

Holiday escape

The days before Christmas break keep travel agents busy planning Holiday get-aways for those fortunate to escape the balmy December weather in State College. Travel agent Peggy Shive and Centre for Travel receptionist Mary Ann Rallo arrange a trip for Jackie Mencher (graduate-business administration).



Photo by Greg Midgley

Holiday blues: hectic shopping stress and high expectations can dampen spirits

By MARY BETH HORWATH
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

This year's Christmas tree is the most beautiful ever, the gifts for everyone are perfect, and the annual family get-together is happy and peaceful — no, not for everyone. For some people, Christmas can be a depressing time of the year.

One reason people feel disappointed during the Christmas season is because of the enormous stress the holiday creates. Two psychologists have established a universal stress scale after interviewing hundreds of people and asking them to rate stressful events in their life. Points were determined by how much a person must readjust his or her life after or during the event. On the scale, Christmas rated a 12 out of a maximum 100 points — higher than the rating for violations of the law.

Selecting, purchasing and wrapping gifts, and preparing for family and friends' visits contributes to the stress. Worrying about the suitability of gifts bought for family and friends causes substantial emotional strain, and visiting with relatives is another source of tension.

Christmas can create unusual family problems or intensify problems that are avoided during the rest of the year, according to psychologists Marcia Lasswell and Norman Lobenz. For example, many young married or engaged couples argue about which family to spend the holiday with.

While other holidays can be shared, Christmas is a more family-oriented holiday. An alcohol problem, which is controlled during the year, can get out of hand during the array of holiday parties. Financial problems are a common source of stress. Families

copied with a tight budget are under even more financial pressure during Christmas. Lasswell and Lobenz, who write a magazine column on coping with stress, said another reason people feel disappointed at Christmas is because their expectations are too great.

"After all the shopping, wrapping, cooking and celebrating, the holiday never seems to be as much fun as it should be," Lasswell said.

Attempting to recapture the magic of childhood Christmases also can lead to disappointment. In many families, Christmas is for the children, and they are the center of attention. For adults, the holiday never seems to be as much fun.

"An unusual aspect of the expectation-disappointment syndrome is that people don't seem to learn from year to year not to expect too much from Christmas," Lasswell said. "People say the blues catch them by surprise every Christmas."

Not only can normally stable people become depressed at Christmas, people who are already depressed because of illness, poverty or the death of a loved one can feel worse because they cannot share in the gaiety of the holiday, Lasswell and Lobenz said. They feel lonely and alienated.

Depression during the holidays is not caused only by emotional aspects, it can also be a chemical or biological reaction. Researchers have discovered that the cycle of eating sweets and drinking alcohol has been linked to short-term depression during the holidays. Alcohol inhibits the absorption of sugar into the brain, and when sweets are consumed with the alcohol, the sugar level in the bloodstream rises. This can cause depression in some people.

Although enormous amounts of food may be eaten

during Christmas, it is often not in the form of balanced meals. This nutritional imbalance, paired with increased activity and strain, can also evoke feelings of exhaustion and irritation.

Precautions can be taken to reduce the possibility of depression, although reducing your expectations of the holiday may be difficult. Eating a balanced diet and moderating alcohol intake are the first steps. Doctors recommend that alcohol not be consumed with sweets.

Trying to reduce stress on yourself and on your family can also help. For example, instead of letting one person cook the entire Christmas meal, each family member should contribute something.

Lasswell and Lobenz suggest some more significant steps, such as talking about family problems that occur during Christmas before they happen. Also, they suggest that changing certain holiday traditions can help. For example, instead of rushing between families on Christmas morning, a young couple can start a new tradition of opening gifts on Christmas Eve at one house.

Setting a monetary limit on family gifts can sometimes cause more problems than it solves. But Lasswell recommends setting a limit if extravagant gifts get out of hand, and if the family members agree to it.

"Giving expensive gifts is often a problem with grandparents," Lobenz said. "Particularly when one set of grandparents gives extravagant gifts, and one set cannot afford to."

Lasswell and Lobenz recommend teaching children not to judge the gift-giver by the gift. Christmas is one of the most important times of the year to teach values to children, they said, and to help them have a realistic attitude.

Christmas

Continued from Page 10, too modest to accept credit for his generosity.

After the wrapping paper is pushed aside, the office cocktail parties are over, and you've exchanged most of your gifts, the holiday season reaches its climax with the celebration of the New Year.

Before the presence and popularity of the late Guy Lombardo's music, Times Square and the television marathon of football games, many people would spend New Year's Day cleaning houses and stables to protect everyone in the home from evil.

Some would open all the doors and windows in the house a few minutes before midnight on Dec. 31 and would leave them open until the clocks struck 12. It was called "Letting the old year out and the new year in."

Whether you choose to chop down your own tree, make your own cards and gifts or face the combat of shopping in stores that resemble war zones, the spirit

of the holiday season can remain a traditional one when we appreciate some of the old customs and remember their importance.

Mom and Dad

Continued from Page 8, Auditorium, said Gloria Newton, Publicity and Information Specialist for the Artists Series.

You can also purchase subscriptions for the next Artists Series season that begins in April by contacting the Artists Series office in Pine Cottage, Newton said.

If you do not think any of these gift ideas will send your parents dancing gleefully out in the snow, perhaps you might consider giving them memberships to a health and fitness spa, or a collection of books by their favorite author, or even a portrait of yourself to replace the one that has been hanging in your living room since your high school days.

And, of course, if all else fails, there is a sale on ties and cologne this week down at . . .

Hanukkah

Continued from Page 11, There are Hanukkah sales, commercials and advertisements, she said. However, many of the more traditional Jews do not give gifts on Hanukkah.

"Hanukkah is not a gift-giving holiday. It's a dedication, remembrance-type holiday. Only as a result of the society we live in is Hanukkah a gift-giving holiday," Glass said.

In Jerusalem, there is a large celebration at the Western Wall, the only standing remnant of the Second Temple — the one the Maccabees recaptured from the Greeks 2,000 years ago, she said.

"After a great torch Menorah is lit, all the youth from all over Israel gather and march together into the area of the Western Wall, singing and dancing, especially the first and last nights of Hanukkah," she said.

"It's a very joyous, festive holiday, and one that holds much meaning to the Jewish people as a nation."

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