

## BUSINESS

# Snow days and virtual opera: Office holiday parties go on

Work's seasonal celebrations get a pandemic twist

By Kelvin Chan and Alexandra Olson  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — An online murder mystery. Law-themed opera arias. A snowman-building competition.

With dancing, drinking and fancy dinners a no-go because of virus concerns, companies are getting creative about their holiday office parties this year. The challenge is how to organize a virtual celebration that doesn't feel like yet another Zoom meeting.

Many are forgoing parties altogether and instead giving employees gift baskets, extra time off or donations to charities of their choice. Just 23 percent of companies were planning celebrations, down from 76 percent last year, in a survey of 189 companies by global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas. Nearly three-quarters of parties this year will be virtual.

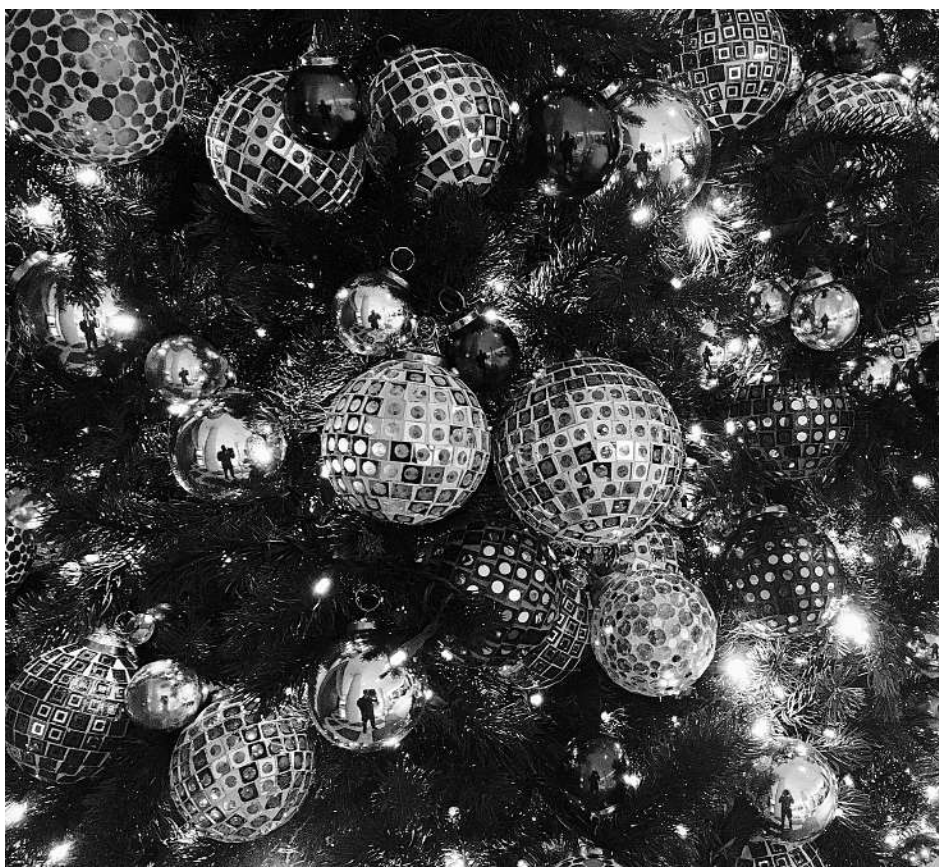
The companies going ahead found their pandemic-weary employees want some kind of bash to break up the anxiety and isolation permeating the holidays.

"People are itching to see each other in person, but I also don't feel totally comfortable holding a typical dinner and open bar," said John Ross, president of Test Prep Insight, a small online education company with 10 employees based in Sacramento, California. "And I know some Zoom-style virtual party just won't cut it."

He landed on the idea of a snow day at a resort near Lake Tahoe, with sledding, snowshoeing and a snowman-building competition. There will be a catered lunch, but no alcohol. Oh, and no plus-ones.

Still, "people are thrilled it's back on," Ross said.

Demand has been high for off-the-wall virtual parties,



Swayne B. Hall / Associated Press

**Office holiday parties are tricky in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic. Dancing, drinking and fancy dinners are out. Many companies are forgoing parties altogether, deciding instead to send staff gift baskets, extra time off or donations to charities that employees choose.**

ties, said Jonathan Como, founder of Offsyte, a marketplace for corporate team events, which has organized online holiday events for companies including health insurance giant Blue Shield, the ride-hailing company Lyft, and the dating app Tinder.

Most popular are celebrations that involve sending food and drink to employees for online cocktail or chocolate-making classes, Como said. Also big are virtual escape rooms where employees can play games.

That's the route marketing firm Rank Fuse is taking, bringing its employees together for a virtual murder mystery through Red Herring Games, said Chelsea Roller, culture manager at the Overland Park, Kansas, firm, which normally organizes a holiday dinner or bowling party.

"It will likely be very silly because every employee will be given a character to play," Roller said. "Truth-

fully, we almost didn't have a company party. However, numerous people started asking about one, so we decided it was the least we could do."

