

Celebrating Our Diversity! Multicultural Holidays

Nowhere is our fascinating Canadian cultural mosaic displayed more joyously than in the many diverse celebrations taking place around the turning of the year. Each faith and cultural group honours its own unique time-honoured traditions that

reflect the people and who they are. *Leader Magazine* is proud to share the basic customs of various cultures and faiths and how they celebrate their end-of-year holidays with joy and enthusiasm. Leaders may gain a new understanding of the family traditions of their youth.

Chinese New Year

“Gung Hay Fat Choy!”

This is the Chinese greeting for the New Year. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have celebrated the New Year with colour and vibrance. Firecrackers are used to ward off evil spirits, and in the Chinatown areas of cities across Canada, colourful dragons lead the way in a joyous parade accompanied by the sounds of gongs and drums. In China, New Year is the most important holiday of the year.

Every Chinese individual celebrates his/her birthday on New Year's Day, regardless of the month in which he or she was actually born. The Chinese calendar follows the moon and divides the years into groups of twelve, with each year named after a different animal; all those born in the year of a specific animal are believed to share its traits. The first of the twelve years is the Year of the Rat, followed by the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. Since the calen-

dar is based on the lunar year, the date of the Chinese New Year changes each year.

As in many cultures, the Chinese believe that the New Year is a new beginning, a fresh start to everything. The house is thoroughly cleaned from top to bottom. Therefore, on New Year's Eve, everyone must be washed and clean. Sweets are a traditional New Year's morning treat, to start the New Year on a sweet note.

When you visit a Chinese home, you may wonder why there is a red,



Ringin' in the holidays is so much fun - especially at Beavers!

Photo: Jessie MacLeod

diamond-shaped sign on the doorway! Red is a very important colour for the Chinese – they display this fondness using small signs intended to give good fortune to all who enter. It's usually hung upside down.

It's a lot of fun for Chinese children, who receive "red pockets," with money inside from all their married relatives and friends. Only single people, or children, can receive these "red pockets".

Kwanzaa

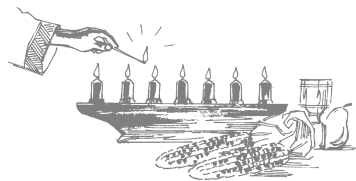
Kwanzaa is a unique African celebration which focuses on the traditional values of family, community responsibility, and self-improvement. It's a time of faith and celebration for African people, their ancestors and their culture, whether they live in Canada or elsewhere in the world. Kwanzaa has become increasingly popular since its founding in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. More than 18 million people worldwide observe the festivities. Kwanzaa is based on the Nguzo Saba (seven guiding principles), one for each day of the observance, and is celebrated yearly from December 26th to January 1st.

Gifts

Kuumba (creativity) is greatly encouraged. Not only is Kuumba one of the seven principles, it also brings a sense of personal satisfaction and en-

hances the spirit of Kwanzaa. Handmade, affordable, educational and artistic gifts are the hallmarks of this holiday. Parents and children exchange gifts on January 1st, the last day of Kwanzaa.

Ceremonies and cultural expressions are highly encouraged when celebrating Kwanzaa



The Kwanzaa Feast Or Karamu

Traditionally held on December 31st (participants celebrating New Year's Eve, should plan their Karamu early in the evening), Karamu is a very special event as it is the one Kwanzaa event that brings African people closer to their culture and roots. Ceremonies and cultural expressions are highly en-

couraged. Decorations are usually in an African motif that utilizes a black, red, and green color scheme. A large Kwanzaa setting should be placed in the middle of the room where the Karamu will take place. Rejoicing, and recommitment to faith concludes the ceremonies accompanied by a farewell statement and a call for cooperation and harmony.

Chanukah/Hanukkah

For Jewish people around the world, Hanukkah is known as the Festival of Lights. It begins on the 25th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev, but the starting date on the western calendar varies from year to year.

The Miracle

It is a holiday which celebrates a miracle. Many years ago in Israel, formerly known as Judea, lived a Syrian king, Antiochus. He ordered the Jewish people to reject and turn their backs on their belief and their faith. Many refused, such as Judah Maccabee.

