



Christmas in the sunny south



Photo by Melanie Conner/The Antarctic Sun

Dining room attendants at McMurdo Station sing "Galley Smells" to the tune of "Jingle Bells" during their evening Christmas performance on Friday. From left to right, Ben "Knife" Cutler, Joy Sichveland, Kate Finnegan, Todd Wesselhoeft, Kim Orrico and Lacey Qualls. The song was written by Kelly Lind.

By Melanie Conner
Sun staff

If Christmas costs money, Antarctic participants aren't buying.

Constant daylight and unseasonably warm summer temperatures on a continent devoid of family traditions, old friends, favorite sweets, smells of pine, spiced apple and freshly-baked cookies can make Christmas in Antarctica feel like something made up and ill-timed.

"Last night at 1 a.m. the sun was in my eyes," said Shandra Cordovano, a McMurdo Station dining room attendant from Colorado "That doesn't feel like Christmas."

Five days before Christmas, Cordovano and other dining attendants discussed Christmas during a break before the lunch crowd arrived. One girl quietly read a travel guide for Fiji while others complained of endless blue skies and feelings of holiday lethargy. Their mood as well as many others was absent of the holiday cheers found in

See Christmas on page 4

Answers from the stars or heavens?

By Kristan Hutchison
Sun staff

Astrophysicists look to the heavens for answers, but not necessarily to God.

A survey of the National Academy of Sciences in late 1996 found 93 percent of the members were non-believers. No specific survey has been done of National Science Foundation grantees, but a quick perusal of people's whereabouts on any given Saturday night and Sunday morning confirms more McMurdo residents take their wine at the bars than the Communion table.

The number of people in the Chapel of the Snows on any given Sunday is smaller than Catholic Father Kevin Mears finds in similarly-sized villages in New Zealand. But the low attendance may have as much to do with people being away from their home congregations and busy working as it does with their religious beliefs, Mears said.

"The ones that do come are earnest and appreciative," Mears said.

On Christmas the chapel is generally

See Belief on page 6

"In this area, as in other areas of life, conflict only occurs when minds are closed to the possibility that the other side may also contain certain truths."

-Father Kevin Mears

INSIDE

Firsts to the Pole retrieved, remembered

Page 5

The greening of Antarctica

Page 10

Quote of the Week

"I went for one walk and thought, 'Unless I go 500 more miles it's kind of pointless.'"

- Field guide returning from a plateau camp

Ross Island Chronicles

By Chico

Hey dad, mom says that if I continue to be good, Santa will bring me something for Christmas.

I wrote him a letter and told him I wanted a howitzer so I can blow all the orcas out of the water.

What do you think Santa is going to bring you dad?

Son, Christmas isn't about getting presents. It's about peace on Earth and getting along with each other.

I t's about showing compassion, generosity and forgiveness. Besides, who wants materialistic things. They don't last long.

Dad, I don't think Santa is bringing you anything this year, is he?

Cold, hard facts

Shopping and eating

Average monthly sales at the McMurdo Station store during the austral winter: **\$25,000.**

Average monthly summer sales: **\$100,000.**

Sales for the first 23 days of November: **\$101,645.**

Date with most sales: **Nov. 20 (\$8,674).**

Date with fewest sales: **July 4 (\$588).**

Estimated date on which the holiday shopping rush ended: **Thanksgiving.**

Pounds of fresh produce and groceries scheduled for shipment for Christmas dinner at McMurdo, the South Pole and remote camps: **12,500.**

Pounds of king crab legs, N.Y. steaks and duck, respectively: **1,200, 500, 400.**

Estimated number of desserts being prepared per person: **2.5.**

Source: Jim Scott, RPSC; galley staff

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Christmas

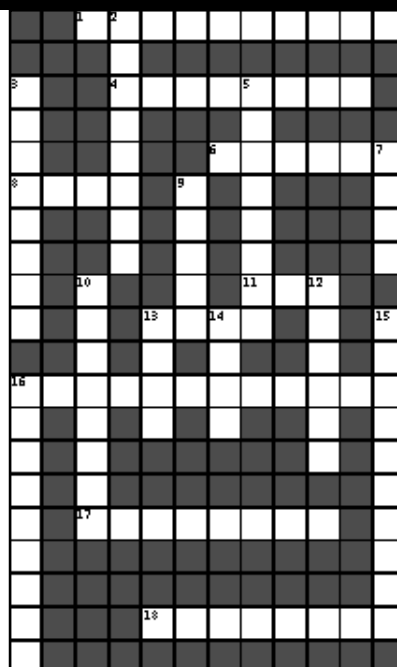
Crossword answer on page 6

ACROSS

- 1) The only kind of tree you'll see on the Ice
- 4) Annual New Year's music fest at McMurdo
- 6) The season of Christmas on the Ice
- 8) Non-candy version used to mark routes
- 11) Miles in South Pole's Race Around the World
- 13) Happens at midnight, but no candles needed
- 16) McMurdo's holiday mountaintop race
- 17) No wood, so no fireplace to hang this
- 18) Lots of these veggies key to holiday glee

DOWN

- 2) Santa's helpers there; explorers' sleeping bags here
- 3) Holds layers of snow, not pumpkin
- 5) If Santa doesn't come, these outsiders will
- 7) This shoreside gift is small, durable, free - and illegal
- 9) Lives further from the S. Pole than anyone
- 10) Antarctic slang for a feast (2 words)
- 12) The only way to send last-minute gifts home
- 13) If Santa gets any, it will be powdered
- 14) One person's trash; another's present
- 15) Provide the extra help needed for the feast
- 16) With no trees, these hang elsewhere



GET READY FOR SPAGHETTI

Italian chef for the stars and scientists cooks at McMurdo

By Kristan Hutchison
Sun staff

Hundreds of names are scribbled on the wooden walls of a hut at the Italian station at Terra Nova Bay, but only one is painted over the door outside - Attilio Pettirossi.