Many companies are using virtual celebrations to offer something people have missed throughout the pandemic: live entertainment.

HireSpace, a U.K. event booking site, is organizing 50 virtual office parties in December, according to co-founder Edward Poland. The party "rooms" will include live jazz, cabaret acts, magic shows and stand-up comedy.

On Site Opera, a New York City group that performs at non-traditional venues, got an unusual request to perform arias for a team of lawyers at a California firm. The numbers will include an aria from Carmen in which the title character tries to negotiate herself out of prison — a favorite of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who fa-

mously loved opera, said Artistic Director Eric Einhorn.

"It's just a chance for the attendees to nerd out with us, to have a good time," Einhorn said.

Some larger companies are spreading out events over several weeks and letting employees choose between ugly sweater contests, cooking lessons or pet costume competitions. Others are dividing celebrations up between teams.

A team of social media managers at PC maker Dell organized a Secret Santa gift exchange and a virtual show-and-tell for employees to share a meaningful memory or thing. The team is new and had only met in person once before the pandemic erupted in the spring.

"It's been a wild year, and as a new team we had to work extra hard — and in new and different ways — to build community," said Susie Gidseg, the team's senior manager.

## TOMLINSON

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wells are depleting, and many Alaskans worry about losing lucrative oil field jobs and the royalties every Alaskan citizen receives.

Royal Dutch Shell has made big promises about leading the energy transition away from fossil fuels, but the supermajor cannot seem to quit the Arctic, triggering accusations of hypocrisy.

From 2012-2015, Shell spent \$7 billion drilling exploratory wells in Alaska's Chukchi Sea over the objections of environmentalists and indigenous people. The whole operation was such a disaster that Shell swore off trying again.

The company filed paperwork in September to extend 18 offshore leases in order to sell them to another oil company. No one ever has drilled in West Harrison Bay before, but engineers think it will be easier than the Chukchi Sea.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is something altogether different. Set aside as part of the deal to open Alaska to drilling, the refuge is the largest wilderness area in the United States and home to polar bears, grizzly bears, wolves, moose and caribou.

Drilling in the proposed 1.6 million coastal acres of the refuge will require a massive logistical operation costing billions of dollars. By most estimates, it would take a decade to spud a well, let alone produce oil and gas for sale.

The Interior Department



Tribune News Service file photo

**Alaska's Arctic refuge is the largest wilderness area in the United States and is home to polar bears, grizzly bears, wolves, moose and caribou.**

says the refuge would produce 10 billion barrels of oil over the project's lifetime. But will the world need or want those barrels after 2030?

Global warming is caused by the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the most harmful emission being carbon dioxide produced by burning fossil fuels. Since the 1860s, scientists have understood the relationship between carbon dioxide concentrations in the air and average temperatures.

Climatologists have calculated a budget for how much carbon the world can burn and still limit warming to levels that will not permanently damage life on earth. To keep temperatures from rising no more than 2 degrees Celsius, oil companies need to slash production

by 40 percent, according to Carbon Tracker, a nonprofit that monitors emissions.

To achieve that goal, the oil companies will need to leave existing proven reserves in the ground. The world never will need the oil from the refuge.

Oil companies that win the leases Jan. 6 will also find it challenging to raise money to start operations. Citi Bank, Wells Fargo, JPMorgan Chase and Goldman Sachs have promised not to finance Arctic drilling, and activists are putting pressure on other financial institutions to follow suit.

Investors also are unlikely to reward management teams that bid on Arctic leases. BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, has led Wall Street in calling on firms to divest from companies that are damaging the climate.

Lastly, any oil company that bids on the refuge will be taking an enormous political risk. President-elect Joe Biden opposes drilling in the refuge and has promised to do everything possible to stop it.

A bid at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge auction will be a profound statement that a company does not care about climate change, public opinion or investor sentiment. Any management team that takes that fateful step will deserve the vitriol poured on them.

The Arctic is the one place where we should leave it in the ground. Why ask for trouble?

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**BIDS OR PROPOSALS ARE DUE THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2021 @ 2:00 PM CENTRAL TIME**

SATTERFIELD & PONTIKES CONSTRUCTION, INC. requests competitive sealed proposals, pursuant to Chapter 2269.151 et seq. of the Texas Government Code, from experienced construction contractors in connection with the redevelopment of an urban park occupying a full city block in downtown Houston, Texas known as Lynn Wyatt Square for the Performing Arts (and formerly known as "Jones Plaza"), subject to and in accordance with applicable law and the terms, conditions and restrictions established in this Request for Competitive Sealed Proposals.

The Lynn Wyatt Square Project (the "Project") consists of demolition of existing structures and construction of new facilities at Lynn Wyatt Square for the Performing Arts, located on top of an existing underground parking facility in downtown Houston. These new facilities include shell construction for a two-level restaurant with an elevator, construction of new landscape and hardscape facilities, new sidewalk paving, expansion of sidewalk along Texas Avenue into one vehicular lane, new vertical vent shafts into underground parking below, and modifications to existing underground parking facilities, all as more particularly described in the Construction Documents (defined below). Work will be performed on a public park site and in the public right of way.

