

International students talk about holidays here and at home

BY KRISTEN COUNTS

Special to the Record-Eagle

International students at The Leelanau School in Glen Arbor recently discussed their impressions of holidays spent in the U.S. and shared accounts of their own holiday celebrations back home.

Luisa and Suzana Abilio, sisters from Luanda, Angola, speak a number of languages — Portugese, French, Spanish, English and Congo. Prior to attending school in the U.S., the Abilios were educated in France.

“It’s easier to believe in Christmas, Santa Claus and all of that here because there’s fresh snow and chimneys... In Paris it’s hard to believe in it all because they have no snow and most people live in apartments,” said Luisa.

“The view I have of the U.S. at Christmas includes church. It is the country that believes in God. When you think of Christmas in the U.S, you think of a religious holiday,” said Suzana.

The Abilio sisters said that they like Thanksgiving as well. Suzana said, “It’s a day where you can have the chance to join family and friends and just talk about everything.”

Luisa added, “It’s nice that it’s a day where you give thanks. I just looked it up and figured that out.”



Suzana Abilio

Looking a bit quizzical, Luisa said, “The thing to me that seems strange is the importance put on Halloween Day. I don’t get it. It’s scary and you go around asking for candy? That’s strange.”

For Thanksgiving 2002, Sae-bom Goo of Seoul, South Korea celebrated in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. In contrast, Goo described a Korean harvest celebration called Chusuk.

“You eat good food and it’s when rice is harvested,” said Goo.

Chusuk is the second largest holiday in Korea, next to Chinese New Year.

Goo smiled as she explained a unique Chusuk tradition: “We eat a special rice cake. They say for moms that if you make a really pretty rice cake, then you will have a really pretty daughter.”



Luisa Abilio

For Christmas, Angola has its own set of traditions.

“Christmas in Angola is all about family,” said Luisa. “You have a big, big meal with all of your family there. Then, you take your leftovers to friends. Everyone shares.”

Luisa and Suzana said that they wear traditional Angolan dress for the celebration.

If the Abilios celebrate Christmas in France, where most of their relatives are, Luisa said, “We cook and eat and eat and eat.”

Goo does not see Christmas as a very big holiday.

“I think I have more fun on Christmas Eve than on Christmas,” said Goo. “We go out with friends. We have cake, exchange gifts, and play games. There is music and parties and Christmas trees in the streets.”



Tatsuya Yamashiro

She explained that may be partly because the winter is not as cold in South Korea as it is in Michigan.

Tatsuya Yamashiro of Yamaguchi, Japan said that his family’s Christmas traditions aren’t so different from the United States.

“My family has big parties with friends and family, a big Christmas tree, and Santa Claus for kids. We exchange Christmas presents. Parents give money to children,” he said.

In South Korea, the greatest celebration occurs for the Chinese New Year, a holiday in February that is fascinating in its traditions.

Older relatives are bowed down to, literally. Goo demonstrated the delicate bows, which vary in form according to the bower’s sex.

Goo said, “We pray for their good health. They tell



Sae-bom Goo

us good things like ‘good luck’ and give us money.”

Goo explained that non-Christians also bow down at the gravesites of ancestors, praying for them and leaving food and pouring alcohol.

“We go and see how dead people are doing,” said Goo. “They must be hungry and thirsty. If they smoked when they were alive, sometimes people leave them cigarettes.”

The tradition is to bow twice at a gravesite. This ritual of respect for ancestors is so important to them that an altar is made and bowed to for those gravesites that can’t be traveled to.

Another Chinese New Year tradition is the consumption of rice soup.

“Old people say you won’t get another year older unless you eat the soup,” said Goo.

In Angola, they celebrate the calendar New Year, and it’s celebrated in a big way, according to the Abilio sisters.

“People will save their money for parties at hotels, etc.,” said Luisa. “The low class and high class mix in Angola because they all spend the same money.”

South Koreans also recognize the calendar New Year, though it is celebrated with less fanfare than Chinese New Year. A bell is rung in Seoul at midnight on New Year’s Eve. Similar to Americans watching the Times Square ball drop, South Koreans often see the bell rung on their TV sets. Goo explained that some think that if they see the bell rung in person, it will bring good luck for the year. Unfortunately, the luck-seekers are occasionally — and unluckily — trampled in the large crowds.

In Japan, Yamashiro celebrates the New Year by playing games with friends, namely card games, board games and Japanese badminton.

“We eat a big meal and then we fall asleep,” said Yamashiro with a laugh.

So, despite cultural differences, it seems the love of celebrating and togetherness is universal.

Kristen Counts is a local freelance writer.

Illuminating tips for dazzling display Inside story of outside Christmas décor

BY R.J. IGNEZLI

Copley News Service

Lights. Ladders. Action.

Watching Josh Cantor hang holiday lights is like getting a behind-the-scenes peek at a movie set.

“Move the ladder over to the right. Get me two more strings of lights,” yelled the owner of Christmas Light Hangers, a San Diego light installation troupe.

Crawling along the roof of a vine-covered arbor, Cantor is putting the finishing touches on a two-day, 100-light-string project. With twilight approaching, show time is just minutes away.

After a final check of all electrical connections, he gives the long-awaited signal.

Suddenly the pastoral estate is transformed into a glistening Southern California wonderland.

As any director will tell you, a show is only as good as its production effort. And that goes for Christmas light displays, too.

“You can’t just staple some lights up on your roof and think it’s going to look good,” Cantor said. “It takes time, planning and the right equipment.”

For a safe installation and the most effective holiday display, lighting pros and safety experts offer some illuminating tips:

■ Before you start, check all light strands for broken sockets, frayed cords and loose connections. Replace the faulty strands with new ones.

