



Karidat now on AmazonSmile.com's charity list

By **BEA CABRERA**
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CORRESPONDENT

Since 2013, Amazon has donated over \$215 million to charitable institutions worldwide through its AmazonSmile.com platform. By purchasing items online and through AmazonSmile.com, customers can donate to the charity of their choice.

This year, the CNMI's Karidat Social Services has made it to AmazonSmile.com's charity list. Now, people can donate to Karidat by simply clicking a button when they make a purchase on Amazon.



Ogumoro

How it works is that Amazon shoppers have to shop on AmazonSmile.com and they can choose Karidat as their charity of choice. Almost all products on Amazon are available at AmazonSmile.com.

"Karidat is truly grateful to be under AmazonSmile.com. An opportunity like this allows us to continue our mission of providing services and advocacy to those in need.

Shoppers who use AmazonSmile.com and choose Karidat as their charity of choice allows them to give back to their community just by shopping what they would normally buy on Amazon," said Karidat executive director Lauri Ogumoro. "This is the first time we are working with Amazon and it's a win-win situation as more people

choose Karidat, and shop online, Amazon will make the donation for them."

Ogumoro said that Amazon got in touch with her in October. "Jesse C. from the Amazon Smile Charity program actually called Karidat on Oct. 30. It was an exciting telephone call to learn that Amazon has selected Karidat. They told us they are expanding their charity program to the U.S. territories."

"Based on our good tax records with the [Internal Revenue Service] as a 501c3 organization, they invited Karidat to become a member of their program. Jesse then informed us how to register Karidat with their Smile Amazon Charity Program," she added.

Currently, Karidat has several projects that the community can help them with. Most proceeds go to their Family Services program and operations, much of which goes to food and home rental assistance. The first one is Karidat's

Thrift Shop where donors can donate new or gently used clothing and household items in good condition. Our thrift shop is open from Monday to Thursday, 9am to 12pm. Almost all items are \$1 with the exception of new items, which are still very low priced to help our shoppers.

"...The food assistance program provides assistance to 30 families on a daily basis. The rental program provides emergency one-month rent to struggling families having a difficult time paying their current rate or has a past due rent. At this time, priority is given to families who have been impacted by COVID-19 and are unable to receive public assistance. Those interested in donating for either programs can call our main office at (670) 234-5248 or (670) 234-6981," she added.

Another worthwhile cause during Christmas is the Saipan Toys for Tots campaign, which this year

is a collaboration between the U.S. Marine Corps, the Saipan Young Professionals, and the Associated Stu-

dents of the Northern Marianas College.

For more information on how you can make a dona-

tion or include your organization as a beneficiary, call 234-7150 or email saipantots4tots@gmail.com.



Office of the Attorney General's public information officer Carla T. Hocog and her family.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Embracing Christmas during a pandemic

By BEA CABRERA
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It's been nearly a year of living our "new normal" under the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then the CNMI has gone

through different colors of safety levels, a curfew is still in place, and there is still restrictions on gatherings and trips to public places. While we are still under a public emergency this Christmas, families willingly adjust and alter celebrations and long-time traditions to comply with safety rules. Some use this time to appreciate how far we have gone.

For Delegate **Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan (Ind-MP)**, he and his family have two important Christmas events. "The family share a meal and the home visitation of Baby Jesus. ...It's been so since I was a child. Our immediate family has grown to almost 100 individuals so one can imagine the size of our family gatherings, whether it is held at my parent's home or at a hotel dining facility. But this is not unique to our family. This is how Christmas Day is celebrated by families throughout the Marianas," he said. "The pandemic has made it



impossible for our family to gather as we customarily do on Christmas. It is necessary to avoid large gatherings so as to remain as safe as possible from contracting or spreading the virus. ...So my own family will visit my Mom on Christmas Day, just as my siblings will. ...Since the adoration of Baby Jesus is not possible this year, including the visits to homes throughout the Marianas, we will instead individually visit and venerate before our family's Niño Jesus at my Mom's home. ...We will certainly miss the caroling of the Bodig Family this year."