He was the one who filled the dining hut with warm and mouth-watering smells, serving up pastas and sauces each night to the men erecting Terra Nova Station in 1985. This week he brought those same smells and tastes to McMurdo Station.

As a gesture of goodwill, the Italians sent Pettirossi to McMurdo Station to cook three dinners. He arrived Dec. 19, with two pallets of Italian groceries totaling 1,400 kilos.

"We're hoping that it's going to be a nice morale boost and that it will provide an opportunity, kind of a learning experience," said Kim Givens, station service manager. "This is the real, authentic Italian food here, not the old store-bought Chef Boyardee."

Pettirossi has been cooking for 48 years, since he was 16 years old. One of the dishes he might make comes from his hometown of Bracciano, about 19 miles (30 km) from Rome. There, a lake near a medieval castle provides the luccio fish, which are dipped in egg and flour, lightly fried, then cooked over a grill with laurel leaves for flavoring.

Pettirossi cooks in the air as he speaks, his hands slicing imaginary prosciutto ham, smoothing unseen sauces and tossing together the pasta until the air seems to sizzle with imagined dishes.

Though fluent in food, Pettirossi's English is rudimentary. Mark Hutchinson and Michael Presto acted as interpreters in the kitchen, since both speak Italian and recently spent time in Italy.

In his first perusal of the McMurdo kitchen Pettirossi had only good things to say.

"The kitchen is well organized and coordinated well," Pettirossi said through Hutchinson. "The kitchen is big enough and it has enough selection to accommodate a lot of people. It's a tough job being a cook, because everyone has different tastes."

Pettirossi oversaw kitchen improvements in Terra Nova Bay, where he cooked for five seasons. In his traditional chef's hat and stark white uniform, Pettirossi always cut a distinguished figure at the station, said Umberto Ponzio, the expedition leader at Terra Nova.

"He's very meticulous," Ponzio said.

For 30 years Pettirossi was head cook of the cafeteria for Casaccia Research Center of the Italian National Agency for New Technology, Energy and Environment. He also runs a private catering company frequently hired by movie producers, including Franco Zeffirelli and Roberto Benigni.

"Attilio is very, very expert," Ponzio said. "Normally Attilio is the cook of the team cinématique when they produce a film."

Pettirossi was cooking for Benigni's current film, "Pinocchio," when he was called upon to come to Antarctica again.

"It's a useful opportunity for him to make other contacts and it's a real pleasure for him to come to Antarctica," Pettirossi said through Hutchinson.

He's cooked for both American and Italian casts. The American casts tend to be larger, partly because they bring their families, Pettirossi said. The Americans also wanted food all the time, while the Italians ate meals at set times.

"So it's always a pleasure to cook for the Americans, but it's a little harder," Pettirossi said through Hutchinson. "There's a high expectation of the Italian cooks and cuisine."

Benigni requested Pettirossi's eggplant parmesan twice a week and his riso con gamberoni or rice with prawns once a week. Some of his other specialties are tagliatelle al funghi porcini and spaghetti alla carbonara, a spaghetti made with eggs, olive oil, bacon, parmesan and pepper.

"The difficulty is to serve the plate, the eggs, they can't be too cooked or too watery," Pettirossi said through Hutchinson. "They have to be a cream."

In McMurdo he had to stick to dishes that can be made in quantities to serve the almost 1,000 people at the station for the holidays, such as meat-filled tortellini with a sauce made of tomato, béchamel, butter and parmesan.

"The tomato sauce and the béchamel, they really go well together because it really is creamy. If you use just tomato it becomes too dry," Pettirossi said through Hutchinson.

Tonight will be the final dinner by Pettirossi at McMurdo Station. McMurdo will stick with a traditional Christmas dinner, Givens said.

Pettirossi will spend Christmas at Terra Nova Bay before flying back through McMurdo and Christchurch on his return to Rome.

"It's a beautiful event," said Ponzio.



Photo by Melanie Conner/The Antarctic Sun

Italian chef Attilio Pettirossi gives instructions while preparing a tortellini dish Friday night.

Recipe sketches

These are provided without precise amounts, because of the difficulty of translating. Use them as rough guidelines.

Saltimbocca alla Romana

On a thin round of veal, lay a mint leaf and a slice of prosciutto. Dip in flour and pound the prosciutto into the veal. Heat butter and oil in a pan and fry the veal, turning to each side. Sprinkle with salt and splash with white wine. Cook 10 minutes, then serve with fresh peas.

"It's a great plate," Pettirossi said.