The scope of substantive construction work with respect to the Project will include, but not be limited to, extensive demolition, electrical, plumbing, mechanical, HVAC, building automation/control, rough carpentry, millwork/finish carpentry, waterproofing/caulking, water features, glass/mirrors, drywall, plaster, tilework, concrete and steel work, masonry, tree planting, extensive landscaping, and such other work as is described in, or reasonably inferred from the Construction Documents.

Construction documents can be downloaded via Building Connected. If you have not received an ITB from Satterfield & Pontikes Construction Inc. Please email the mentioned contacts.

All questions are to be sent to **Jeremy Fenton** at [jfenton@satpon.com](mailto:jfenton@satpon.com) or **Leslie Lagunas** at [lagunas@satpon.com](mailto:lagunas@satpon.com) by **January 5th, 2021** end of day.

Bids or proposals are due Thursday, January 14, 2021 at 2:00 pm central time, bids or proposals should be emailed to [houstonbids@satpon.com](mailto:houstonbids@satpon.com) or faxed to 713-996-1400, or mailed/delivered to the Satterfield & Pontikes Construction, Inc., 11750 Katy Freeway, Houston, TX 77079. Late bids will not be accepted. All bids are to include acknowledgement of all Addenda, Minority Letter Of Intent (If Certified) and Subcontractor Experience Form.

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**NOTICE TO BIDDERS**  
**The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO) is planning to issue the procurement documents listed in this advertisement.**  
**IFB No. 4021000071: For Purchase of a Diesel Filter Cleaning System (DPF) for METRO's Kashmere Bus Operating Facility.** Solicitation will be available on or about 12/21/2020.  
**IFB No. 4021000077: Daily Cleaning Services at METRO Transit Centers and Park & Rides.** Solicitation will be available on or about 12/21/2020.  
Prospective bidders/proposers can view and download these solicitations by visiting METRO's website at <https://www.ridemetroapp.org/procurement/>. If you are unable to download the documents or are having difficulty, please contact METRO Plan and Bid Room at (713) 739-4881.

### REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS CONSTRUCTION MANAGER-AT-RISK

**HAMSHIRE-FANNETT HIGH SCHOOL ADDITIONS & RENOVATIONS  
HAMSHIRE-FANNETT INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The Hamshire-Fannett Independent School District will accept responses to its Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for selection of a Construction Manager at Risk (CMaR) firm to provide CMaR services for Additions and Renovations to Hamshire-Fannett High School. Qualifications will be received from firms until 2:00 pm, Wednesday, January 6, 2021, at the Hamshire-Fannett ISD Administration, 12702 Second St, Hamshire, Texas 77622. The selection process will follow the requirements of the Texas Education Code Section 44.031 and 44.038 as clarified by Senate Bill 669. This selection shall be accomplished in a two-step process as provided for in Senate Bill 669 (77th Legislature). The construction budget for the Hamshire-Fannett High School Additions and Renovation project is approximately \$30,174,750.00. Request for Qualification documents will be issued Wednesday, December 9, 2020. There will be a Pre-Proposal Conference at Hamshire-Fannett ISD Administration located at 12702 Second Street, at 2:00 PM, December 15, 2020. Questions about the project and the Request for Qualifications should be addressed to PBK, Architects, Inc., attention: Ms. Ashleigh MacLean, Project Coordinator at [ashleigh.maclea@pbk.com](mailto:ashleigh.maclea@pbk.com).

**Sealed Bid Solicitation #VE11-20A  
Houston-Galveston Area Council  
Cooperative Purchasing Program  
Current Model Cars and Light Trucks**  
Response Deadline: 1/07/2021 @ 1pm  
Public Opening: 1/07/2021 @ 2pm  
3555 Timmons Lane, Houston, TX.  
Per ADA, reasonable accommodation provided with 24 hour prior notice.  
713-993-4554 or [www.hgacbuy.org](http://www.hgacbuy.org) for info.

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#### REQUEST FOR COMPETITIVE SEALED PROPOSALS

**2019 Exhibit Center Addition, Burns Science Resource Center & Adam ES Renovations  
CYPRESS- FAIRBANKS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT  
PROPOSAL NO. 19-11-5458R-RFP  
VLK PROJECT NO. 20-009.00**

The Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District will accept Base Competitive Sealed Proposals until 2:00 P.M. and Alternate Competitive Sealed Proposals until 3:00 P.M. on Thursday, January 28, 2021 at the Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District 11430 Perry Road, Suite B Houston, Texas 77064 for the **2019 Exhibit Center Addition, Burns Science Resource Center & Adam ES Renovations**. A Pre-Proposal Conference will be held Monday, January 04, 2021 at 10:00 A.M. at the above location. Proposal Evaluation Criteria are published in the "Instructions to Offerors" section of the proposal documents. Plans and specifications will be released Monday, December 21, 2020, and will be available electronically or hard copy from VLK Architects upon request by calling 281.671.2300. The Owner reserves the right to waive any informalities and to reject any or all proposals.

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