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store, at least not when I'm piloting the shopping cart. Walking more is simple enough, until I look at establishing a time to do so. Getting that home gym contraption to move itself just isn't going to happen, after all, so I'll let you know how retooling my days goes as we wander into a New Year.

If you've had an eye on the "Happenings" calendar, you know that today (Wednesday, even though I know that some of you get Sierra Lodestar on Tuesdays) is a pretty cool day at Calaveras Big Trees State Park. The Calaveras Big Trees Association is staging a Winter Wonderland Celebration from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., during which you can enjoy a wagon ride through parts of the park and hear live music inside Jack Knight Hall. Children can get crafty and hot cocoa, cider and cookies are set to be snacked upon (I'm not exercising till the week after next).

The association is limiting the number of tickets that are sold, so try bigtrees.eventsbot.com for tickets, which are \$12.50 for adults and \$8.50 for children in advance. If they're still available, get them for \$15 and \$10 at the event.

A tree crashed into the entry kiosk at the park in mid-December. No one was injured, but the ranger hut took a wallop from a pretty good sized evergreen. The park was closed for just a few days when, viola, a framed kiosk re-appeared. I'm seriously thinking that Santa got busy before his appointed rounds and performed some magic, because in no time the hut was back and the park returned to pre-winter glory.

Maybe my during-winter calendar will show me when to squeeze in a workout. Till then, make your New Year's a safe and enjoyable one.

Contact Mike Taylor at mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

Winter Wonderland

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Wednesday

WHERE: Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Highway 4 east of Arnold

TICKETS: \$12.50 for adults and \$8.50 for kids at bigtrees.eventsbot.com or \$15 and \$10

MORE INFO: 795-3840



Step out to ring in the New Year

The New Year arrives this weekend; time for some New Year's resolutions. You know, those goals that most of us quickly forget to fulfill. Become healthy. Deal with that addiction. Get a better job. Become more involved in the community. Get out of debt.

For me, New Year's resolutions usually involve losing weight and determining to spend less money on movies, a very difficult feat for a person with a love of food and films with a collection of well over 300 at home. This year, however, I am struck by a thought that has helped me through many difficult situations. I recall a line from C.S.

Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia." In "Prince Caspian," Aslan tells Lucy she can never know what would have happened, but what will happen is another matter entirely.

In other words, we can't change the past, but we do control our futures. And that's what New Year's Day is all about, choosing to act or change for the better. But too often we forget to act. Words are nothing but words, powerless without the will to act on them. Aslan's words encourage me to not let the past haunt me and to choose to live in the present. I fail at my resolutions because they only last one day. I must act. I must celebrate the blessings of the past, forget the evils of the past and live in the present every day after New Year's Day.

And what are your New Year's

resolutions? At the risk of sounding clichéd, there's no time like the present.

Of course, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day still have much to their merit (but watch for swerving cars on the road), and acting on our resolutions can still get inspiration from the fresh feeling that comes each new year. So, what will you celebrate this New Year's Day? Much like birthdays, New Year's marks another year gone by. I know that's not a pleasant thought for everyone, but there's plenty to be grateful for (Thanksgiving wasn't that long ago). I may not have a ton of money, but with a roof over my head and a college degree, I look with hope toward the future.

Come this New Year's Eve, I'll likely be sitting on the couch with

my family, all cuddled up in our blankets, enjoying the usual television specials. While I haven't been to the New Year's celebration in Times Square in New York, I have fond memories of my freshman year of college spent in the city before changing schools. I never grow tired of yelling out, "I've been there!" as the ball drops. Then there are the usual holiday favorites like "It's a Wonderful Life" that leave you feeling all warm inside. And

when we lived in Modesto, my parents and I would use leftover sparklers from Fourth of July as the clock struck midnight.