Spaghetti alla rigoletto

Thinly slice prosciutto ham and fry lightly in a small amount of butter. Grind on fresh tomato. Add a very little salt. Mix in cooked spaghetti pasta, a little basil, parmesan and olive oil.

"The prosciutto transmits the flavors of the tomatoes," Pettirossi said.

Eggplant rolls

Thinly slice eggplant, salt and let it drain. Fry the eggplant rounds. Roll each eggplant piece with a slice of mozzarella and fresh tomato, hold with toothpick and cook for a few minutes.

"It's another recipe you will never find in any other, a recipe that I invented," Pettirossi said.

Christmas

From page 1

small and large cities throughout the U.S. All agreed they felt very little homesickness as they say it is hard to be homesick when it doesn't feel like Christmas.

However, some Antarctic participants succumb to homesickness during reflective times, especially those who will be spending their first Christmas away from home.

General Assistant Ann May of Minnesota said she is going to miss sledding, playing games, enjoying her annual family Christmas party and participating in the May family Christmas Eve traditions.

"After dinner, we used to go out to the barn and sing Christmas songs while my dad milked the cows and my mom was inside doing dishes and playing Santa," said May. "Then we'd come in and there would be gifts."

Jane Powell of Colorado Springs is spending her first Christmas away from her husband Nick, who is working 900 miles away at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station. Powell said it makes her feel closer to him, knowing that they are both spending Christmas on the Ice.

"Thanksgiving was tough," said Powell. Her sadness came through from time to time as she remembered her two kitties at home. "It's also little harder than I thought without friends around."

Although the couple is on the same continent, communications between the stations are difficult. For Powell to call her husband, she must first contact the communications center, where a high-frequency telephone call is placed. During their 10-minute telephone patches, every statement is punctuated with "over" before the other person can respond. This makes the calls more closely resemble a two-way radio communication between remote field camps than a telephone conversation between husband and wife.

"It actually forces you to complete a thought and the other per-

son must listen," said Jane about their weekly telephone patches.

Laura Tudor and her fiancé are also separated by the Ice. Tudor is no stranger to spending Christmas far from home. A few years ago, she spent Christmas in Peru, where she met her fiancé, Bruce Felix. The couple later spent a Christmas in London. Before that they spent a Christmas with a family of strangers in St. Louis, after an airline strike left them stranded for several days. Last year Felix spent his first Christmas aboard the *Lawrence M. Gould* Research Vessel at Palmer Station in Antarctica. In a strange twist of events, this year Tudor is working at McMurdo Station in Antarctica, while Felix, who is on a month break from his work on the vessel, will spend the holidays in their home state of Colorado.

Laura and others enjoy being free of last-minute shopping, family obligations and other holiday stressors.

"Sitting down, writing Christmas cards should not be stressful," said Tudor.

Christmas stress is much lower on the Ice, without the possibility or need for last-minute mall hopping, stocking stuffing, bread baking and gift exchanging. Instead, people decorate their offices and dorms, make gingerbread houses, carve ice sculptures and plan their mode of transportation for the annual two-mile Christmas Day Race Around the World.

"It doesn't matter how you get around as long as you do it three times," said Kevin Cullin, who will be spending his fourth Christmas on the Ice.

Although Cullin misses some aspects of Christmas back home, Cullin said he enjoys the holidays at South Pole because of the small, tight-knit community.

"My brother has a bazillion kids. That's a hoot (at Christmas)," said Cullin, a South Pole technical representative. "If you can't be home for Christmas, the Pole is the next best choice."

Inside? Write on!

Outside? Well, shoot!

Then enter The Antarctic Sun's prose, poetry and photography festival

Prose: A fiction or nonfiction story of 300 words or less. Poetry: Up to 30 lines.
Photography: Categories for wildlife, scenic, people and other. One entry per category.
New non-Antarctic category added to photo contest!

Submit entries by Dec. 31 to sabbatkr@mcmurdo.gov or bring them to the Sun office in building 155.

Continental Drift

Do you plan to open your Christmas gifts early? Why or why not?



"No, because my family didn't send me any presents. But if I did receive any, I'd open them on Christmas Day."

Gary Jirschele
FEMC Maintenance Specialist at Palmer Station, from Rhinelander, Wis.



"Yes, I will, because I will be so happy to have received anything, from anyone, anywhere."

Thomas Kuhn,
general assistant at South Pole Station



"No. I want it to feel more like Christmas."

Joanna Lueck
Dining attendant at McMurdo Station, from Colorado.

around the continent

PALMER

Life on the edge

By Tom Cohenour
Palmer correspondent

They're all on the edge. Every one of them. All residents of Palmer Station live, sleep, and work along the water's edge. To be accurate, some work on the water and others in the water.

Being surrounded on three sides by the ocean, it's only natural that daily activities at Palmer Station revolve heavily around the water.

Biolab, which houses the dining room, offices, kitchen, 10 laboratories, and berthing is a mere 71 feet (22 meters) from Arthur Harbor to the north. And Hero Inlet is only 78 feet (24 meters) to the west.

GWR, which holds the power plant, garage, warehouse, gym, lounge and berthing is 98 feet (30 meters) from Arthur harbor. The Boathouse, which is functionally on the shore of Hero Inlet, also contains the dive locker where divers store their equipment and dress up for underwater research.

