

Cheers! A toast to holiday drinks

By Lori Sachare
For the Patent Trader

It's a social time of year.

While the hors d'oeuvres are passed and the candles are glowing, the drinks are flowing. At intimate gatherings and grand bash-es alike, guests will gravitate toward the punch bowl or bar before they begin mingling, drinks in hand. The holiday beverage, warm or iced, sparkling or still, can generate conversation and bring guests together — affording the occasion for a toast to health and friendship.

Local caterers offer their ideas on beverages to serve at your get-together that will delight your guests and complement your menu.

"The best thing is to keep the drink choice simple," said Mark Kramer, owner of the Chappaqua-based Susan Lawrence Gourmet Foods. "Offer something festive. Catch people's eye."

A warm welcome

Greet your friends and family with a warm and soothing starter when they come in from the cold. Craig Pellis, co-owner of Silver Spoon Catering with his wife Tamara, suggests serving hot butternut squash soup in a demitasse cup. For an extra kick, the soup can be laced with vermouth.

On Christmas Day, Debra Altschuler, co-owner of Two Good Cooks with Judith Neidert, suggests serving your guests a red drink like a Bloody Mary.

Pleasing punches

Guests will enjoy congregating around a welcoming punch bowl. Serve delicious alcohol-free punches at afternoon parties where children may be present. If you want to add alcohol, Altschuler says rum, wine, vodka and champagne all work well, but leave it on the side so guests can add the amount they desire. "You can't take it out," she said. If you are going to use champagne in a punch, it's not necessary to use an expensive one.

Altschuler recommended a raspberry or cranberry punch — or mixed, if you like, with some ginger ale or seltzer. "It's beautiful with lemon slices and some raspberries floating on top of the punch bowl." She recommends you spend some time in advance doing a taste test to see how you prefer the flavor of the punch, sweet or dry. "Every palette is different. Have fun creating your own flavors."

Kramer serves punch in a glistening ice bowl decorated with evergreens and garlands.

In "Ten Tips for Making Punch," on the Epicurious Web site (www.epicurious.com), it is recommended that you use a large block of ice rather than ice cubes in punch, as there is less di-

lution. The Web site also says that a gallon of punch fills about 32 punch cups and to figure on two or three cups per guest.

Hot drinks

To accompany a roaring fire in the fireplace, Pellis recommended that you bring warmth to your affair with Holiday wine (spiced red wine) from the Brotherhood Winery, served hot. He also suggests mulled cider — add cloves, cinnamon and orange rinds to apple cider, bring to a boil and serve.

Tradition, tradition

As they point out in "The Fiddler on the Roof," traditions change, and that goes for holiday drinks as well. There are two drinks, both English in origin, as-

sociated with the holidays but no longer popular. Hot toddies (according to folklore a cure for the common cold) made of brandy, honey, tea and lemon, and hot buttered rum are no longer big hits.

Here we go a-wassailing

Have some wassail before you go caroling and you won't be cold! Wassail drinks have many traditions associated with them. It is said that carolers went from door to door with a wassail bowl and had it refilled after singing. It was once customary to float toasted bread on the drink, originating the phrase "making of a toast." There are many variations, but all are made of apples, since wassail is associated with the custom of blessing apple orchards.



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Mark Kramer pours a glass of his Holiday Pomegranate Punch at Susan Lawrence Gourmet Foods in Chappaqua.