

A Different Holiday Season 2020

This past spring and summer New York residents became role models for America by adapting to the policies of social distancing and mask wearing in an a selfless, collective effort to protect our families, friends and communities across the state. This spirited, unselfish effort helped to “bend back the curve” of the COVID-19 spread to reflect one of the lowest rates in the country by the summer. This, after New York started off as the epicenter of the pandemic in the United States. Can we do it again is the latest question?

Recently, as we entered the winter holiday season while in the midst of a worldwide pandemic we were tasked with rising to the occasion once more by limiting travel, close encounters and family gatherings; first Thanksgiving and now once again for the annual Christmas, Hanukah, and Kwanza celebrations. New Yorkers can lead the way again!

In a year filled with chaos, stress and uncertainty everyday people stepped up and out front. The effort was led by our heroic first responders; doctors and nurses, hospital workers of all stripes, police, firefighters, and other emergency personnel, sanitation workers, nursing home employees and front line workers including; supermarket and grocery personnel, all municipal workers, bus drivers, railroad and subway employees and the postal service. These brave men and women put their own needs on the back burner and went to work every day, putting themselves and their own families at risk so the rest of us could stay home safely. These often overlooked acts of courage are what allowed New York to persevere. Now once again we face a battle of even greater proportion with a reemergence and explosion of new COVID-19 cases. Can New York rise up meet the challenge one more time?

Locally and nationwide businesses have been devastated by forced shutdowns, a great number of our neighbors and friends can't pay their rent or mortgage, lines at food banks have quadrupled, jobs have been lost and unemployment benefits are winding down for tens of thousands. The whirlwind that has been 2020 shows no signs of slowing down as we move towards 2021 and perhaps the promise of hope and new beginnings. Most of us have never witnessed a confluence of such destructive economic, and societal factors.

There is hope! This holiday season may the spirit of giving rise to meet you in a different way. In addition to doing our part for safety and reducing virus transmissions perhaps everyone can focus on doing away with typical and seemingly obligatory gift giving, choosing instead to adopt a “my community” approach. It is so important that we do all we can to support our local businesses during these very difficult economic times. Their very survival may depend on our ability to help them remain afloat until help arrives. For those who are in a position to do so please consider giving to others who are less fortunate and supporting your local merchants with in person purchases (where allowed) or by online shopping or via curbside pickup. Give to family members, neighbors and to local charities and food banks who help to serve those in need.

As it was after Superstorm Sandy a local practical gift giving movement is beginning to spread. More and more friends and neighbors are committed to supporting their own local neighborhoods by giving practical gifts that can be redeemed locally, geared towards boosting our local communities by providing friends and loved ones with sensible, practical gifts. Some examples include purchasing car wash gift certificates, or store gift cards for nail salons, spas, diners, oil changes, super markets, gas stations, local restaurants and other neighborhood businesses.

While the festive focus of “The Holiday Season” may be subdued this year there is an incredible opportunity at hand to raise the spirits of entire communities, tempering and transforming tragedy and misfortune with memorable acts of kindness. Earlier efforts by those who have done this over the years indicates this type of service is truly rewarding, a genuine blessing for others that reaps spiritual rewards for the givers as well.

Please be mindful that the typical holiday stress is compounded further this year by the circumstances of our times. In these times of heightened stress it is more important than ever to pay attention to self-care during the holiday season. “Spending time” (connecting safely with loved ones and other important people in our lives like friends, work colleagues, those from religious groups, social clubs and neighborhood groups, can be an additional source of support. Now more than ever before be certain to plug in with people that support and appreciate you! Look in on elderly or compromised neighbors.

Doing nurturing things for our spirits and bodies can also be helpful. In the interest of safety focus more on the things you can do alone or safely with others: Schedule a holiday family video get together; taking a bath, going for a brisk walk, meditation, reading an enjoyable book, taking an online yoga or exercise class or attending a virtual wellness related workshop can all help us refocus and become grounded in the here and now.

Finally let us all be mindful and grateful for our extraordinary service men and women all over the world who are unable to be home with their families this year.

Be safe, be smart! Remember that more than half of all the alcohol consumed in the US during the entire year occurs during the time period from Thanksgiving to New Years.

Wishing all a safe and healthy holiday season filled with Community Spirit!

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