Several Zodiac boats are moored a few feet from the Boathouse, making it convenient for researchers to come and go in pursuit of the elements of their discipline. Such objects of interest often include algae, phytoplankton, krill, fish and sponges, among others.

Zodiac's are outfitted with platforms that hold multiple pieces of scientific equipment. Each science group uses their unique set of instruments to gather data.

Karie Sines, with the Phytoplankton Ecology Component of the Long Term Ecological Research (LTER) (BP-016-P), described the devices she uses by saying, "We have several pieces. The CTD measures conductivity, temper-



Photo by Tom Cohenour/Special to the Antarctic Sun
Zodiacs tied up at Palmer Station.

ature, and depth. The PRR (profiling reflectance radiometer) measures light penetration in the water column between 60 and 160 meters. A laptop computer records the PRR data. We use the depth sounder to measure depth, and use a GPS for location. The Go-flo is used to collect water samples at specific depths. A ring net is deployed to concentrate organisms such as phytoplankton. The net is either dropped to a depth of 30 meters, opened, and then raised or towed along behind the Zodiac. An electric winch is used to deploy and retrieve the CTD,

Go-flows and ring net."

Boating Coordinator Jeff Bechtel noted "We have a total of 18 Zodiacs, but right now seven are in the water."

"And one of our boats was sent to McMurdo Station to be used at the Byrd Field Center," he added.

Other boats appearing at Palmer this week included the sailing yacht *Philos* and the *RV Nathaniel B Palmer* (NBP). The *Philos*, which is approximately 42 feet long (13 meters) anchored in Hero Inlet and brought six passengers ashore in their small dory. The 308-foot (94 meter) NBP anchored in Arthur Harbor ferrying some passengers to Palmer Station via Zodiacs for tours while a few station personnel took the opportunity to visit the NBP.



Photo by Jeff Gustafson/The Antarctic Sun
Yacht Philos in Hero Inlet at Palmer Station.

SOUTH POLE

Digging up polar history

By Judy Spanberger
South Pole correspondent

"Yes, that looks like one of the kinds of parachutes we had. We had white ones too. When we chased parachutes in the drop zone, we used a hunting knife to cut the harnesses so the chute would collapse, so if you find one with a cut harness, it was probably one of ours."

"Generator, D4 tractors and weasel had 4 of these 60-foot diameter parachutes attached to a platform per item, while large building parts had 2 of these 60-foot diameter parachutes. Smaller items used smaller parachutes with various colors including camouflage, depending on visibility/weather. We dug pallets of barrels out and towed them to camp. This was easier than chasing and cutting parachutes to keep wind from dragging pallets away. In one case, Hough and Tuck took a trip out about 15 - 20 miles to locate barracks panels and cut parachutes loose, which the wind pushing the 60-foot camouflage parachutes dragged the panels away at time of airdrop. We used these parachutes for various shelter and covering purposes."

These e-mails were recently written by Cliff Dickie and Ken Waldron, respectively, members of the Seabee team of Operation Deep Freeze #1, 1956-57, the International Geophysical Year. These men were tasked with building the first South Pole Station. Nine of them would become members of the first South Pole winter-over crew, 1957, along with nine scientists. The amazing story of the building of the first South Pole Station can be found in *National Geographic*, July 1957.

On Dec. 14, John Wright and his crew of intrepid tunnelers carefully dug out the parachute whose edges were first revealed when Marty Reed, a heavy equipment operator, began digging the trench for the tunnel operation earlier this season. The parachute was about 30 feet down, and at that time the

See Pole on page 6

the week in weather

McMurdo Station

High: 45F/7C Low:23F/-5C
Wind: 30 mph/48 kph
Windchill: -16F/-26C

Palmer Station

Weather unavailable this week

South Pole Station

High: -9F/-23C
Low:-20F/-29C
Wind: 11mph/18kph

Pole

From page 5

little bit that we could see had a manufacture date of December 1952 stamped on it, which was just enough information to put our imaginations into gear. Was this particular parachute the kind mentioned above in the e-mails from Cliff and Ken? Was it dropped during the summer the original South Pole was constructed? Perhaps there was a payload at the end with construction materials, or personal effects or maybe some other treasure. What we found was actually more interesting than buried treasure, and synchronistic considering the date it was excavated. The harness of the parachute had been cut as if done with a knife. This was one of the original parachutes. One of the first pieces of our presence here at the bottom axis of the earth. As John laid it out for all to see we couldn't believe that we, who were here to build the third South Pole Station, were touching a piece of our beginnings in this amazing place. Pieces of the parachute will be sent, along with other mementos, to the surviving members of the first South Pole crew, now in their 70s and 80s and still very active in the life of the Antarctic through reunions and e-mails. We had dug up our history, and the first day we were able to do so was the 90th anniversary of Amundsen's arrival at 90 South.

