

## "No room at the inn" holiday

By Julie Jordan-Hendricks  
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

for baby Jesus, who is represented by a beautifully ornate porcelain doll from Mexico.

**B**latant commercialism runs rampant throughout the holidays. But it hasn't marred every community. Many neighborhoods still celebrate the Christmas season in the traditions of their ancestors.

Members of Lincoln's Hispanic Community — including members of the Hispanic Catholic Community Center — celebrate Christmas for more than two weeks beginning Dec. 16. *Las Posadas* (the inn) centers on a reenactment of Joseph and Mary's search for shelter before Christ's birth.

Letty Sanchez, a former participant, said that a young man and woman from the community are chosen to portray Joseph and Mary. Sanchez portrayed Mary in last year's *Las Posadas*.

On Dec. 16, the couple dress up like Mary and Joseph and visit a home in the community. At the door, they sing a song asking for shelter for the night. They are refused and the door slammed in their faces. Each night the couple visits a different home and are similarly refused entrance — until Dec. 24. On Christmas Eve, the couple is allowed shelter "for the night." The host family has prepared a corner of their home for Joseph and Mary that resembles a stable. A big fiesta begins on Dec. 25 when everyone gathers at the home and finds the baby Jesus has been "born." Participants sing, say prayers and a mock rosary

People celebrate with presents, candy and cakes, a surprise-filled pinata, songs and a feast that includes empanadas — a tortilla-fritter with pumpkin filling. After the Christmas day celebration, the group pretends that Mary and Joseph stay at the house, and the holiday continues until Jan. 6.

*El Dia de Los tres Reyes Magos*, meaning The Day of Three Kings, celebrates the arrival of the three magi with presents for the Christ-child. Mary and Joseph wake up the Baby and everyone sings songs and gives presents to the infant Jesus. They share in another full-fledged fiesta with more candy, pinatas and goodies.

Sanchez said everyone in the Hispanic community likes to take part in *Las Posadas*. Families take turns offering their homes for the stable and giving treats to Mary and Joseph after they are "officially" turned away. She said that each year, younger children are excited and eager to do their part and carry on the tradition of *Las Posadas*.

"The old customs never die," she said, "It grows every year."

Another fiesta takes place Dec. 12 in South Sioux City, said Lazaro Flores, public information officer for Nebraska's Mexican-American Commission. Hispanics there gather in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico.

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## Irish spend holidays with family, food

By Ann Lowe  
Daily Nebraskan Senior Reporter

**T**he holiday season is family time in Ireland. Offices close for several days, as families gather to feast and play games.

"Things really shut down over Christmas," said Desmond Wheeler, UNL chemistry professor and Dublin native.

Wheeler went back to visit a family in Dublin at Christmas two years ago. Christmas was on Sunday, and banks were closed from Friday afternoon until the next Wednesday, he said.

"The only bank open was at the horserace meeting," Wheeler said.

And there weren't any white sales Dec. 26, he said. The stores were all closed for St. Stephen's Day, the feast of the first Christian martyr.

The Irish now follow American custom and deck the halls in early December, Wheeler said. Traditionally, though, they waited until Christmas Eve to decorate, he said.

Irish tradition calls for 12 days of Christmas, said Louis Sayer of Lincoln, whose father was born in Ireland. The holiday starts on Christmas Eve and ends on Epiphany, Jan. 6. The Irish call the wise men's day "Little Christmas," Sayer said.

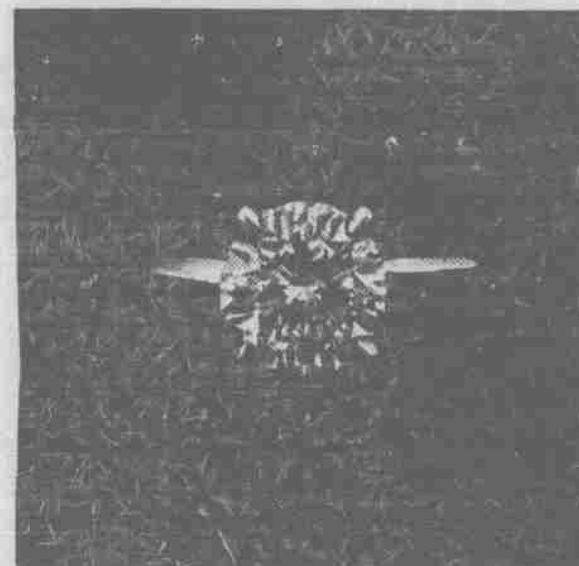
The traditional Irish home has a blessed candle in the window "to light the way for Jesus and Mary," Sayer said. The poor use cut turnips for candleholders, she said. Irish immigrants brought this custom to the United States, but candles usually are put on the mantle for all to see, she said.

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