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Family expects 100 or so for Christmas

Gatherings keep growing larger for parents of 13

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

ALEXANDRIA - When Ed and Agnes Mader have their family Christmas, it's going to take awhile for the mashed potatoes to get around the table.

All 13 of their grown children, 36 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren will attend with their spouses, along with a few other friends and relatives. The Maders are expecting more than 100 family members. And this happens every Christmas.

"We've always gotten along good and look forward to family get-togethers - Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, usually once in the summer," said Agnes Mader, a homemaker. Ed ran an insurance and real-estate business in Alexandria.

ADVERTISEMENT When asked how she kept her children and grandchildren close, Mader seemed puzzled.

"We just - you know - got along. That's all," she said. "Everybody has their ups and downs, but there's never been anything serious enough that they don't want to come around - we love it," Agnes Mader said.

The party will be at the home of their ninth child, Beth Sanker. Last year, the Maders downsized from the home where they reared their family. Sanker, who has six children, lives within walking distance of her parents' house on Bittersweet Drive. She has her own beliefs on why the family is close.

"Something that I've come to realize in the last 10 years is I think every one of us grew up thinking we were the favorite child," Sanker said. "I think that has something to do with us getting along fine. They made us all feel like we were the most important person in their lives. It cut down on competition and we got along."

Large gatherings are not new to the family. Seventh child Mary Ann Mader-Jones cherishes a picture of a similar gathering from 1959. In it, she's a 6-month-old infant surrounded by a Christmas gathering.

"It is very touching. Sort of sad now," Mader-Jones said. "All of Mom's brothers have passed, and there are only four girls left. In the past year or so, several of them passed away. It makes me realize that time is precious, and we need to take the time to spend with our families whenever we can. We never know when it might be too late."



ZOOM

The Enquirer / Meggan Booker

Ed and Agnes Mader of Alexandria will have about 100 family members gather for Christmas at the home of one of their daughters. Agnes holds a 1959 article about their gatherings, which get larger as the family grows. The family also gets together for Easter and Thanksgiving.

During meal time, the family cooperates as much as possible, but having 100 people makes elegant dining difficult.

"Each family gets assigned a dish to bring, so no one does all the cooking. It is utter chaos, but lots of fun," Mader-Jones said.

"I just try not to worry too much because everybody helps out when they get there. We use a lot of disposable stuff," Sanker said.

Gift-giving is friendly competition; the family does a "white elephant" exchange.

"We'll draw numbers, pick a gift, open it, and if the recipient doesn't like it, they'll steal someone else's gift, and make that person take their gift. The last person whose name is drawn is the luckiest because they can steal any gift in the house," Mader-Jones said.

After presents are unwrapped and the house cleaned up, the Mader family will start to think about next year's party.

"They have been going on ever since the first child married," said Mader-Jones. "Everyone comes home for Christmas no matter what. It just keeps getting bigger and bigger."

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