

Ashfield News- Winter Holiday Celebrations Revised

As we enter the winter holiday season is it time for us to look at minimizing the role of STUFF in our celebrations? I know this might not be our most popular column, but it is hard to deny that all of the shopping involved in the holidays is not good in terms of climate change both in terms of production and shipping and packaging waste. How can we enjoy the holidays while minimizing our impact on the planet? We have lots of options here in Ashfield!

1) Can we make our holiday traditions more about celebrations and special time together than about things? Here in Ashfield we have so many fun events to choose from! In recent years we have had Solstice celebrations on the common with Morris Dancers wearing antlers, Hanukkah celebrations, Carolling, and a Christmas Eve Candlelight service of lessons and carols at the congregational church- all of these open to all.

This year there will be

- Victorian holiday costume making at the library November 16 and 30,
- Band concert at the congregational church December 3 3pm followed by refreshments at the church and tree lighting 4:30 at town hall,
- Carolling 12/9 during winter farmers market (10-1),
- Solstice event at the Congregational Church Saturday December 16 6:30pm,
- Christmas Pageant Sunday 12/17 10am at the Congregational Church
- Caroling on the town common 12/23 3pm
- Service of Lessons and Carols Sunday 12/24 7:30pm at the Congregational Church

All of these are fun local traditions which help bring us together and get us into the holiday spirit.

2) One way we can reduce the carbon footprint of the giving we do is to buy local. We are so lucky to have the winter farmer's market to buy local handmade crafts and goodies that are beautiful. The market is Saturdays- December 2,9, and 16 10-1 in town hall. Come check it out and support our local artists and craftspeople! And don't forget the Ashfield Hardware store who always have fun and useful things- my favorite spot for stocking stuffers!

3) Another way to reduce the environmental impact of the holidays is to make our own gifts, especially if they are using recycled or repurposed materials. The Ashfield Needles and Threads (ANTS) group hosts periodic materials swaps so that you can get free yarn or fabric. The Belding Memorial Library is hosting a crafters meetup Mondays 6-7:30. All levels welcome from beginner to experienced. Come get or share ideas for fun things to make for friends and family. Those are often the most cherished gifts.

4) We can decrease the commercialism of holidays by giving experiences. Instead of more STUFF how about concert tickets, theatre tickets (Double Edge), Berkshire East or Notch View Ski Passes, Zip lining, River Rafting, a CSA share, a massage, a yoga class in Shelburne Falls or a class at Snow Farm Craft Center or Molly Cantor Pottery.

5) Of course choosing used items is a great way to reduce resource use and environmental impact. You can find brand name items at thrift stores of which there are many around here. If you are a facebook user you can join our local Buy Nothing group. This group is dedicated to helping people reduce purchases by sharing with each other our no longer wanted items. You can list items you are getting rid of or items you are seeking. Our family once got a full sized basketball hoop and backboard delivered to our house! It's a win-win for the people looking to let go of items and the people receiving free stuff. It keeps waste out of landfills and reduces energy and resources used to make new items.

6) Pay attention to the sustainability of the items you do purchase new- look for durability, for recycled content. Try and stay away from disposable plastic items which will quickly enter the waste stream.

7) Make the holidays about helping others. This can be a rough time of year for many people. We can make it more meaningful by volunteering at a soup kitchen or food pantry, Donating to local organizations like Warm the Children or sharing Christmas, or international organizations like Hiefer Project, where you can give money to fund livestock for families in need to become more self sufficient.

The Ashfield Energy Committee wishes everyone a warm and happy holiday season. We hope the above ideas are thought provoking and inspirational, not guilt inducing. As with many of the ideas we share in these columns the point is not to be perfect but that if we all make some changes to benefit the environment and reduce climate change it can make a big impact overall. As always feel free to contact us at energy@ashfield.org.