

Dinner Party of Ten

2017 Christmas

With Chef Deb Karnes

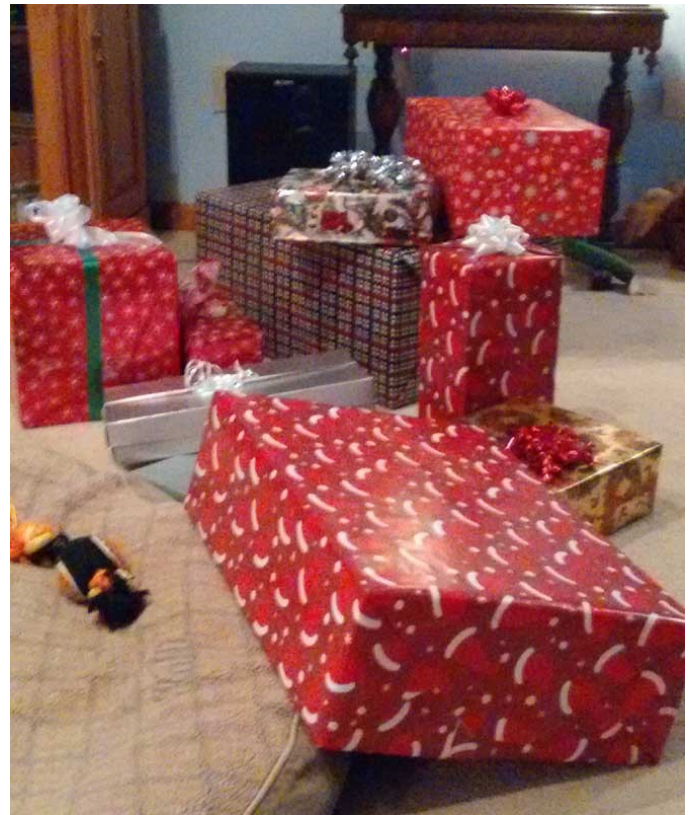
and Master Assistant Chay Karnes

Another benchmark of culinary skill and consistency was proven at DP8 Christmas 15 @ Karnes. Yes, the 15 stands for the fifteenth year Dinner Party of Eight has enjoyed Christmas dinner at the Karneses' abode.

Weather was kind once again, seasonable, almost pleasant, in the mid-30s. Chay was spared clearing the driveway, a chore that has made a couple of past DP8s an adventure. An entire inch of snow pack on the lawns was all we had to contend with.

A host of lights started the welcome as we entered Pine Meadow Lane, accumulating at the driveway approach, and finally filling around the house. Stringing all of Chay's extension cords and strands of lights might reach to Freehold proper. And indoor decorating bore more testimony to Christmas spirit efforts.

Kallie needed five minutes to greet each visitor with some Christmas warmth and cheer. We stacked presents under the tree, dropped our coats in the bedroom, said hello to Kiki who decided to be more of a



At first glance, it might appear that food is the star of the evening. The evidence?

Appetizers:

- Cheese curds - cheddar and tapenade, with a side bowl of crackers
- Veggie tray of carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, celery, red pepper, pea pods
- A mug of bourbon balls, topped with a walnut



part of the Christmas gathering this year, and then we headed to the evening's center of the universe—the kitchen island, to wish all a Merry Christmas, check out the appetizers, and let the hosts know how much we appreciate their efforts.

Entrée: pork tenderloins, seasoned with a mixture of salt, pepper, onion and garlic powder; and a touch of cayenne and brown sugar

Sides:

- Salad: greens topped with craisins, feta, blueberries, and orange
- Intermezzo: mango, peach with a touch of lemon
- Salad: beet and barley with craisins, toasted pecans, red grapes and a balsamic reduction
- Mostarda: a chutney-type of dried cherries, apples, onions, balsamic vinegar and a touch a tarragon
- Macaroni and cheese: Deb's idea of a "lazy" version, cooking all the "stuffing" ingredients together mostly and then mixing in bacon, onions, mushrooms (this could have been the meal most days!)