We held ceremonies at noon and at mid-



Photo by Jerry Marty/Special to the Antarctic Sun

Eivind Jensen, Director of Science Support South Pole carries the Norwegian flag from the Ceremonial Pole to the Geographic Pole.

night to honor the 90th anniversary of Amundsen's arrival here. Both ceremonies were well attended. To start off the noon ceremony Eivind Jensen, director of science support South Pole, carried the Norwegian flag from the Ceremonial Pole, to the Geographic Pole. (Eivind's father was a youngster in Norway during Amundsen's expedition). There were readings from various books that accounted Amundsen's life and journeys. (As a child Amundsen would

sleep with the window open to prepare himself for his goal of becoming a polar explorer.) Many related personal observances and stories. We were reminded that the tent left by Amundsen, the heart-breaking sign for Scott that he had been beaten, was still under our feet somewhere. At midnight the flag that had been flying over the Geographical Pole was taken down and carefully folded. A new Norwegian flag was then erected and returned to the Ceremonial pole. The flag that flew over the Geographical Pole for the anniversary will be sent to the NSF for a presentation to the Norwegian government.

Trevor Griffith was the screenwriter for the 1987 BBC film "The Last Place On Earth." In this film we watch the actor who plays Amundsen recite Amundsen's words as he stands at the pole for the first time. The story is that Amundsen hadn't planned on saying much except to claim the pole for King Haakon and Norway, but his crew insisted that he make a speech. According to Amundsen's diaries, various records and the lectures that came later this is very most probably what Amundsen said 90 years ago to his crew at the South Pole:

"I have no great words to share with you. No grand emotions, but to say in this place I feel how good it is to be alive."

Belief

From page 1

packed for both the midnight Mass and the morning service.

Astrophysicist Steve Barwick is one of those who attend church at home. Raised Catholic, Barwick supports the social causes the church tackles. Science is also supposed to improve humanity, so he sees them as complementary goals.

"Where I view religion as useful and important is the sociological components," Barwick said.

Barwick is happy to volunteer and help out on the various causes the church takes on. When he goes to work though, researching neutrinos and their sources in the galaxy and as a professor of physics in Irvine, CA, he doesn't think about God much.

The scientific process breaks big questions down into a series of well-defined, smaller questions and then tries to answer those, Barwick said.

"The questions that I go after are much more specific than worrying where God comes in. I'm not there yet," Barwick said. "Most of the time you spend worrying about whether a piece of electronics is going to function or not. Only after a series of years are you going to worry about the source of a particular neutrino."

Father Mears enjoys following the discoveries of science, but in the end always gives credit to the Christian God.

"Scientists discover wonders of creation, but they're not explaining who thought up these wonderful things and created them," Mears said.

"No matter how scientists think it began, matter has to come from something. So far scientists have explained developments and changes to matter, but not the creation of it," Mears said. "We firmly believe there's a creator."

The contradictions between the Bible's explanation of creation and scientific theories of the universe starting with an explosion of matter don't bother the Catholic priest. Whether or not Biblical stories are historically factual, they carry a deeper truth, he said.

"The Bible isn't a scientific journal and the message is more important than the dramas used to convey the message," Mears said.

Historically there have been some incredible religious scientists, including the Curies, Mears said

"In this area, as in other areas of life, conflict only occurs when minds are closed to the possibility that the other side may also

:(Bummed by black and white?

Read The Antarctic Sun in **COLOR** at :)

www.polar.org/antsun

Answer to crossword from page 2



Innovation feeds feasts

Cooking with freeze-dried cottage cheese in a can and having a mid-summer blizzard hold up supplies of fresh vegetables can be a bit rough when making Christmas dinner.

On the other hand, any meal featuring 1,200 pounds of king crab legs and 2,500 homemade desserts can't be that bad.

The mix of challenge and lavishness in preparing the feast to be served Christmas Eve at McMurdo Station is typical at bases and on research vessels in Antarctica. Cooks pay extra attention to the meals - sometimes days, sometimes minutes - and volunteers help with numerous tasks. But inevitably there are limitations to a holiday meal on the Ice.

"Every year getting freshies on time is a challenge," noted Sally Ayotte, food service supervisor at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, in an e-mail. "It is not uncommon to receive them after the holiday has passed."

The all-important freshies - several tons of fresh vegetables, dairy products and ducklings headed for McMurdo, the South Pole and various field camps - are again a source of concern this year due to several days of blizzards last week that halted most flights. Kitchen officials trimmed 2,500 pounds from the planned 15,000-pound shipment and that may be further reduced, since the backlog of passengers gets priority over poultry.

Still, the groceries needed for baked goods and main entrees - crab and steaks at McMurdo, Beef Wellington at the South Pole - arrived weeks ago. At least some of the freshies are scheduled to arrive today, officials said, but there's plenty of frozen vegetables and other foods to make a decent meal if necessary.

"Plan B is nobody would go hungry," said Bob Tellez, food, beverage and retail manager at

Story by
Mark Sabbatini

Photos by
Melanie Conner

The candies for decorating gingerbread houses arrived late, delaying the event until Friday night.



Carey Collins, far right, a communications supervisor from San Diego, Calif., decorates a gingerbread house in the McMurdo kitchen with Julie Scheffer, finance representative from Denver, Colo. Behind them, Dorothy Burke, a help desk operator from San Rafael, Calif., works on another house.

McMurdo Station.

About 1,000 people are expected for the McMurdo meal, including some flying in from remote field camps for the holiday.