Since the COVID-19 vaccines arrived on Saipan last week and with more expected to arrive in early 2021, Sablan said this will give people of the CNMI the opportunity to be vaccinated. "...Only then can we fully open our islands to tourists, allow our businesses to fully open and bring their employees back to work. We will have greater hope to open schools, with fewer worries of contracting the virus. We also still have a long way to recover from the wrath of [Super] Typhoon Yutu," he said. "I wish everyone who calls the Marianas home a merry Christmas filled with joy, with family and loved ones and with the prospect of good health for 2021."

Sen. Paul Manglona (D-Rota) said that Christmas time is about enjoying family time, singing songs, eating boneless *dagu*, and attending novenas. "Unfortunately, this tradition is practically missing or significantly reduced during this holiday season. The Commonwealth Healthcare Corp., Governor's COVID-19 Task Force, and our people have done an incredible job of keeping COVID-19 at bay. In spite of this, the pandemic has severely affected our lives economically and socially," Manglona said. "My hope for the incoming year is for all our leaders to work collaboratively in dealing with the monumental economic challenges that we are facing today. We must keep in mind our people and the power and duty they have entrusted us with. We must make decisions that are right, honest, and fair, even when it is tough, to set the course for a stronger island community and rebuild our economy back better and stronger than ever."



TanHoldings lawyer **Steve Pixley** and his family typically purchase a "live" Christmas tree. "However, this year there were very few live trees shipped to Saipan and I was unable to purchase one. We do have an artificial tree. We are blessed that our entire family will be together next week."



According to **Sen. Teresita Santos (Ind-Rota)**, Christmas with her family will be celebrated with simplicity yet full of meaning and remembrance. "...This pandemic will affect the way we celebrate Christmas, considering the drop in the world's economy, plus all the health protocols to be observed, called the new normal. Thus, it will be celebrated just within the family and it will not be as extravagant as it used to but



Continued on Next Page

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according to what we have," she said. "As we look forward to the coming new year 2021, may we carry with us life's lessons brought by this pandemic. As most people would say, 'Experience is the best teacher.' So as lessons are learned and lived by, we will be assured of a better, more resilient individuals and communities."

For Saipan Chamber of Commerce president **Velma Palacios** and her family, they are adjusting their Christmas traditions to continue to be safe. "Every year on Christmas Eve, our entire family would attend the Christmas Eve Mass, then we gather for dinner at our house or a family member's home. ... Gifts are exchanged, especially for the young children, and on Christmas Day, we attend Mass and come home and wait in anticipation for the traditional *Niño* (Baby Jesus) being brought to visit our homes," she said. "With this pandemic, we will be adjusting to the new normal and following the guidelines recommended by the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force. We will have just a small gathering after Mass and there will be no *Niño* (Baby Jesus) going to the homes. The Catholic Church has provided alternatives for the families. This would be the first year as far as I can remember that the Baby Jesus will not be brought into homes. We all understand this is for everyone's health and safety."



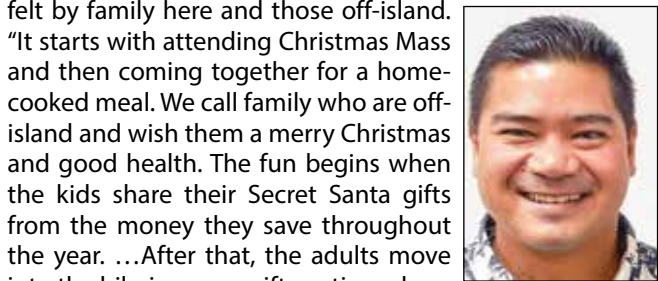
Palacios said that 2020 has been a real challenge for all, including making adjustments to things that we take for granted. "We are unable to visit families as frequently as we want to via traveling or driving to their homes, to ensure that both our health and safety are not compromised. It has made us even closer as families as we communicate more via phone and social media to help each other cope with not being able to do 'normal' things. We try to support each other across the miles, especially during those times of lockdown."

"For 2021, it is my hope the community and families will continue to be strong and support and help each other. We have done a great job as a community following the COVID-19 Task Force recommendations. With the COVID-19 vaccine now available, there is hope. We can try to have some normalcy without living in so much fear. Overall, it is my hope we can start seeing an uptick in our economy as we all foresee 2021 to be a tough year. I would like to see continued public/private partnerships to work on diversifying our economy while we work on our tourism industry. This, in turn, will allow us to help create more jobs for our people," she added.