Tuolumne County has a few of its own New Year's offerings. You

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Tuolumne Talk

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Swing Dance Party

WHEN: 9 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Angelo's Hall, 1209 State St., Columbia

TICKETS: \$10 at the door

MORE INFO: swinggitane.com



Courtesy photo

Swing Gitane performs in Columbia New Year's Eve.

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could attend a New Year's Eve Swing Dance Party at Angelo's Hall in Columbia State Historic Park for just \$10. The party goes from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. at 1209 State St. Hot music from the 1920s and '30s will be performed by Swing Gitane, and beverages will be available for purchase. Check out swinggitane.com for more.

A Contra and Traditional Square Dancing party will welcome 2012 at Aronos Women's Club, 37 E. Elkin St. (at Stewart Street), Sonora, starting at 8 p.m. This one features fiddle music and an old-time string band. The cost is \$7 for adults and \$3 for students. Learn more at squaredancer8.wordpress.com.

And if you're looking for a way to celebrate and do something for the community at the same time, Give Every Child a Chance of Tuolumne County presents a New Year's Eve murder mystery, dinner and dance. The 1960s and '70s themed fundraiser includes a silent auction and a drawing with a grand prize of a trip to Monterey. All of the proceeds provide students with free mentoring and tutoring in an afterschool program. The no-host bar opens at 6 p.m. The dinner and show will go from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. and the Party Like It's 1969 Dance Party goes

Contra and Square Dance Party

WHEN:
8 p.m. Saturday

WHERE:
Aronos Women's Club, 37 E. Elkin St., Sonora

TICKETS:
\$7 for adults and \$3 for students at the door

MORE INFO:
squaredancer8.wordpress.com

from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. Tickets are available for the entire night or for individual parts of the evening at gecacoftc.org.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

The experts make martinis memorable

Some distillers have a knack for turning juniper berries into pure silk; bartenders do their part by combining gin with other delicacies to create the perfect martini. These people are so appreciated on these cold winter nights. Blame it on the weather, the late humorist Robert Benchley did: "Why don't you slip out of those wet clothes and into a dry martini?"

The classic recipe (gin with an eye dropper of dry vermouth stirred over ice and garnished with an olive, onion or twist of lemon) is only part of it. The rest has something to do with the clink of a real martini glass, that classic triangle atop a tall stem. Such a glass makes even big, cumbersome hands look graceful.

Granted, the martini is the ultimate designer drink. But designers vary, don't they? Some bartenders are simply Dior, others more like Wal-Mart.

Mike Ferrell at Mokelumne Hill's Hotel Leger bar is a good example of the former. He favors Bombay Sapphire gin or Tanqueray with a quarter-ounce of dry vermouth and a two-olive garnish.

Martinis concocted by Mike and his colleague, Sean Canty, have become so popular that they've inspired weekly Thursday night gatherings. Martini Night isn't just a Moke Hill thing; patrons come from as far away as Murphys and Sutter Creek. Martini Night libations are \$4; as opposed to \$6 on regular nights. There's always bar food available at the Leger, and often enticing specials; but my ongoing favorite

Antoinette May Herndon

Foothill Flavors



remains fish and chips (\$9.95). The fish is always fresh, tender and hand-dipped.

It was the sad tale of floating Flo that hooked me. A ghost chaser from way back, I determined to check out the bar scene at Jamestown's National Hotel.

More than 100 years ago, Flo, 19 and pretty, arrived at the hotel with a story to tell. The New York heiress had met Henry, a handsome young lawyer, while traveling by train to San Francisco. It was love at first sight, Flo confided. Henry proposed marriage, but knowing Flo's relatives would be outraged, the couple planned to meet six weeks later in Jamestown, where Henry was to travel on business.

They kept their rendezvous at the National, with separate rooms, of course. A wedding was planned. A dressmaker sewed a lace-trimmed wedding gown. On Christmas morning, Henry presented Flo with a diamond ring.

The day after Christmas, Flo sat waiting in the dining room for Henry to come down when a shot rang out. It appears that a drunkard stumbled into the doorway and shot

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