

# Holiday happenings on the upswing around the East Bay

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With the holiday season rapidly approaching, employees of East Bay businesses will need to start shuffling their dancing shoes. Big holiday bashes are back in style.

"The economy is good, business is good, and parties are happening," said Denise Slavitt, owner of Livermore-based Checkers Catering. For 18 years Slavitt has catered holiday parties for East Bay businesses, and this year she is noticing an upswing in company celebrations.

"We're as busy, if not busier, than last year," Slavitt said.

Checkers is planning a 1960s rock 'n' roll themed holiday party for the Pleasanton architecture firm Dahlin Group. The retro hoopla will happen in the ballroom of the Dahlin-designed Dublin Senior Center, and an estimated 300 party guests will be there to dance to jukebox tunes and sip root beer floats. Servers in short white aprons and paper diner hats will dish out main courses.

"We're doing a blue plate special at a roll-up counter and meatloaf at another station," said Sandee Munroe, Checkers' director of special events.

While Dahlin is focusing on the 1960s, lawyers from the Walnut Creek and San Francisco offices of Morrison & Foerster LLP will be throwing curve balls and heading to batting practice at their holiday party in AT&T Park. This is the second year the law firm has hosted its celebration in the dugouts and locker rooms of the San Francisco Giants.

"We got rave reviews last year," said MoFo director of administration Hilary O'Brien. "People who were skeptical of a holiday party at a ballpark are going this year."

With 1,000 employees, the firm has to find a location to accommodate everyone.

"In the past, we've been at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco," O'Brien said. "We like to do something a little different."

At the park employees will feast on a traditional turkey dinner and on mini hot dog appetizers. They'll watch videos on the JumboTron and boogie to music from the company's homegrown band, the MoFonics. AT&T spokesman Stephen Revetria said that a "ballpark" figure for a party like this is about \$100 per person.

Budgeting big for the holidays is nothing new for Pleasanton staffing company Bayside Solutions. When the company was launched in 2001, it threw parties in Las Vegas, said president Bob Klotz.

"It's a young, fun organization," Klotz said, and what he has planned for this year reflects that. The evening will start with wining and dining at the Rincon Center's Cosmopolitan Café. To avoid drinking and driving, employees



**Sandee Munroe of Checkers Catering is so busy planning parties for other companies that her own may have to wait until March.**

can stay at one of the 40 rooms Klotz said he reserved at San Francisco's Hyatt Regency.

Out of downtown and into a more serene setting, Wendel Rosen Black

& Dean LLP attorneys will be riding in horse-drawn carriages at this year's black tie event held at Oakland's Dunsmuir House. The old-fashioned carriage house will set the tone of the

party, said executive director Gina Maciula.

"It's the traditional party that other firms aren't doing," Maciula said.

In addition to the cottage gathering, Wendel Rosen legal teams battle up in their annual "breakfast challenge." The office's dining room is transformed into an Iron Chef cook-off with rows of stoves lined up to fry winning omelettes and blintzes.

"Last year, it was litigation versus transactions," Maciula said. "We all end up gaining so much weight, but all the events are good for morale."

Not every company is throwing big celebrations to boost morale. At Clorox, holiday events are strictly charitable. The Oakland household products company focuses on giving back to the community by donating to the Salvation Army and area soup kitchens. Last year, employees raised \$10,000 for family shelters and donated food baskets to home-bound Oakland residents. "We get in the spirit of the holiday," said spokesman Dan Staublin. "It's fun and rewarding."

Employees at Mr. Plastics in San Leandro wear bibs instead of bow ties. "We've got a crab broker for a client," said owner Mike Adelson, who hosts the

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**Denise Slavitt**, owner, Checkers Catering

annual company crab feed. At noon on December 24, employees put down their pens and computers and head down to the company kitchen to pick up mallets and shell pickers. "It's all right here" said Adelson, "because people just don't have time for outside events."

Because of time constraints, more and more companies are celebrating the holidays after the holidays. Zentax Inc., the Pleasanton-based electronic archiving company, is waiting until late-January for its annual cocktail party. Financial lender E-Loan Inc. is spreading out its funds by hosting smaller parties throughout the year.

"We have a Thanksgiving pie social and a summer sumo challenge," said E-Loan spokesperson Laurie Azzano. For the challenge, E-loan employees dress in oversize, flesh-colored sumo suits that are filled with air. Sumo wrestlers from different departments "literally bounce around the lawn and on one another until one falls over and can't get up," Azzano said.

There's more than one way to observe the holiday season. Checkers may even be playing bocce ball, Slavitt said. But her caterers will wait as long as until March to do it.

"We have to wait until we're done with all the other parties," she said. "We're booked."