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Holiday treats keep season merry

By Tanya Noffsinger

Oakwood has been put on the fashion map with Althea Harper's showing at Fashion Week and runner-up status on Project Runway. Alas, we have yet another of Oakwood's beauties, Lydia Witt, who has just been hired by the New York City Ballet as a costumer out of fifty-six applicants. Lydia and Althea both played varsity field hockey at dear old OHS together. Lydia's first assignment is Clara's dress for *The Nutcracker*. Cooks, Corks and Cuisine has learned that her workmanship is couture-quality. Hmm--seems that some enterprising

Oakwood investor might want to do a "start-up" with these two bright, beautiful and talented young women as a team. But, oops...this is a food column!

So now you have insight into how my little brain produces stream of consciousness thoughts that get me from fashion to *The Nutcracker* to the Sugar Plum Fairy and then to...What in the world is a sugar plum? We've all heard about it in "The Night Before Christmas" ("Visions of sugar plums danced in their heads"), recited it in Eugene Feld's poem "The Sugar Plum Tree" (Have you ever heard of the

Sugar-Plum Tree? 'Tis a marvel of great renown," and also heard John Lennon say it twice before playing "A Day in the Life." Sugar plums come in two types, a candy made with sugar and shaped into an oval, and the fruit of a deciduous shrub or tree called an Amelanchier canadensis that is purple, edible and sweet. Since these sugar plums are harbingers of the forthcoming season, I'll send along not only a recipe for them that would make a lovely house gift or stocking stuffer, but some other holiday treats, savory and sweet, to keep your season merry and bright!

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SUGAR PLUMS

2c. whole almonds, 1/4 c. honey
2 tsp. grated orange zest
1 1/2 tsp. gr. cinnamon, 1/2 tsp. gr. allspice
1/2 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
1 c. dried apricots, fine chopped
1 c. pitted dates, finely chopped
1 c. confectioner's sugar

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Arrange almonds on baking sheet in a single layer and toast in oven for ten minutes. Set aside to cool and then finely chop. Meanwhile, combine honey, orange zest, cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg in a small bowl. Mix almonds, apricots, dates and spice mix in a large bowl. Mix well. Pinch off rounded teaspoon-sized pieces and roll into balls. Dust the sugar plums with powdered sugar and refrigerate in single layers between sheets of wax paper in airtight containers for up to one month.

PEANUT BRITTLE

2 c. granulated sugar
1/2 c. water, 1 c. white corn syrup (Karo)
3 c. raw whole peanuts
1 tsp. salt, 1 tsp. vanilla
2 1/2 tsps. baking soda

In a large heavy pan, combine sugar, water and corn syrup. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until 250 degrees on a candy thermometer. Add raw peanuts and salt. Boil over medium heat to 300 degrees, stirring constantly. Remove from heat (work quickly now) and stir in vanilla and baking soda. (Mixture will foam). Immediately pour, spread and pull the foamy hot mixture on a large buttered marble slab or use two buttered cookie sheets, or sheets with parchment or Silpat. When brittle has cooled slightly, move it by sliding it to wire racks if it is on parchment or Silpat. Cool and break into eating-size pieces. Store in tightly covered tin at room temperature. Yield is 2 lbs.

POPCORN BALLS

4 qts. popped popcorn (1 cup uncooked)
1 1/2 c. peanut butter
1 1/2 c. sugar, 1 1/2 tsps vanilla
1 1/2 c. light corn syrup

Keep popped popcorn warm in a 250 degree oven. Mix sugar and corn syrup together in a heavy saucepan. Bring to full boil and boil 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and beat in peanut butter and vanilla. Pour syrup over popcorn. Stir to mix well. Butter your hands before shaping and use as little pressure as possible; just enough to hold together. If desired, Reese's pieces can be hidden inside each popcorn ball. Cut cellophane or waxed paper into 12"x12" squares and place ball in center. Tie with festive holiday ribbon.

RED AND GREEN PUNCH

1 1/2 cups frozen lightly sweetened red raspberries
1/2 of a 16 oz. pkg. frozen unsweetened peach slices (2 cups)
1 6 oz. can frozen lemonade concentrate
2 medium bananas, sliced
1 carton each lime and raspberry sherbet

Thaw the raspberries, peaches, and lemonade concentrate. In a blender container combine raspberries, peaches, bananas, lemonade concentrate, and 1/2 cup cold water. Cover and blend till smooth. Sieve mixture and discard seeds, if desired. Chill. Transfer to a punch bowl and top with scoops of the sherbet. I triple the recipe because this is popular.

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