Triple J chair and CEO **Robert H. Jones** said the Jones family usually goes to Japan or Utah in the mainland for their favorite family pastime: skiing and other winter sports. "All stayed together in a single cabin large enough to house all 20 family members and enjoy the snow, the cold, and one another, cooking family favorites and baking desserts," he said. "This year we will have individual family celebrations because the focus is on safety and survival, like the rest of the world. I look forward to more opportunities into 2021 and beyond as the world learns how to adjust and overcome COVID-19. ... 2021 also entails focus on business development in the CNMI, Guam and Micronesia where the family has roots."

In the household of **Carla T. Hocog**, public information officer of the CNMI Office of the Attorney General, the Christmas season is centered on the arrival and welcoming of the *Niño* into their home. "We're also big on family get-togethers and more so during the holidays where we spend it with extended family. Although the visitation of the *Niño* into our homes will not happen this year, my family will continue with our annual tradition by praying the *nobenan Niño Jesus* [novena]," she said. "This Catholic ritual will always be important to carry on despite these challenging times. I'm grateful we are able to keep it going in the safety of our own homes. I'm hopeful for a better and brighter new year!"

Rep. **Ivan Banco (R-Saipan)** said their family tradition is felt by family here and those off-island. "It starts with attending Christmas Mass and then coming together for a home-cooked meal. We call family who are off-island and wish them a merry Christmas and good health. The fun begins when the kids share their Secret Santa gifts from the money they save throughout the year. ... After that, the adults move into the hilarious gag gift portion where



Rep. Ivan Blanco (R-Saipan) and his clan reunite every Christmas.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

each one secretly gives and publicly gets a prank gift. This draws an explosion of laughter from everyone."

"In a way, this pandemic has prevented several family members from visiting, either due to the lockdowns in Palau and FSM or the required quarantine days to and from Guam. While we understand it is for the safety of everyone, we continue to thank all our first responders and the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force for their due diligence and commitment to keep our islands safe. I share everyone's hope that the vaccine will be made available to everyone... All in all, it is my hope that we can get back to a sense of renewed normalcy and restart our economy," he added.

For TanHoldings Corporate Business Development vice president **Alex Sablan** and his family, their holiday tradition starts with a fresh Christmas tree that gets set up and decorated by everyone in their home. "There are multiple celebrations with our immediate families, extended fami-

lies, and friends. Our celebrations include homemade seasonal treats, traditional gift exchanges for the kids, and a fun white elephant gift exchange for the adults. On Christmas Day and the subsequent days, we welcome the *Niño* into our home—a tradition has been a part of our families since before we were born," he said. "The pandemic has changed pretty much every aspect of our daily lives, including celebrations. We want to ensure the health and safety of all of our loved ones, especially for those with



underlying health conditions. Some of our annual celebrations and traditions have been cancelled but we understand why they should be. This year we will have our own family *Niño* so we can continue this tradition which is very special to us."

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Why I am thankful this Christmas

By **BEA CABRERA**
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CORRESPONDENT

Taking time to be thankful for the things that you have received and experienced this holiday season, especially in this challenging time of the pandemic, makes life sweeter and evokes positive emotions. Gratitude is a shared journey and we asked residents to share theirs.



"I'm so thankful to call Saipan home. The people here (those who were born and raised here and those who have chosen to move here) have made building a life here such a positive experience. The community has been so warm and welcoming that it feels like my family has been here for many years rather than a handful of months. And nowhere else in the United States has been as successful at minimizing COVID-19 risk and transmission, thanks to residents' cooperation with policies requiring masks and distancing and support for protocols for businesses and quarantine. People really make a place what it is, and there is no place I'd rather spend this Christmas."

—**Ali Nelson of Capital Hill**

"We are very thankful that, despite our current situation, we are able to practice and join the CNMI Got Talent and show the audience our talents. In our competition piece, we would like to [convey the] message [to] the public that in every struggle in our life and every health problem, there's is hope and believe that everything will be back to normal. We also thank that our community is safe and the front-liners work hard for our safety."