- Grilled vegetables of cauliflower, broccoli, peppers
- Rolls: yeast rolls that you literally "spoon" into your baking cups

Dessert:

- ♦ a Montverdean-arranged Hartmann Black Forest cake. If it had been any airier, it would have floated.
- ♦ Homemade pistachio ice cream, shaped into decorated trees and cut-out persons
- ♦ a plate of fancy homemade cookies



Liquids:

Chay kept the liquids flowing: Judy's prosecco, bottled beer, and three bottles of Mark's 2013/2015 McGregor cabernet franc reserve – interesting for the mini vertical tasting. There must have been another red someplace and some liquor.

I think I wrote "at first glance" earlier, alluding to food as a focus of the evening. And food is.

But Party is also there. And the social aspect garners co-star status, if not a smidgeon more. Groups of twos and threes and fives and ten gathered around the kitchen island, catching up, expanding, expounding, adding another layer, contradicting



(quite convivially, of course), tweaking, laughing, listening, nodding in agreement... whatever is important to each of us is important to all of us.

In between we wished Deb a Happy umpteenth Birthday, stayed out of the culinary pathway, and finally allowed the interruption of the call for salad.



Seating has been surprisingly traditional, with Chay and Ken occupying the ends, just as we do at restaurants, with the rest of us occupying the same seat for fifteen years.

Dinner festivities started with the poppers, with this year's version containing a silly paper hat we donned (for three minutes, or more), confetti, and a riddle or a booklet. Deb made/prepared a favor per



couple—this year’s version was a Christmas bowl filled with her variety of homemade Christmas cookies.

Eight of us continued the chatting while, when necessary, the hosts departed to prepare delivery of the next course. (Offers to help are gently, but firmly, declined.)



Just as the main course was consumed, and before we had a chance to wonder how we would fit dessert, someone announced the wise decision to gather in the living for our Bad Santa Gift Exchange. Rules for stealing were re-established.

A devious feint played out this year when everyone had a smile on their face, thinking they pulled the number for the most advantageous selecting/stealing position—#1. When all realized everyone was #1, a cackle of laughter broke out with faux displeasure at the creator of the mischief—our Emergency Coordinator Chay Karnes.



Bad, very bad, Chay.

A few thefts broke out, with the surprise pass-around being the reel of electrical cord. Also in the mix of thievery was the bamboo stick display holder, the Echo, and the bright light with magnifier. Lots of Christmas spirit with a sprinkle of near malevolence!

And when enough laughter had passed, we headed back to

the dessert table. Topics included the Adamses’ purchase of a house (really, folks, they have only two), the departure of the Adamses back south until per-



haps next year, the departure of snowbirds Ken and Kriss for the winter,

nearing retirement of the last “real world” person, travel plans, and gobs more that will remain unwritten.

Did we say Retirement? Beginning the evening was the traditional, but surprise, delivery of our “Welcome to Retirement” gift to Deb K. Surprise because we usually wait to the real event but the presence of the Adamses proba-

bly would not happen again until after the event. And most of us are getting old enough that we feared we would forget. Ha. Happy retirement, Deb, whichever month this summer you pick to start another of life’s chapters.



In a side presentation, and acknowledging Deb and Chay’s magnanimity, we others authored a framed resolution of recognition of a decade and a



half of their generosity. And a framed resolution of Word-smith for making people read 1,000 words every month for over 15 years went to this writer. I know all three of us appreciated the recognition.

The clock passed 11, and once again,

we contemplated the specialness of an event that stands out on our calendars. Thank you, Deb and Chay, for such generosity and hospitality.

Goodbye 2017! We wish that 2018 be as kindly eventful and, when it is not, may we have the grace and strength to deal with whatever is thrown our way.