There are often more limitations - and at the same time more freedom - at smaller land-based sites. Supplies are limited and workers may have too many duties to take the day off, but more creativity in cooking is possible since there are only a handful of diners instead of hundreds.

At Palmer Station, for example, a menu of turkey, ham, prime rib and plenty of trim-

mings is planned, wrote Wendy Beeler, the station's food service supervisor, in an e-mail. But volunteers can play a role in shaping the bill of fare.

"The community is invited to suggest or make anything else that will make the holiday more traditional for them, so there is sure to be a few additions to this list," Beeler wrote.

Ships may have it roughest of all, since workers are too busy to take the day off and access to freshies is limited to whatever might be at various port stops every six weeks.

"Due to the environment that we work and live in, it doesn't

really allow us to get into the Christmas spirit," wrote Joshua Spillane, Marine Projects Coordinator aboard the 230-foot Laurence M. Gould. "One thing that I've learned sailing on both the Antarctic research vessels is that every cruise is different. Having a group of people that take the initiative to bring a little Christmas cheer is always welcomed, but not always seen."

The ship will stop at Palmer Station on Dec. 23, but due to science needs will leave that same day and spend Christmas in Drake Passage, Spillane

See Feast on page 8

Feast From page 7

added. The passage is widely regarded as one of the roughest stretches of water in the world.

Holiday decorations can be found in the labs and public areas of the 308-foot Nathaniel B. Palmer, but science will still be the focus of the holidays.

"In all likelihood, we'll be attempting a Jumbo Piston Core as a special holiday treat," wrote Skip Owen, the vessel's Marine Projects Coordinator. "This is a seafloor sediment sampling system that allows us to obtain samples of the sediments up to 80 feet long, or 80 feet below the seafloor."

The four cooks aboard are making a holiday meal of turkey, ham, Louisiana gumbo and special deserts, but ship policy prohibits volunteers from being "guest chefs," Owen noted.

"If time and science schedule allow, we will 'stand down' for a period - perhaps finding a quiet bay or cove somewhere to enjoy our 'holiday' meal in peace and quiet and allowing everyone a few extra hours of sleep before getting back to the work at hand," Owen wrote.

There is also little rest for those preparing the food at the larger stations. Most station workers get Dec. 24 and 25 off, but all of the kitchen staff - and dozens of volunteers - will be in full swing.

The Thanksgiving meal involved "spurts of stress" because there were three seatings, with a rush of cleanup and setting out food in-between, said Shandra Cordova, a lead dining attendant from Denver who is working her first season on the Ice. The same arrangement is in place for Christmas.

"It was in a way more of a relaxed day because we had more volunteers, but we still had to be there," she said.

Employees ate a 1 p.m. "family" meal for Thanksgiving, but the time limit imposed due to the upcoming seatings dampened some of the spirit, Cordova said. She said workers this year may get together informally after the

"We have no sugar today. We ran out of flour yesterday."

-Ben Bonnelo, lead baker at McMurdo Station

meal.

"I think what we'll do after everyone's cleaned up and cleared out is sit down and have some wine," she said.

Preparations for many dishes have been crammed into the regular meal preparation schedule.

Work on 12 different types of Christmas cookie dough started two weeks before Christmas Eve, said Rob Taylor, a lead baker from Missoula, Mont., working his fourth season on the Ice. He said the baking of chocolate tortes also started early because the menu calls for 480 slices of chocolate torte, but there are only 12 pans to make them.

Improvisation is often a needed skill, said Ben Bonnelo, a lead baker from Portland, Ore., working his third season in Antarctica.

"We have no sugar today," he said. "We ran out of flour yesterday."

The bakers adopted by making a flourless torte that particular day. Bonnelo said they can use mixes if they have to, but prefer to avoid them.

Cooking a fancy holiday meal for 1,000 expected diners is a new experience for John Wight, one of two sous chefs at McMurdo, who worked at a four-star restaurant in Vermont and a restaurant in Arcadia National Park before coming to Antarctica. In addition to the large amount of food to prepare, there's the novel element of cooking with a variety of canned, frozen and other durable ingredients.

"It's a challenge," he said. "I've never worked with a lot of this stuff."



Network engineer Dafydd Mcpike works on his gingerbread house.

Full-scale preparation of food begins a few days before Christmas Eve. Sauces are made, cheeses sliced, fruits and vegetables readied for salads, and appetizers such as smoked seafood and deviled eggs readied for serving.

Volunteers play a critical role, beginning with the decoration of cookies and gingerbread houses during the preparatory stage. They will also peel potatoes, bus tables, wash dishes and do whatever else is asked of them.

Among those who signed up for a two-hour shift is Angela Gasperetti, a MAPCON data specialist from Seattle working her first season at McMurdo. She will be a familiar face to the galley staff, since she has worked as a volunteer for an hour or so during numerous evening shifts this season.

Gasperetti said she volunteers because a number of her friends work in the galley - and she has made more with her work - and the holidays are one

of the most enjoyable shifts.

"The great thing about Thanksgiving was you got to talk to people while you're cleaning," she said.

