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Planning can make holidays merry

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What makes holiday meals special is not the kind of foods we prepare or the size of the group, it's the celebration with friends and loved ones. Often times though, getting that meal on the table can leave us frazzled, stressed and unable to fully enjoy this special time.

Here are a few tips that can help make holiday meals safe and stress-free:

Decide what you want to prepare well ahead of time. Then check your storage space. You may have to make room in your freezer or refrigerator for some of your purchases. Make a shopping list and purchase everything needed one to two weeks ahead.

To reduce preparation time that day, some foods can be prepared ahead and frozen. Items that can be made early and frozen are homemade breads and rolls, casseroles, gravy, pie dough, cookies, cakes and other types of desserts. Even some types of stuffing can be made ahead and frozen.

Share the celebration—ask others to bring their favorite holiday side dishes or desserts. If you're only cooking for your household let every family member be responsible for the preparation of one dish.

Keep it safe

Cross-contamination is the term for how bacteria can be spread from one food product to another. Prevent any potential cross-contamination of your food by separating raw meat, poultry or seafood and ready to eat foods in your shopping cart and in your grocery bags.

Store ready to eat foods above your raw foods in the refrigerator. The safest way to thaw frozen food is in the refrigerator.

This method requires pre-planning, but if you need to thaw your food rapidly do so in a cold water bath. Place the food item in a leak proof container or bag and submerge it in cold water, changing the water every 30 minutes so that it stays cold.

After thawing, refrigerate or cook promptly. You can also thaw a food item in the microwave as long as you prepare that food immediately after removing it from the microwave.

Always marinate foods in the refrigerator. During preparation use one cutting board for raw meat, poultry and seafood and another cutting board for ready to eat foods. Don't rely on the eye. Cook all foods to proper temperatures for safety.

Use a food thermometer to make sure all food, especially meat and poultry are cooked to a proper temperature and keep a cooking internal temperature chart handy. (**foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/mintemp.html**)

The importance of storage

After the meal is over, it's time to begin dealing with the leftovers. It isn't a favorite job, but is very important to the safety of the food your family and guests may eat later.

Place all your leftovers in small, shallow containers and be sure to cut the meat or poultry into small pieces. Chill all your leftovers within two hours of cooking. Yes, that means taking care to store the leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer quickly!

The refrigerator temperature should be 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below, the freezer temperature should be zero degrees. Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer to monitor safe temperatures.

Finally, reheat safely. Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F and check the internal temperature of the thickest part with a food thermometer. Bring gravies, sauces and soups to a rolling boil. I

If you prepared turkey and stuffing, use leftover turkey and stuffing within 3-4 days; gravy should be used within 1-2 days. It is safe to refreeze leftover turkey and trimmings even if you purchased them frozen. Wrap and seal leftovers tightly for best quality and be sure to thaw frozen leftovers in the refrigerator.

We wish you a safe and happy holiday celebration!

Gary A. Witte

Giving thanks for our public safety

The Cobb Chamber honored Cobb County's Public Safety personnel, during its annual appreciation breakfast at the Cobb Galleria Centre Oct. 5.

The event drew more than 650 attendees and kicked off Public Safety Appreciation Week, a community-wide effort to say "thank you" to the men and women who work to keep Cobb County safe.

Award winners included Acworth Police Cpl. Bo Jordan as Public Safety Employee of the Year, Cobb Police Lt. Chris Michael and Precinct 2 Evening Watch with the Award of Merit, Puckett EMS Senior Field Training Officer Brent Homan from and Cobb Police Det. Chris Twiggs gaining the Award of Merit and Marietta Police Officer Mark Bishop earning the Medal of Valor.

Nominees for the awards represented public safety agencies throughout Cobb County including police, fire, sheriff's office, campus police, 911 dispatchers and EMS.

Airport project wins top prize

The Cobb County International Airport's new air traffic control tower was recently awarded the 2015 General Aviation Project of the Year in Georgia. The 78-foot tower, at twice the height of the original, has improved visibility and the work environment for air traffic control personnel. It also incorporated FAA security standards. The airfield is the second busiest general aviation airport in Georgia and is base to 300 aircraft, while generating an annual economic impact of $112.4 million to the local community and supporting 842 local jobs.

For more information about Cobb County International Airport go to **cobbinternationalairport.com**.

Cobb plans for the future

Cobb County staff is hosting informational and interactive meetings throughout the county for residents, business owners and property owners to kickoff the public engagement phase of the 10-year update to the Comprehensive Plan for the unincorporated parts of the county.

Civic engagement is a central component to any planning process. In order for the Cobb 2040 Plan to be successful, residents must be active in the planning process by providing their thoughts and ideas to ensure the plan reflects the community's preferences and desires.

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-range, community designed growth strategy that will continue to make Cobb County an attractive place to invest, conduct business and raise a family. The current plan covers the time period between 2007 and 2030.

The 10-year update will extend the current plan's growth outlook to 2040. It will help Cobb guide and manage expected population and employment growth and coordinate major public investments in public safety, transportation, community facilities and other important elements.

All meetings and exercises are designed to be easy and fun for all who care about how their community will grow in the future. The goal is to share how the 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the county, as well as providing information about existing conditions.

Interactive sessions will help gather input about the needs and opportunities for Cobb County moving forward over the next 20 years. Please attend one of the remaining meetings:

- Meeting in District Four

6-8 p.m., Thursday, **Nov. 12**

South Cobb Community Center, 600 Lions Club Drive, Mableton

- Meeting in District Three

6-8 p.m., Monday, **Nov. 16**

Mountain View Community Center, 3400 Sandy Plains Road, Marietta

For more information about the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, call 770-528-2018 or email **comdevplanning@cobbcounty.org**.

Go online to check traffic in your area

Cobb County has an easy-to-use web tool to help users navigate traffic. Available on both desktop and mobile devices, **cobbcommute.org** shows users color-coded traffic speeds on major roads and highways, offers a look at live traffic camera feeds and much more.

Cobb County...Expect the Best!

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