—**Members of the X-cessive Dance Group, the 2020 CNMI's Got Talent grand prize winner (adult division)**



"This Christmas, I am thankful for our health, my family, and the many blessings, big and small, that we have received even through this pandemic. I am especially thankful to the people of the Marianas who pulled together and followed the Governor's COVID-19 Task Force protocols and wore their masks. Because of everyone participating, we prevented the community spread of COVID-19. Together we protected each other. Thank you, Marianas, and merry Christmas!"

—**Victor Cabrera, Career and Technical Education teacher at Hopwood**

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CHRISTMAS

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"There is so much to be thankful for this Christmas, but I am most grateful to be with family in Texas and celebrate my newborn niece!"

—Mabby Glass of Tapochao

"I am thankful that we are able to celebrate Christmas with family. I'm thankful for the CNMI cooperating with and supporting each other during a pandemic crisis. Because we are a small community who cares for each other, we continue to bounce back through any hardships that we face each year."

—Eric Atalig,
San Vicente



"We are thankful for this Christmas because our family has received abundant blessings all throughout the year. Our Christmas is complete this year because I was able to come home after being away for college for about two and a half years. We are also thankful that we got the chance to share our love for music and the season through the CNMI Got Talent contest. Despite the many



challenges we are experiencing, we hope that people would still look at every situation and be able to find that one positive outcome that it can bring."

—Leonard Manuel of The Manuels, 2020 CNMI Got Talent 2nd Runner up

See CHRISTMAS on Next Page

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SAIPAN VEGAS RESORT, MICRONESIAN BROKERS 2 companies team up to donate to the man'amko



A total of 400 packages donated to the Aging Center in Garapan surround Gus Noble of Saipan Vegas Resort and Micronesian Brokers Inc general manager Dennis Yoshimoto, Office on Aging director Walter Manglona, Man'amko 2020 Queen Genia Draper, and Aging Center employees. **BEA CABRERA**

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To spread Christmas cheer, Saipan Vegas Resort and Micronesian Brokers, Inc. teamed up to deliver a total of 400 care packages to the elderly at the Aging Center in Garapan last week. Each bag contained basic commodities like food, milk, and toiletries that seniors have difficulty in getting by themselves because their exposure is limited due to COVID-19 concerns.

Saipan Vegas Resort consultant Gus Noble and MBI general manager Dennis Yoshimoto have a clear understanding of the added stress and difficulty that the pandemic has brought to the *man'amko*.

"We are very glad to support the [Aging] Center and believe it's important for local businesses to give back to our community, particularly in these extraordinary and difficult times," Noble said.

"Micronesian Brokers is pleased to partner with Saipan Vegas to donate these 400 care packages to the [Aging] Center. This year has been especially difficult for everyone and MBI is pleased to do our part in bringing a little Christmas joy to our senior citizens and to let them know they are in our hearts and on our minds," Yoshimoto said.

Reigning Man'amko Queen Genia Draper was



"Thank you to the community for always looking after our welfare. This care package will go a long way. We appreciate it and may God bless you more," said Sonia Cabrera, who was one of the beneficiaries. **BEA CABRERA**

present at the turnover of the care packages, describing them as heaven-sent. "This mean a lot to us seniors. ...I recall talking to someone the other day, we have limited income and food stamps are very minor compared to what most families are getting and you can't use that income on things like shampoo and toothpaste like we have in these packages because to us they are like luxuries. To have those as part of the care package is a big deal," she said. "... We don't eat a lot of meat, we eat a lot of vegetables so the gifts we get, even as simple as spaghetti sauce, it's a treat for us. A lot of times we get fresh fruit and vegetables. ... We don't go to the store to buy those because it's an expense for us so when we get things like this, oh, this is awesome. We thank the Lord, Saipan Vegas, MBI. ...We appreciate that the community go out of their way to think of the *man'amko*."

According to Office on Aging director Walter Manglona, every donation that the seniors receive from the community is counted as a blessing. "Whenever we receive any kind of donations from people and from the community, we are always grateful and feel blessed. I assure you that our seniors truly appreciate this donation, especially during these challenging times. The care package with food and toiletries will definitely help and it's great that people in the community are thinking about the *man'amko*," he said. "The [Aging] Center team will deliver these packages to our seniors and practice health and safety protocols. My team follows every protocol. ...The same [things are practiced] when they deliver. ...We understand our seniors are a vulnerable population and we need to do everything we can to keep them safe."