The day of the feast will see a number of galley employees arrive early. Taylor said he will arrive at 4 a.m., two hours earlier than normal, and spend the day making dinner rolls. Final preparatory steps before the first seating at 3 p.m. will also begin, such as partially cooking the steaks so they can be served quicker once dinner begins.

The largest line will form outside the galley for the final 6 p.m. seating, after which the long task of cleaning up begins. Then the galley has to worry about a special Christmas Day brunch, similar to the Sunday mid-day meals that usually are the most elaborate of the regular weekly menus.

Eventually, the staff will get to do more than watch others relax.

"I'll take my days off in January," Wight said.

Correction: A photo outline on page 7 in the Dec. 16 issue was inaccurate. Tony Hansen was standing next to the power pyramid he designed, a self-sufficient solar collector which powers his air monitoring equipment. The larger solar panels in the photo above it run the Lake Hoare camp, and were being turned by camp manager Ray Spain to catch up with the sun. Also, the third of the "Cold, Hard Facts" on page 2 was for the total number of birds in Antarctica, not species.

No place for commercialism

By Mark Sabbatini
Sun staff

On a continent where the best shopping is often in recycling bins, there's a lot less stress for many people when it comes to picking out holiday gifts.

Imagination frequently plays a greater role than commerce as crafts, food, good deeds and other people's discarded items are exchanged in lieu of whatever "hot" gifts are being advertised this year. There's no TV commercials or advertising flyers on the Ice to let people know what they should be buying, and no malls to trek to if the urge to buy "it" strikes.

"It seems it takes on a whole new meaning here," said Helen Trujillo, a resale reuse technician at McMurdo Station who said she is doing calligraphy artwork for friends. "A lot of the commercialism and the advertising is completely not missed. It's very refreshing and very compelling, and makes it more special."

An exception for Trujillo and many others - especially if it's their first season on the Ice - is the Antarctic hats, shirts and others gifts sent to family and friends at home.

"This being my first season down here, a lot of people not knowing anything about this place are interested in photography, postcards and calendars," she said.

Employees at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station and Palmer Station also have access to small stores with Antarctic trinkets to send home and more traditional items - maybe a bottle of wine or some chocolate - for co-workers. But those in remote field camps and aboard research vessels lack even those scant options.

"Shopping options are quite limited. Like zero," wrote Skip Owen, Marine Projects Coordinator aboard the *Nathaniel B. Palmer*. "But we might do a small gift exchange - probably locally made things, particularly of the humorous variety. We don't have internet access and are quite limited in what we are allowed to send over a relatively expensive satellite link via e-mail. So, no (personalized) calendars. And personal phone calls are very expensive over the commercial satellite as well, so few people will call home."

The longtime practices of gift exchanges and Secret Santas are common with many groups and stations. A station-wide exchange is likely during Christmas celebrations at Palmer Station, wrote Food Service Supervisor Wendy Beeler, in an e-mail.

"Some call it a Grinch Christmas, some call it Yankee gift exchange, but whatever the specific rules of this year's gift exchange wind up being, you can bet there will be a fair share of swapping, stealing and laughing," she wrote.

Perhaps the easiest and most diverse collection of items at McMurdo is found in the purple "skua" bins nestled in with the other groups of waste containers at various locations. Clothes, books, a laserdisc player (not to be confused with DVD), posters and furniture are among the normal and often highly abnormal items available for the taking.

"It's usually not the prime picking for Christmas gift giving unless you're looking for a T-shirt of a unique place a person has been," said Mark Furnish, waste operations manager at McMurdo.

Holiday shopping at the station store tends to wind down around Thanksgiving due to the amount of time needed to mail gifts from the continent, said Jay Fox, McMurdo's retail supervisor. Unfortunately, one of his recommended choices this year - a \$10 custom-made Christmas tree ornament - arrived after the rush.

"Had this come in a month ago it would have been big," he said.

The annual crafts fair at McMurdo is another option. Those who crowded into the galley last Sunday could choose from inexpensive

Mary Ann Harris from Oklahoma City buys nine teddy bears to send home as gifts.



Photo by Mark Sabbatini/The Antarctic Sun

zipper pulls, handmade cards, jewelry, photos, artwork and other items made by workers in their spare time.

The Internet is always an option for those who want to send mail-order books or fruitcakes to loved ones, but few interviewed said they thought about doing online shopping. More popular was the idea of sending home personalized - and free - presents such as digital photos, greeting cards, video clips and personalized calendars.

"I made a photo album of pictures and I put it on a CD," Furnish said.

Rachel Jenkins, a McMurdo radio relay operator, said she is making calendars of photos she took by pasting them to cardstock. She also makes pottery, which might be a Secret Santa present.

"One (piece) doesn't have an owner, so that's probably what that'll be," she said.

Most who said they bought traditional gifts did so before they reached the Ice.

"I did all my shopping in New Zealand before I came because of the exchange rate," said Zak Kergel, a Raven Ops coordinator working his second season on the Ice. He mailed the gifts to his wife before leaving for Antarctica, a common habit for those who wanting to avoid the extra delay and uncertainty of shipping from the continent.

Many last-minute mainland purchases are gifts for co-workers. Amy Madden, a radio operator at McMurdo who is working her sixth season in Antarctica, said she brings "little soaps and things that are smelly because we don't have any smells except food and diesel."

