

## Why We Entertain... By Former Commander's Spouses

I think Commanders and spouses should definitely entertain. Commanders are the keepers of the Marine Corps traditions, customs and courtesies. I truly feel the Commander along with spouse inherits the responsibility for passing on the traditions of the Corps...and entertaining is one of those traditions. I think the big question is "what is the purpose of entertaining?" The Corps prides itself on being a Marine family. It is through social gatherings that the Commander strengthens the family ties and bonds. He/she sets the tone for unity. There is no better avenue for creating that unity of families than through gatherings at the Commander's place. It is at these type gatherings that we all have learned many things about the traditions of the Corps. Think that you should stress that entertaining does not have to be expensive.

Realistically, I know that it is hard for some people to entertain because they feel they won't "measure up" to some unattainable standard. We can't all be the "Barefoot Contessa" and that's okay. Yet it is important for the boss and the boss's spouse to show their appreciation to the people who work so hard for the Marine Corps by occasionally having a party – be it burgers in the backyard or a holiday reception. Use paper plates, learn food shortcuts, play your favorite music, turn the lights low (it hides the dust!) and just enjoy the people you have over. They do notice and they do appreciate your efforts; even Ebenezer Scrooge fondly remembered "Old Fezziwig's Christmas Parties."

In a nutshell, the most important reason for commanding officers to entertain is to help the unit become more cohesive. Social gatherings help active duty members relax together and give the spouses the opportunity to meet each other and gain support mechanisms. *Only other spouses in that command can understand the challenges that the deployments present.* The side benefit is that it is a fun thing to do!!

1. The battalion is a unit, a family and building relationships and camaraderie is very important to a successful command.
2. Entertaining is a form of expressing our "Thanks" to both Marines and *also* the spouses for their dedication, devotion to their jobs and to their role as involved Marine spouses.
3. Its plain 'ole fun!! Every time we did a bash, it was just that...a good time, with a dinner party theme...Mexican Fiesta, A Beach Party with sand, leas, tropical drinks and all or even "A Toast to our Corps", a Pre-Ball Reception...Boy all of this talk of entertaining just makes exhausted thinking about it again...But it was fun you know, like you, Lisa, I love to do it!
4. Additionally, along with #3 above, entertaining your Marines and their spouse's gives everyone an opportunity to relax, have a good time and "put the days work behind them for a few hours."

Entertaining has been a great way for us to get to know the members of the command on a personal basis and give them a chance to see us in our home. We have had various members of the command to our home and they see how Colonels live. We really enjoy having the LT's

over for dinner. It is a great opportunity to get to know the junior officers and stay in touch with the youth.

1. Entertain because it puts a human face on the commander. The unit sees that he or she has a life outside the Office. Your home demonstrates to people what is important to you or enjoyed by you, i.e. your collections, books, pictures, even furnishings with dents and scratches from previous moves.
2. Entertaining builds a cohesive group, wives and/or spouses included. It presents an opportunity for spouses to meet other spouses where they can share experiences and information, possibly build friendships, which are vital during times of deployment or other stressful work periods for the service member.
3. Entertaining provides a casual environment where the spouse can make contact with the people the commander spends most waking hours with. This relationship building process provides useful insight to understanding the stresses and joys the commander experiences.
4. The more you entertain the more fun you will have as a hostess and spouse. Each social event is a learning experience preparing you for the next party or dinner or coffee. It helps you become a better conversationalist as well.

...Entertain because opening your home to the community helps to create an environment which is just that – a community. If you are in a large non-military community, it's probably one of the few links. In a smaller, military community, these events are vital to ensure that military members see each other on less formal basis and for spouse to have a chance to enjoy themselves with their spouses in a comfortable setting.

...Because you can learn so much from your guests! You get to know them, and because you're more likely to hear about their interests or concerns in a less stressful, more positive setting. You can be a better leader of your team. In turn, they find out that you're normal, too.

...Because you are in a senior position and with privilege is responsibility! If you have been given government quarters, it doesn't belong to you. It should be used for entertaining.

...Because be entertaining them, you serve your guests, anticipating and ensuring their comfort and happiness. It's quite flattering and it makes your team/spouses feel appreciated.

I entertain to make the group feel that we truly did care for them, enough to not only spend our money but more importantly our time with them. We took great effort to entertain with the key members of the command and the KVC.

Our house was too small to have the whole group over so we just did them in smaller groups or we entertained out.

We bought gifts at Christmas, for the key volunteers. And we got the officers spouses together at least once a month at rotating homes. The sharing of time brought the entire command together in a very wonderful way. The most important part though was we did it because we felt we should, but the real reason was because it was fun!

## Affordable and Doable Entertaining Tips

Make sure you and your spouse make your plan for entertaining...your time will be over before you know it and you will wonder what happened?

The most challenging part about entertaining is following through and having the party...don't allow distractions to sway you...see your entertaining plans through.

Plan events at different times to make sure you include all

There is no perfect party...

- Everything takes longer than you think
- Something always goes wrong (the key is to relax...no will know but you)

Organization is the key to success

Centerpieces do not have to be flowers

- Italian Dinner...use pasta, olive oil, balsamic vinegar bottles, can tomatoes, bread sticks and wine
- Breakfast Brunch...waffle iron, odd bottles of syrup, gourmet pancake mix boxes
- Seasonal Fruit and Vegetables...
  - Apples, pineapples, artichokes make great taper candleholders. Lemons, mini pumpkins and oranges for votives,
  - Clip greens with your fruit centerpieces

If you have a friend with a fabulous flower garden or just a few interesting flowers ask if you can come and clip some for your party (San Luis Rey has great Bird of Paradise all over and orange trees! You'll find magnolia's in the south, camellias at Quantico and Lejeune, orchids in Hawaii and Okinawa).