CHRISTMAS

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"There are so many 'things' people have in their homes that we should be thankful for. Like the stove that cooks food, the electricity that brings us comfort, cellphones that keep us preoccupied and the beds that soothe us to sleep. These 'things' are great and awesome but I have experienced loss of these 'things' From Soudelor, Yutu, and now COVID-19, I have lost many things: I lost food, electricity, my bed, my salary, my inner peace and finally, I lost me. Instead, I gained greed and fear, anxiety and depression and in all this grief and loss, I forgot how to be grateful. [Yet] I am [also] grateful for loss. With loss comes a lot of anger and thoughts that absolutely destroy you in and out. Thoughts that are not welcome and barge in, disrupting normalcy. Thoughts that make it seem impossible to breathe and make it through each day. Then when the time is right, with some help, thoughts turn into understanding. With understanding comes perspective. With perspective comes intention. And finally, contentment. This Christmas, I am content and I am grateful for this feeling. ...I became a kinder person to my family and no longer focused on all the loss and anger. With contentment my smile becomes a true reflection of my soul. The world I built in my bubble is now a part of the universe. I am no longer alone in my own world. I can welcome the people I love most to visit my world. Thank you, Fernando, Amiah, Reiana, Isaiah, and Mom for being my rock in this journey."

—Meena Benavente, San Antonio



Thinking of 'You' packages for the holidays

By **BEA CABRERA**
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CORRESPONDENT

Do you want to give family and friends something different, creative, and useful during the pandemic, yet something that also speaks from the heart? In one package? It's possible with locally available products! They are easily available, will help keep the our local economy dynamic, and, hey, they won't make a hefty dent on your pocket.

Give the gift of cleanliness: HAND SANITIZER

Aside from merely sanitizing, hand sanitizers' biggest benefits is that you can bring it with you everywhere—to the office, school, meetings, restaurants, at the beach, and more. This will ensure that your family and friends keep clean, which is important during the pandemic. Find Carlotta Instant Hand Sanitizer and Spray in the shelves of I Love Saipan on Middle Road and Garapan.



Express how you feel through HANDMADE CARDS BY JILL ARENOVSKI

Communication is so fast and instant these days that they are nearly throwaway stuff. Yet when you receive a handmade card in the mail, you know that someone has taken their time to create it for you, according to Jill Arenoveski. "That's the beauty of making your own cards. You can use nearly any design and make a beautiful card for any occasion. A card can complete your package, sending a message of hope or support, of love or sympathy, or of cheer and happiness. Especially during this pandemic,



we miss actually spending time with others and a hand-written card can bring others closer in our hearts," she said. Arenovski's handcrafted greeting cards are available at the Saipan Shell gasoline stations in Susupe, Dandan, Shell Highway, San Roque, and Puerto Rico, which has the largest card display with the best selection and locations are refilled monthly with new designs and seasonal cards.

Give the gift of protection: FACE MASKS

With the ongoing pandemic, we cannot over-emphasize the importance of wearing a mask. It protects you and other from contracting any form of virus. But masks don't have to be boring; they can be stylish and decorative. Marjorie Librada makes unique masks using quality cloth so it won't fray easily even after constant use and washing. "I make masks that are fun, colorful, and maybe will show what the personality of the wearer is. I started making my own a few months ago and it is nice to see people wearing my masks but nicer to know that everyone is keeping safe and healthy." For more information, email Librada at librada95masks@gmail.com.

Strengthen your immune system with Vitamin C

Vitamin C that is easy to ingest is one practical gift that you can give, especially during the pandemic. It keeps your loved ones strong and boosts their immune system. Emergen C packets are available at Brabu Pharmacy on Middle Road and Kagman and at PHI Pharmacy in Dandan.



Make a tummy happy with homemade baked goods from Isla Panadera by Jimae-la Ham. "It's just really a small business.

It's my passion to bake!" said Ham. "I have cookie bags with usually six or eight pieces, cream puffs (6 pieces) and assorted Aloha macarons come in eight pieces. Our macarons are currently available at Payless Superstore and Truckload Store. I am also on FaceBook: Isla Panadera and Instagram: Isla_Panadera."



