

Hanukkah fosters togetherness

■ The Festival of Lights is not a 'Jewish Christmas' as some would believe

By Yael Menaheim
Oregon Daily Emerald

'Tis the season.

While many Americans celebrate Christmas as a symbol of the birth of Christ, or for gift giving, Jewish-Americans celebrate Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights.

Over the last few years, Hanukkah has been recognized and commercialized in American society. Many people who celebrate Christmas don't know what the celebration of Hanukkah stands for, and some assume that it's a holiday that was designed to compete with Christmas. Compete may be too strong of a word, but Hanukkah is best understood by non-Jewish people as a way for Jewish children to feel like they are part of the holiday.

Nothing is more inaccurate than to refer to Hanukkah as the "Jewish Christmas," as Jessica Elkan, student president of Hillel, a campus Jewish religious organization, has heard it described.

Jewish people didn't choose to have Hanukkah in December,

rather, the holiday begins as it is marked on the Jewish calendar, not the Christian one. The fact that Hanukkah falls during December is coincidental.

Hanukkah is a celebration the Jewish people who defended the Old Temple in Jerusalem from the Greeks by finding a small container that had a drop of oil in it. That single drop lit candles for eight straight days, and helped them win the battle.

As it is understood by many Jewish people, the holiday is a historical commemoration that holds some religious value, but it rarely involves any great gift giving. The most a child can expect on Hanukkah is a small sum of money, a significant gift, or chocolate in the shape of gold coins, from relatives or family friends.

Rarely is it the case that children should expect to receive eight gifts for every day that Hanukkah lasts. That is a recent invention by parents who feel pressured to buy into the gift-giving spirit of the holidays.

Office of Public Safety Sgt. Marte Martinez said a student living in Thornton called OPS after smelling smoke behind an electrical outlet. The student was probably smelling smoke seeping out of cracks in Wilcox Hall's fireplace chimney, Martinez said.

David Coleman, district chief for Eugene Fire and EMS, said

"The presents are not the important thing, and some parents refuse to give presents for Hanukkah, [but] a lot of parents feel pressure to buy gifts," Elkan said.

This pressure can be understood because we live in a culture that thrives on the holiday economy that pushes people to spend, spend, spend. Many parents don't want to make their children feel like outsiders. They attend public schools, and bring home Christmas decorations rather than Hanukkah ones. They don't learn about the meaning of the holiday outside of their home or temple, if they attend one.

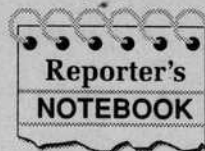
Elkan thinks that since we live in a society that strives to be politically correct and recognizes different religions, Hanukkah has received more recognition.

Now the first day of Hanukkah is reported on in the news, or written about in the newspapers.

Christmas is a time that brings families together, as is Hanukkah. People interpret the holidays as it fits their lives. Some attend church, others go to temple, while others get caught up in the gift-giving spirit. Whatever you celebrate, enjoy the holidays and celebrate them as you wish.

eight units responded just before 6 p.m. to Bean and believed there was a small electrical fire of unknown cause. He added that it was contained behind an outlet in a student's room in Thornton Hall.

But after a full investigation, OPS reported that a fire burning in the Wilcox Hall fireplace may have been the cause of the scare.



News brief

Residence hall fire alert proclaimed false alarm

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