.

For more information please call PECO Energy Company Muddy Run Information Center at 717-284-2538.



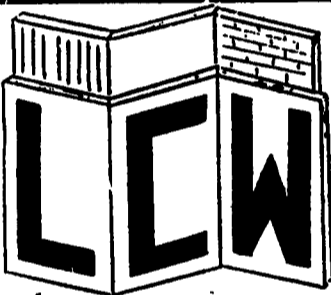
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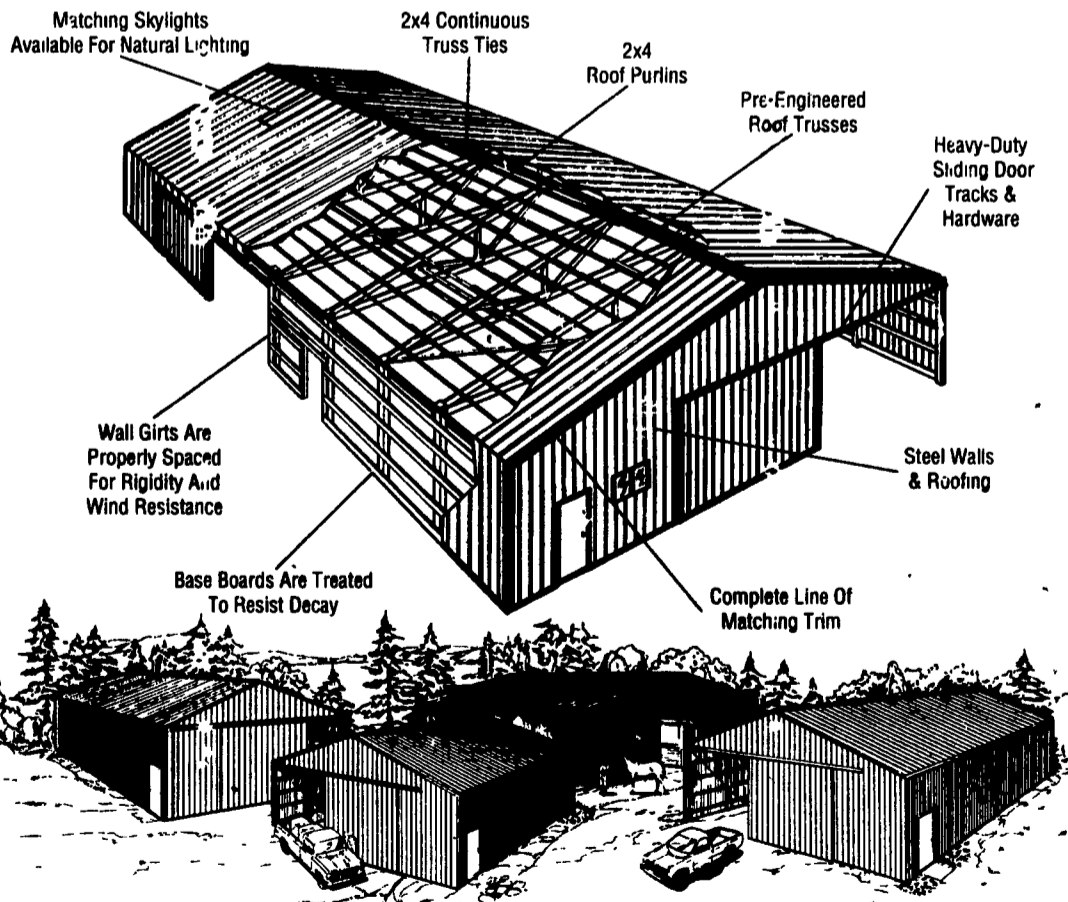
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