Other items not intended as gifts sometimes fulfill that role. Jim Jullian, a janitor working his second season at McMurdo, said last year he gave away some of the things he just happened to have with him.

"I had an Elvis keychain and I found out this guy liked Elvis, so I gave him the keychain," he said.

Many will bypass gifts altogether, focusing instead on simply enjoying being with friends.

Observing traditions is more important for Olena Boyko, a Ukrainian-American first year janitor who celebrates Christmas according to the Julian calendar on Jan. 7. The focal point is not gifts, but a 12-course Holy Supper of specific dishes, with the ingredients being mailed here by friends.

"In whatever country I am, I always carry on this traditional celebration that unites me in spirit with my family," she said.

A simple holiday greeting will be enough for the people David Berry works with.

"We're all mostly older co-workers and we're beyond gifts," said the McMurdo airfield ground equipment worker from Silver City, N.M. All that's needed, he said, "is a little good cheer and a little comradery."



Profile

By Melanie Conner
Sun staff

Wilt-ing away in the greenhouse

Chris Wilt knows a trick to make any weathered Antarctic face grin - a flower.

Not a silk or plastic flower, but a living flower in Antarctica, where nary a single shrub exists and people go months without seeing a growing organism. Wilt cheers many when he surprises people on occasion with a daisy or sunflower that he cultivated in the hydroponics green house at McMurdo Station.

What started for Wilt in high school as a "blow-off class," landed him a scholarship to Joliet College, Ill., in the horticulture department and a career in landscape design, hydroponics and floral arrangements.

Wilt stumbled into horticulture when his high school teacher liked his flower arrangements and encouraged him to pursue it further and practice after school.

"I was on the flower arranging team in high school," said Wilt. "I won first in state competition."

With two sisters and three brothers, Wilt, a high school soccer player, said growing up "was survival of the fittest" and couldn't let it be known that he had a soft side. He tried keeping his membership on the flower arranging team a secret. But to his dismay, his Illinois State flower arranging championship was announced over the intercom system in the morning.

"I was so embarrassed," said Wilt. "My English teacher made me get up and come to the front of the class and said, 'Well Chris, we all thought you were such a tough guy.'"

He may have been tough, but 10 years after high school Wilt's flower power outlasted his tough guy image. At 28 years old, Wilt enjoys watching the daily progress of his plants and flowers in the Antarctic greenhouse. He said his job is rewarding and fulfilling when he supplies the kitchen with fresh lettuce and



Photo by Melanie Conner/The Antarctic Sun

Chris Wilt of Fort Collins, Colo., examines plants in the McMurdo Station greenhouse to determine if they are ready to pollinate.

sees sensory-deprived, homesick individuals visit the greenhouse and occasionally rest in a hammock.

"It's a sanctuary for all. It's a place for people to go and gather their thoughts, relax, enjoy the smells, sounds and humidity," said Wilt. "Horticulture is a giving thing."

The greenhouse is especially important to winter-over participants whose only green produce comes from Wilt in the greenhouse. He knows first-hand about the winters in Antarctica because he has spent three austral winters here. Wilt, who signed a one-year contract, is in the middle of his first summer on the Ice. He said it feels strange to see daylight when he gets up in the morning or leaves the greenhouse. Although he has completed three winters on the Ice, Wilt considers the upcoming winter to be his "first" because he will be working in the recreation department, not the greenhouse and won't receive a daily dose of "sunlight." However, he is looking forward to the new position, where he can plan social events and work with his girlfriend, Francine Oliver, who will join him in February.

"I love to get people going and making sure everyone is smiling, dancing and having a good time," said Wilt.

There are no doubts that Wilt will succeed in entertaining people with his friendly and carefree demeanor.

"Just by being there, sitting at a table with him, he's entertaining," said Greg Lehman from the recreation department. "That's his personality."

Wilt, a self-described troublemaker during his younger years, creates a story wherever he may go.

This was the case over four years ago, prior to his first stint on the Ice. Wilt had quit his job, packed his bags and stuffed his belongings in storage. He was ready to go.

At his going away party, two days prior to his departure, a burly friend approached him with a drunken, bear hug. Wilt's arm received the impact as it bent on the corner of the refrigerator, upon which he was leaning. Wilt broke his arm and had to stay at home.

Wilt begged the doctors to qualify him physically, but they could not, so he called his mom in Tennessee and told her he was coming for a visit. His arm healed just in time for the austral winter to begin and in February Wilt made it to the Ice to finish what was left of his contract.

He returned the following two winter seasons, which completed three consecutive winters. He took the following year off, but having never spent an austral summer on the Ice, Wilt returned in October for a full year to complete his Antarctic experience.

Now Wilt is ready to find roots and a place to call home. He wants a big yard with thick bushes for privacy, lots of flowers, fruit trees, a vegetable garden, a hide-away tree house in the back yard, a big porch and a dog.

"I always watch other people's dogs," said Chris solemnly. "But I would really love my own dog."

Although he is not sure if he will return to Colorado or somewhere else, he's certain that he won't return to the Ice next year.

According to Wilt, "This will be it for awhile. It has been a huge chunk of my life, but I want to have a place to call home."

contain certain truths," Mears said.