



Extension News Column

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Re: Pinching Pennies to run Mondays on page A-3
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NOTE: Please run this column on Monday, Dec. 12.

The holidays bring a great opportunity to connect with family and friends. But nights on the town, elaborate parties and expensive Christmas activities can really add up. This week, let's look at ways to enjoy your family and friends without straining the family budget.

Keep it simple. Focus on enjoying the simple pleasures of the holiday season, like spending time with friends and family or taking a walk to see the holiday decorations in your neighborhood. These kinds of activities often capture the spirit of the season better than expensive gifts or elaborate celebrations.

Another great and inexpensive way to entertain the family through the holidays is to take a drive around Fairbanks or North Pole to see the Christmas lights. As a child growing up in Texas, I remember my parents driving us to Austin to look at the lights on Congress Avenue. Do the same here in town. The News-Miner publishes pictures of the best places in town to look at lights, so load up the family and take in the sites and lights!

Get out the board games; the kids will love spending time with you. If you don't have many to choose from, maybe you can borrow a new game from a friend or neighbor. You never know, they might have a closet full they never even use and would be delighted to share them with you! If your board games are missing parts, make do right now, but there is a place where you can buy those missing parts. Check out the game manufacturer to order those parts you are missing. Parts are sometimes available on ebay.com, so check there as well. It is much less expensive than buying new games.

Playing cards is always fun, too. At my house, a deck of cards means rummy or poker or pitch. Even when the kids are little, you can play Go Fish or Concentration. Think about what you are teaching your kids as you play. Addition, matching and sorting are all important skills that they will learn through simple card games. More importantly, you

are connecting with them while having fun. Remember, we're making memories as we play.

Sit around a warm fire, or cozy up in the living room with blankets and a hot drink of tea or cocoa. Tell family stories ... or have everyone take turns sharing how they have been blessed throughout the year, like we do at Thanksgiving. Being thankful shouldn't end in November; keep the spirit going!

Have a gathering to do some of those holiday chores. Many hands make light work, so serve cocoa and cookies and invite all your friends and family to put up the Christmas decorations. Or, get all the wrapping paper out and invite a few friends to come wrap. Tell them to bring their own presents and everyone gets their work done.

Bake goodies. Invite friends to come over and bake or decorate cookies. A friend of mine has an annual truffle party. Everyone chips in to pay for the cost of the supplies, several people meet and they make truffles for a full day. Each of them takes their share of the bounty home, so they have gifts and goodies to share with folks on their Christmas list.

Check out a Christmas book from the library and read it together as a family. There's nothing like reading a story together to help us remember why we enjoy the season. Or, if a movie is more to your liking, check out classic Christmas movies from the library. Save yourself \$10 for a ticket at the movie and there's no one kicking the back of your seat.

If you want to have a party, consider a sledding party. Invite family and friends over to play in the snow and serve cocoa and cookies. It won't require much preparation, and will offer lots of fun and laughter.

No matter how you choose to celebrate this season, remember that the important thing is connecting with family and friends — not what you spend.

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