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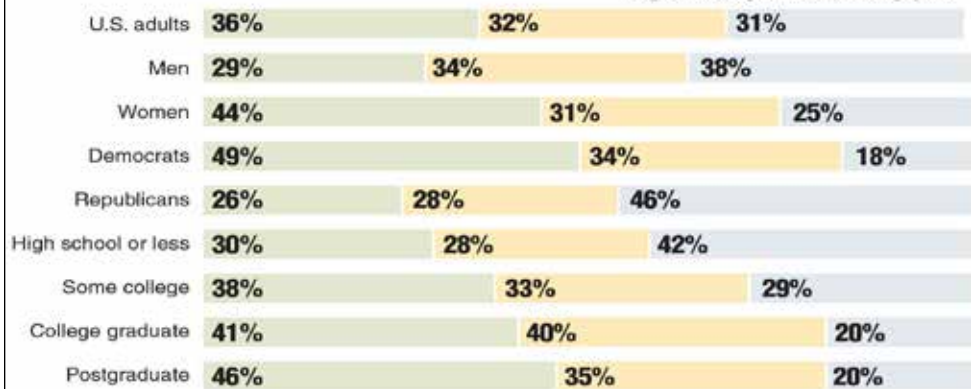
Americans' face mask habits, by subgroups



In the past seven days, how often did you wear a mask or cloth face covering outside your home?

% Always % Sometimes % Never

Margin of sampling error is ±3 percentage points



Source: Gallup
Graphic: Staff, TNS

Simple steps to stay safe this holiday season

By BEA CABRERA
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Over 4,000 COVID19 vaccines arrived in the CNMI last week and a segment of the community will be vaccinated first, like front-liners. When more vaccines arrive next year, hopefully, the whole population will get it.

Still, the CNMI community must remain diligent in observing health and safety measures, especially during the holidays when gatherings and celebrations are at its peak.

The CNMI is still under public emergency and remains on Community Vulnerability Blue. That means everyone must still be mindful that curfew begins at 12am and end at 4am, establishments should enforce social distancing precautions and promote the wearing of face masks and gatherings of people from different households should be limited to less than 25 people.

Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. CHCC Esther Muña asks the community to be extra diligent this season. "Let's not let our guards down when it comes to community transmission and this has always been our message. Always go back to the 3 W's: Wear a mask, wash your hands, watch your distance. We try our best and we have been doing it successfully to capture the ones at the border and isolate them from the community," she said. "But, again, the science of it keeps changing. ...Even when there is a vaccine we should be able to practice the 3 W's as well. The community has been really good at this, making sure that we contain the virus. Even without community transmission, people still wear a mask etc. and please don't get fatigued, don't get tired, we need to do this so that, especially this Christ-

mas, we are able to spend time with family and we can do that with limitations. We want to be able to do this until we are completely out of this pandemic."

Hilda De Dios of Garapan said that when it comes to venue, people should consider having parties outdoors. "My family and I believe that outdoor celebrations and gathering would be the safest for everyone. Good thing we live on an island where we can be with family and friends at the beach, parks or even in our own backyards."

Janine Montenegro of Tanapag said to make the guest list short and simple. "By saying that, I mean keep the celebration short, maybe maximum of three hours, and make the guest list below 25 people or even smaller," she said.

Mario Elias of Sadog Tasi said that if you are feeling under the weather, skip the party. "If you are having flu-like symptoms, do not overlook it. Do not attend a party if you feel this way. Protect others by protecting yourself."

COVID-19 Task Force chair Warren Villagomez said that Christmas caroling must be prevented. "... During this activity, social distancing and the wearing of face masks is not present. At the same time, it fails to comply with rules when entering any sites and offices such as signing up for contact tracing purposes and having one's temperature taken. If an event like this happens, it's abruptly moving from one area to another area," said Villagomez.

"...Even health experts recognize singing as one of the fastest ways to spread the COVID-19 virus...We at the COVID Task Force, wants to make sure that the risk of any type of exposure or infection is avoided. All COVID-19 enforcement agencies are aware of this measure," Villagomez added.



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