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## C H E F ' S   C O R N E R



*Executive Chef  
Paul Marks  
shares recipes  
and cooking tips  
with members.*

### LET IT BURN

#### Start 2010 with a clean slate

Celebrating the start of the New Year is one of the oldest holidays observed by cultures that use a yearly calendar. Chinese clean their homes to rid them of last year's bad luck. Portuguese eat 12 grapes at midnight for 12 months of happiness. Danish throw old dishes at doors of friend's homes—if you have a lot of broken dishes, you have a lot of friends and luck. In Brazil, they eat lentils, which they believe brings good luck. In India, they celebrate with a festival of lights to drive out evil. Noisemakers and fireworks originated in ancient China and were thought to dispel evil spirits and, of course, bring good luck.

Five years ago, my wife and I spent three weeks in Panama. We arrived in Panama City on Christmas Day, rented a car and headed north. We were to meet friends from London out on the islands on the Caribbean side of the country in Bocas del Toro for New Year's Eve. This is after we spent a few days in the mountains in Boquete.

As we drove by people's homes, they all had hand-built dolls or mannequins in their front yards. Some were in poses and some were sitting in rocking chairs. Some also had string tied to their arms, and the dolls would wave at you as you drove by, with someone inside the house pulling the string. They varied between lavish and simple, but all had much time and thought put into them. Because they were so interesting, we couldn't help but stop and take pictures. And yes, many Panamanians laughed at those gringos taking pictures of people's front yards.

We had no clue what this was, but guessed it to be part of their Christmas celebration. Toward the end of our stay we spent our last three nights in Panama City meeting up with friends. Over dinner and much tequila it was explained to us that Panamanian tradition was to build a statue of someone or something that had wronged them in the past year. At the stroke of midnight, they burn the doll purging themselves of any wrong done to them in the past year, and they move into the next year clean and free of all wrong. My wife and I have adopted that tradition, purging the past away and only looking into the next year, not dwelling on the past. We have even burned Monopoly money.

This year, I am going to burn my 2009 401(k) and stock statements—anything relating to the recession. We are going to move into 2010 with the money woes of 2008 and 2009 behind us. The recession has been rough on all of us, but we should enter the New Year feeling refreshed and cleansed.

While we won't be having a bonfire at the Bellevue Club, we will be celebrating New Year's Eve with our own traditions—the dropping of the ball in Times Square, dancing, great food and laughter. Polaris will be serving up a five-course chef's tasting menu in addition to the regular dinner menu.

In the Olympic Ballroom we will be celebrating New Year's Eve with a no-host bar and delicious appetizers in the atrium. At 9 p.m., we will open the ballroom with a lavish New Year's Eve buffet, including seafood and a carving station. Dance the night away to the fun, soulful dance tunes of Carson and Tess Henley. At 10:45 p.m., we will present a dessert buffet and Champagne near midnight. We didn't forget about children, either. While the adults ring in 2010, we have supervised fun activities for children, including pool time, snacks and a movie. For more information about the New Year's Eve Celebration, contact the Social Office at 688-3384.