

TOP 10

Ways to Celebrate the Holidays in your Community

This list was compiled by Karen L. Werner, CDM, CFPP, with contributions from Alyssa Peters, CDM, CFPP.

1. SHOWCASE DIVERSITY

Involve your dining team members in menu planning. Ask them to cook and/or demonstrate and discuss a dish from their heritage. This broadens the culinary experience for residents and visiting families by introducing new flavors. Residents may have traveled extensively and may be familiar with specialty dishes.

2. CELEBRATE GLOBAL HOLIDAYS

Any employee or resident can contribute by sharing celebrations from holidays around the world. Work with other departments or residents and their families to build a community bond and a family-like atmosphere of acceptance and togetherness. Invite family members of patients to share the experience and offer special trays for free.

3. INVITE RESIDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN CONTRIBUTING FAVORITE RECIPES

Cook or bake recipes suggested by residents and host a tasting party. Add their recipe from home to the holiday event. Feature them in a cooking demonstration and give them the opportunity to instruct others on how to prepare the meal or tell a story about the dish. A group event like this will allow residents to reminisce on holiday feast preparations.

4. TREAT TRADITIONS WITH A TWIST

Prepare favorites in a different shape, such as sheet pan “pies” that can be cut in smaller portions for sampler plates at a dessert bar. Create caramel apple cheese bars instead of apple pie. Or, make baked apples with a lattice top and brownies with pecan pie topping.

For savory additions, increase plant-based offerings, such as salads with superfoods. Quinoa, green onion, and cranberries make a colorful holiday salad. Use mandarin oranges, walnuts, and spinach with feta or chèvre cheese, sunflowers and broccoli raisin, and more. Tantalize the taste buds with exciting new flavor combinations and add a fun decoration or themed notecard to each tray. For restricted diets, utilize cut fruits, vegetables, and cheeses to shape a tree, snowman, and other exciting holiday imagery on a platter.

5. BALANCE TIME AND TALENT, MADE-FROM-SCRATCH AND CONVENIENCE FOODS

Purchase plain cheesecake and enhance it with delicious fruit toppings. Purchase pre-cut vegetables and spend time arranging the food artistically or enhancing base flavors of dips with additional herbs or spices. Match up production tasks with the talents of each team member. Find out what they are interested in learning—caring for your team leads to the team caring for the customers!

6. BRING ON THE SIZZLE

Set up a mix of action and self-serve stations. A brunch action station could include waffles made to order and omelets to order. Self-serve stations could include carved meat, salads, appetizers, fruit, pastry, and desserts with a variety of toppings. Multiple stations help to disperse a crowd and allow customization and a variety of choices. Offer small bites and portions so guests can sample various items.

7. START THE CONVERSATION

Place table tents on the dining tables with conversation starter topics. What was your best Thanksgiving? What is your favorite memory of traveling to a family member's house? What was your proudest moment? What was your favorite gift that you gave to someone? To increase engagement, let team members select a question for guests and wear it as part of their nametag. Additionally, volunteers can create homemade nametags or placemats for everyone with holiday colors and graphics.

8. DRESS FOR THE OCCASION

Offer staff or servers the option to wear appropriate festive wear. Add a unifying effect by allowing everyone to wear festive accessories such as bow ties, aprons, sashes, hats, blinking pins, ugly sweaters, or coordinating colored shirts.

9. TAKE TABLESCAPES TO NEW HEIGHTS!

Bring seasonal or holiday color theme into the décor of the facility. Add varying heights with build-up such as boxes, crates, books, or glass blocks. These can be covered with matching tablecloths. Add appropriate garland, leaves, or fabric woven throughout the framework and clear LED lights for extra sparkle! Utilize tiered stands to add vertical interest. Arrange for height and color. Use uniform serving bowls and platters. If building your inventory of catering dishes, white is the most basic and versatile for any event.

10. ADD AMBIANCE WITH THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC

Add the finishing touch with music. Recorded music, live piano, guitar, or harp will make the event special. There may be a talented musician within the facility. Or, team up with the Activities Department for hired entertainment. A surprise visit from carolers would certainly increase holiday cheer!

BONUS! 11. REMEMBER THE BEVERAGES

Create a specialty beverage or mock-tail. Noel spritzers with a splash of cranberry juice, warm cinnamon orange cider, or double chocolate cappuccino cocoa—the possibilities are endless...and delicious!