■ “Don’t spend too much time repairing your lights,” Cantor said. “Most lights, especially the mini lights, are only made to last a season or two. Just go buy some new ones.”

■ Read the directions on the box of lights for guidelines on the number of sets that can be safely hooked together. The limit is usually three.

■ Avoid overloading a single wall outlet or extension cord. Each outlet can only accommodate up to 1,500 watts. Add up the wattage of the bulbs on the string and don’t let them exceed the limit.

■ Make sure all lights are Underwriters Laboratories listed, signifying they’ve been tested for safety.

■ The large, screw-in holiday bulb is a good type to

use for framing the house since individual lights can easily be replaced.

■ If your screw-in holiday lights are more than 5 years old, replace them with new and improved low-heat, energy-efficient bulbs.

■ Choose bulbs with transparent rather than painted coloring. These lights look brighter and will not peel or chip.

■ Plan your strategy, considering where the electrical outlets are so you can easily plug cords in.

■ Use good-quality outdoor extension cords that can handle moisture. Choose dark-colored cords rather than bright orange ones, so they don’t stand out.

■ If you have an older home without ground fault circuit interrupters built into the outlets, use portable ones. They plug easily into the outlet and help protect you from electrical shock.

■ Wear proper footwear, rubber-soled and low-heeled shoes, especially when climbing on the roof.

■ Do not wear a tool belt while hanging lights. It could be hazardous in case of a fall.

■ Be sure to use a sturdy extension ladder. To minimize the trips up and down and for safety’s sake, make light hanging a two-person job.

■ Hang lights with the power off. Turn on the power after attaching each string to make sure there are no problems.

■ Keep ladders away from power lines. Never stand on an aluminum ladder while installing or troubleshooting live wires or lights. Unplug the line or cut off power first.

■ Hanging larger lights takes more precision than the minis or icicles.

“With the bigger lights, you have to get every bulb straight in line,” Cantor said. “Otherwise, the first thing you’ll see when they’re lit are the mistakes.”

■ Outdoor lights should be hung with the bulbs hanging down. This prevents moisture from collecting in the sockets and causing damage.

■ If you use a staple gun, use the smallest quarter-inch wire staples you can find so you won’t damage the wood. When hanging

screw-in lights, staple every light on both sides. For icicle lights, place a staple every two or three lights. Be careful not to staple through the wire.

■ Instead of staples or nails, try using plastic gutter clips to hang the lights.

“They work great because they don’t cause any damage to the house,” Cantor said.

■ When wrapping tree trunks, don’t use a staple gun or nails. The sap will ooze out and sink into the wires, causing a short circuit.

■ When lighting bushes or shrubs, don’t be stingy with the lights. A small bush requires at least six to eight strings to make the lighting effective, Cantor said.

■ Try to keep extension cords out of sight. Cantor routinely runs cords along the gutter line or loops them over the roof and down the back of the house to an outlet.

■ Wrap all light and cord connections with duct tape to make them waterproof and keep them from loosening.

■ You can cut each string of lights to custom-fit windows and lines so leftover lights won’t be left dangling on the side. After cutting wires, twist them together and wrap with electrical tape.

■ Label the light strings for next year, indicating which window or portion of the house they’re used for. For more complicated light schemes, take a picture or draw a map.

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM

Special to the Record-Eagle

Was it the Swedes or the Germans? Or Thomas Edison’s assistant? Who started the love of light at Christmas?

We see the lights now on downtown lamp posts, along drives, on trees and shrubs. They light up wire forms to look like trees and shrubs and cling to supports shaped like Santa, reindeer, and even Nativity scenes.

The Swedes bring light to the holidays early, and do so with great energy. The Lucia celebrations, Festivals of Light, follow the earlier advent candles inside and outside. Founded in pre-Christian eras, they are celebrated now on Dec. 13, marked by young girls dressed in white and wearing crowns of holiday greens, passing through homes and streets, through schools, hospitals, and workplaces, bringing light and warmth into the dark winter.

The Germans added the candle-laden Christmas tree, then to England (Its popularity aided by Charles Dickens’ “The Christmas Carol”), then to America. The tree first came from the forest into the home, and then from the home to, in all its lighted glory, outside again.

Interestingly, it was Thomas Edison’s helper, Edward Johnson, who dis-

played Christmas lights as a publicity stunt, just three years after the light bulb was invented. The Detroit Post and Tribune covered the event and Johnson’s lights were patriotic red, white and blue.

Outdoor lights were introduced to the public on a bigger scale in 1927 and they were immediately popular.

Paul and Becky Wheelock of Traverse City are first-year franchise owners of Christmas Décor, a service which lights up both businesses and residences. They offer trained installers and sell the outdoor lighting materials to clients.

Even better, the firm will take down the lights when the clients prefer and will store them until the next year. Clients choose the extent of lighting and the styles from custom proposals. Timers also add convenience. According to Becky Wheelock, 80 percent of clients opt for clear or white lights, although colors are offered in many varieties.

However, lights are only part of the outside holiday scene. Decking the grounds with greenery is, as always, an American tradition. Roping around

the doors and/or porch light fixtures is always a holiday highlight — whether lighted, decorated, or left natural — perhaps with cones and berries.

At Traverse City’s Hibbards, Cindy Hardy says that they carry cedar roping and mixed green wreaths. And, as with other area florists, special orders should be made as soon as possible. Hibbards will order boxwood wreaths and mixed greens roping with bay leaves.

When decorating the outside, keeping nature in mind adds a simple elegance. Lighting or adding evergreen roping to fences, walkways and foundation plantings, draping lights and roping should complement nature, not compete with it.

Advice to keep in mind is that the purpose of lights and décor is to give holiday warmth to the home, not to literally illuminate the neighborhood.

Sally D. Ketchum is a local freelance writer.



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