Judah and his four brothers formed an army and chose as their name the word "Maccabee," which means hammer. They fought for three long years but ultimately drove the Syrians out of Israel; reclaiming their temple in the city of Jerusalem. They cleansed the building of the Greek symbols, and on the 25th day of the month of Kislev,

**Making menorahs is a great way
to get into the holiday spirit.**



Photo courtesy of Howard Ostera

the job was finished and the temple was rededicated.

The Maccabees wished to light the eternal light, known as the *N'er Tamid*, which is present in every Jewish house of worship. Once lit, the oil lamp should never be extinguished – but they found only a drop of oil to light the lamp. But the tiny bit of oil lasted for not one, but for eight days – a miracle.

Menorah

Family Hanukkah celebrations include feasting and gift-giving, and worshipping at synagogue. The house is thoroughly cleaned, and food must be *kosher* – produced in accordance with Jewish law. The Menorah, a candelabra that symbolizes the great miracle on which this festival is based, is lit (one candle is lit for each of the eight days of the celebration). It is a very special time for Jewish people around the world.

Ramadan

You may have heard Muslim friends talk about Ramadan – their special holiday which takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It occurs during different seasons depending on the cycle of the calendar. All adults who have reached the age of puberty (usually 12 years of age) are expected to observe a strict fast which lasts the entire month. They are also expected to share their food with a poor person during this time. People who are ill during Ramadan and unable to fast may continue their fast at a later time during the year.

Strict restraints

Strict and specific restraints are placed on Islamic followers at the time of Ramadan. They are not to eat or drink during the daylight hours, but they may break the fast at sunset. Ramadan is a time to demonstrate self-mastery and self-restraint.

A time of prayer

Of course Muslims spend a good deal of time praying, worshipping and considering their strong faith during this season. They worship the god Allah, and recite passages from the holy book, the Koran. Despite its restrictions, Ramadan is a very joyful time for Muslims. There is a real atmosphere of celebration after sunset – with visits to family and friends. Fireworks are often displayed on the 27th day of Ramadan, to celebrate the

Night of Power - the time that Muhammad first received revelation of the Koran in the year 610.

Christmas

Many ancient cultures enjoyed a celebration or festival to mark the winter solstice – in Scandinavia, this period of festivities first became known as Yule. The joy of finally ending summer's work and enjoying the fruits of the season was cause for much celebration.

The Christmas carol gradually became associated with the birth of Christ.

In the British Isles, the Celts revered mistletoe and holly. These important plants became symbols of celebration and fertility, and were used to adorn houses, much like they are today.

By the beginning of the Middle Ages, new customs began to emerge; the most prominent of which was the Christmas carol, which had gradually become associated with the birth of Christ.

Nativity scenes were said to have originated by Saint Francis in Italy, as a tool to enlighten the people by offering spiritual knowledge.

Celebrating Christmas has been controversial since its inception. Since numerous festivities found their roots in exuberant and sometimes excessive pagan practices, they were greatly frowned upon by conservatives within the Church. Even today, many people feel that the commercialization, gift-giving and over-celebrating is contrary to the true spirit of Christmas.

The earliest English reference to December 25th as Christmas Day did not come until A.D. 350, when it was declared the official date for celebrating Christmas by Pope Julius I. It somehow made sense that this time of their winter festival would also be the time to celebrate the birth of Christ: a bright, joyous light in a time of cold darkness.

Santa Claus

Of course, you can't write about Christmas without mentioning Santa Claus. Though he takes many forms and different costumes throughout the world, it's believed his roots came from an ancient Bishop, Saint Nicholas, from a city named Myra in Turkey. Nicholas became widely known for his kind acts and giving to the poor; his feast is celebrated every December 6.

Whatever you do for the holidays...may you be blessed with all the joy your celebrations bring.m

Message from the Deputy Executive Commissioner, Central Canada

During the past several years Scouts Canada has initiated a number of changes at various levels of our organization that have affected structure, staffing, and processes. In an effort to focus our energy on achieving our Mission, I promise to DO MY BEST to keep Central Canada volunteers informed on a regular basis. Starting in January 2005, Quebec and Ontario volunteers will receive "Central Canada Notes," a special addition inserted regularly into your *Leader Magazine*.

Your comments and suggestions on content are most welcome at kderry@sympatico.ca.

Kim Derry
Deputy Executive Commissioner, Central Canada

Remember to register for the Central Canada Jamboree (CCJam '05)! Check out www.ccjam05.org for early registration bonus information.