

'Tis the Season to Be Jolly: Valley Family Traditions 2015

Written by Christina Tetreault

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Breaking through the hustle and bustle of the holiday season with Christmas carols humming from the stereo and wish lists fresh on their minds, we hear from some of our favorite Valley families to see what makes their holiday dreams come true.

By: Christina Tetreault Photographed By: Cori Roberts at The Wrigley Mansion



The HALL-FITCH Family

Jennifer Hall-Fitch and Stephen Fitch | Children: Jackson: 4 1/2; Isabella: 2 1/2

Christmas is everything to this tight-knit family. With much more to celebrate than just the holiday, including a family birthday and wedding anniversary, there's quite a lot of hustle and bustle. However, one tradition never changes. "It's a tradition I have carried over to doing with my own children. Each year we read, *The Night Before Christmas*, which gets the magic stirring in their heads," says Jennifer Hall-Fitch. The founder and designer of luxury children's brand, [Henny & Coco](#), uses that magic that she sees in her children as inspiration for her brand. "They inspire me and a lot of what I do, how I can dress them, and how I envision things based on their personalities." And this year, the passionate family of four will be starting a new tradition: going up north and picking out their own real Christmas tree to continue the magic around their rich and growing traditions.

FAVORITE HOLIDAY MOVIE: Isabella: "The puppy one...puppy one. The puppy one is my favorite!"

TREAT: Jennifer: Blueberry pie and Christmas cookies; Stephen: Blueberry/cherry cobbler with vanilla ice cream; Jackson: "Actually, I like broccoli! Actually, what it is called that we just baked? A pie!"

CAROL: Jackson: "I like the 'Jingle Bell' song!"

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The TAYLOR Family

Karrin Taylor | Children: Alexandra: 22; Elizabeth: 19 (not pictured, away at school); William: 15; Olivia: 11

With long established roots in Arizona, one of Executive Vice President of DMB Associates Karrin Taylor's fondest holiday memories was opening presents in the wee hours of Christmas morning after going to midnight mass and returning home to find that Santa had magically already trickled gifts under the tree. Going to Christmas Eve mass is also a tradition that she has held with her own children, but she's added her own sweet spin to the tradition: pecan pie. For the Taylors, the holiday season does not begin without a full house of family and their traditional passed-down, famous pecan pie recipe.

FAVORITE FAMILY TRADITION: Karrin: "Getting to make our pecan pie with all of the cousins around"; Alex: "When all the family comes together between Thanksgiving and New Year's"; Olivia: "Probably all of the baking, the cookies and pecan pie"; Elizabeth: "Making pecan pie"; William: "Spending time with my family"

TREAT: Karrin: Pecan pie, cookies and candies; Alex: Gingersnaps; Olivia: Pecan pie; Elizabeth: Mashed potatoes; William: Chocolate chip cookies **MOVIE:** Karrin: "Miracle on 34th Street," "It's a Beautiful Life" and "Elf"; Alex and William: "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer"; Olivia: "Elf"; Elizabeth: "It's a Wonderful Life"

CAROL: Karrin and William: "Silent Night"; Alex and Elizabeth: "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer"; Olivia: "Deck the Halls"

ACTIVITY: Karrin: "Cooking and eating with family"; Alex: "Waking up on Christmas morning and eating breakfast"; Olivia: "I like to wake up on Christmas morning and make pecan pie"



The KEPPEL Family

Scott and Melissa Keppel | Children: Gavin: 13; Alex: 11; Gabe: 8

Having a dad who's the owner of Scott's Training Systems and fitness director of Fit Life 120 and a mom who has defeated cancer twice, this family is one force to be reckoned with. Keeping holiday traditions as strong as their family's bond, Scott Keppel says their family is "blessed." The Keppels incorporate their own gym with the holiday spirit. "Every year we participate in John Jay and Rich's Christmas Wish program," Scott says. The family and their gym community—their second family—collect gifts to donate that the gym incentivizes. This is one way that Scott and Melissa teach their three children, Gavin, Alex and Gabe, about the true reason for the season: giving.

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FAVORITE FAMILY TRADITION: Scott: "Getting each kid an ornament symbolic of them each year"

MOVIE: "Elf"

TREAT: Gabe: Candy canes and peanut butter cookies; Melissa: Assorted tray of desserts from AJ's; Gavin: Candy canes; Scott and Alex: Making magic cookie bars

CAROL: Gabe and Gavin: "Jingle Bells"; Melissa: "O Holy Night (O Night Divine)"; Alex: "Let it Snow"



The CARDINI Family

Michelle and Joe Cardini | Children: Amanda: 21; Joseph: 18; Nina: 14

Community makes up the spirit of the holidays for the Cardini family. What prompts their annual Christmas Eve party and new traditions are the fondest of childhood memories. "I loved my mother's 'Christmas Eve in Connecticut' parties that she would throw. It was a giant open house with a big bowl of eggnog," says Michelle Cardini. The co-founder of MASK (Mothers Awareness on School-age Kids) knows the importance of a strong community for youth. This same atmosphere from her memories is one that she now recreates for her children and their school friends during the Christmas season, inviting her children's high school and college pals so that they have a place to celebrate along with their family. And, what's now included? An entire hot chocolate bar filled with treats.

FAVORITE CHRISTMAS CAROL: Michelle: "All I Want for Christmas is You"; Amanda: "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire" ["The Christmas Song"]; Nina: "Santa Baby"

TREAT: Michelle: Peanut butter chocolate balls; Amanda: Peppermint bark; Joseph: Gram's Christmas tree cookies; Nina: Hot chocolate

TRADITION: Amanda: "Being home with loved ones"; Nina: "Our Christmas Eve party"; Joseph: "Going to pick out a live Christmas tree"