Arrange flowers in a small pumpkin.

Multiply the number of guest you have by three to determine how many napkins to buy.

Use a pumpkin as a soup tureen in the fall.

Make sure you have enough garbage cans around the area.

Abundance is the sign of a gracious host.

Basil plants keep flies away. Pinch them before you serve the food to have a stronger scent.

When you have potlucks do not do A to L and M to Z, you never know what you are going to get! A better idea is to have a theme (Mexican, Italian, chilies or soups).

Have your guests switch seats during a party. This helps to keep the party alive and interesting.

Line your walkway with paper lunch bag luminaries. Fill each bag with about 2 inches of sand and a tea light candle.

Always cook what you are familiar with and capable of so you don't feel overwhelmed.

Look online to find out how to fold napkins in decorative ways...this could be your table decoration.

Line your table with an assortment of bottles (antique, colored, clear, all different shapes and sizes) and place a single flower in them.

Never do the dishes during a party. It makes the guest feel like you want them to leave or that it was too much work. Instead fill the sink before they come with soapy water and just toss the dishes in as you go.

Always have a plan and a schedule for the day and night of the party. You don't want to forget to do something. This also helps you to relax and enjoy your party.

Ask a friend or two to come the day before the party to make as much of the food as you can. You will cut your time in half and it is a lot more fun to work together.

When you do not have a table...

- Serve finger foods...easier for your guests to manage while standing, etc.
- Use other tables that are around to place food (this helps spread out the food so everyone can get to it).
- Use lap trays (Marine wives always seem to have bamboo trays or wooden plates so ask around).
- Use card tables, rent a table, borrow from a friend, open two drawers and lay a board over the two and place food on the counter and the drawers (this makes for a beautiful display).

Placement of food on the buffet table is important...place bread, potatoes, salads then meat...otherwise you might run out of meat before everyone goes through the line.

Set up a bar in a closet or a doorway of a room that you do not plan to use.

Make sure to include the following on invitations:

- Host name, type of event, date, time, location and RSVP desires.

Optional information:

- Attire, rain date, plan for parking, map, children welcome, free to bring a date, etc.

If you live in southern California or the Parris Island area it is a wonderful idea to take your volunteers to the recruit emblem ceremonies. This is an amazing motivational event and will highly motivate your ladies as Marine wives. If you are a deploying unit do it a month or so before they go...it will certainly help recharge your batteries.

As a commanders wife it is always a good idea to encourage your spouses to join clubs and to volunteer at one of the base organizations.

Get with fellow commanders and plan parties...each can help the other(s) with their respective party. Everyone always enjoys an extra hand and this also frees you up to socialize with your guests. It also makes set-up and clean-up a breeze!

Make the dollar store your new best friend!

[www.realsimple.com](http://www.realsimple.com) has great ideas for entertaining.

Deploying units...

- Make sure you plan ahead for activities... (i.e. when you have your children's Christmas party use that opportunity for the kids to make Valentines Day cards to send to ship or unit. Remember, mail can take longer than you think. Send the cards to a designated person. You might need more than one person if the unit is deployed to multiple locations/various ships.

For your Easter party:

- Stations/bases usually have costumes for rent.
- Reserve your space for the party early.
- Make papier-mâché Easter eggs (balloons covered with newspaper, flour and water. Look online for instructions'...it's easy and fun and cheap!)
- Make Easter baskets out of old diaper wipe boxes. You can even grow grass in the baskets or sprouted wheat.
- Use old strawberry baskets too.
- Have the Easter Bunny lead the kids in the Bunny Hop.
- Have an Easter Bonnet parade.
- Don't forget the cameras...always have back-ups!

For your Christmas party:

- Stations/bases usually have costumes for rent.
- Decide if Santa is giving gifts or just candy canes.
- Have a camera to take pictures with Santa.
- Make paper angels and noodle angels.
- Make reindeer clothes pins.
- Make pinecone bird feeders.
- Make paper ornaments.



## ❧ Affordable Get Together Ideas for Entire Groups ❧

Ice Cream Social...make ice cream and have fun toppings

Christmas caroling...hot chocolate, cider and cookies

4<sup>th</sup> of July Bike Parade...decorate bikes with cards, streamers and flags (dollar store!)

Fall Fest Chili Cook-off

Easter egg Hunt

Rent Paddle Boats at the Lake...bring a sack lunch

Rollerblade around a park

Ice Skating

Beach Cookout...or potluck

Pet Show...where everybody wins!

Ceramic Paint Places

Tea Party (can be fun with boys too! Or better yet dads)

Rent Kayaks (Pendleton has them)

Rent a Pool for a Pool Party

Community Service Project...military cemetery or clean up the beach

Set up Factory Tours for Kids

Potluck with Themes...Italian or Mexican...you provide the drinks and paper products

Picnic in the Park...a day with non-school age kids

Chinese New Year's party...order Chinese take-out

Mardi Gras

Oktoberfest

Tree Trimming at the Unit

Cowboy and Indian Party... rent horses from the stable; make sheriff badges, bandanas, paper bags for Indian vest and pasta colored for beads

Go on a trail ride as a group and take a lunch

