THE REASONS TO



throughout human history we have always looked for reasons to celebrate. Eating and drinking are integral components of being merry; add a bit of dancing and debauchery and you have a winning party recipe. While we don't really need much encouragement to get a party started, there are several benchmarks that warrant elaborate festivities just about everywhere — the Hudson Valley is by no means an exception, and indeed has become a haven for partiers with panache. These events can be lumped into three main categories: coming of age, pre-matrimonial, and achievement.

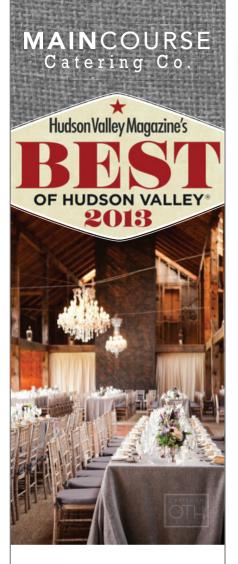
While most of us have attended at least one of these varieties (if not all), few of us really know how these celebrations came to be so important to our culture. We've been celebrating these landmark occasions for so long that they have become things we do with few questions asked. But for those of you who have found yourself sitting at a frilly table laden with flowers and ribbon, wondering, "What am I doing here?" we wanted to give you a few answers.

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COMING OF AGE CELEBRATIONS

Imost every culture marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Many traditions today are colored by the Christian faith and European culture. But this Western influence merely adds to the long history of established coming of age rituals. (Americanization, in particular, has intensified the party aspects of originally religious customs.) The most noted coming of age events are the bar/bat mitzvah, quinceañera, and sweet 16.

In general terms, all these practices can be considered a debut. In fact, the Western influence that has infiltrated these customs is rooted in the debutante ball or season. In the French and British traditions, when girls came of age — normally around 16 — they were formally introduced or debuted to society; this was called a "season" and marked by a series of balls. At these soirees, marriages and other social connections were arranged. The cotillion is an outgrowth of this tradition and is still very popular in the South.

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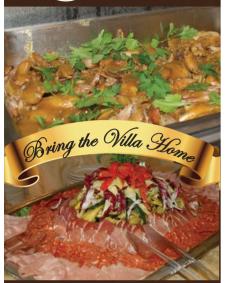
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PARTIES, WEDDINGS&CELEBRATIONS



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There is no traditional way to approach a bridal shower (also called wedding shower). Venues range from home basements to banquet halls, because the party is so specific to the socio-economic circumstances of the bride. In truth, its sole purpose is to amass gifts (similar to its sister party, the baby shower). It is said that the first of these occasions was held in 17th-century Netherlands to offset the stinginess of a penny-pinching father who refused to pay for the dowry and wedding. However, stories in Belgium and practices in the United States also place the bridal shower's origins sometime in the mid-1800s. This event was a way to fatten out a bride's dowry and also allow the married couple to begin their life as one without completely breaking the piggy bank.

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ACHIEVEMENT

In fact it seems that many parties are attached to the concept of taking a leap into the next phase of life. Achievement parties are no different, the most observed being graduation and retirement. While the first is by no means a new concept, the latter is really a 20th-century invention.

Whether from high school or higher education, the graduation is often marked by not only an official academic ceremony, but also an after party. Academic study can be just as rigorous as a paying job, and so at the end of a full course, the dutiful scholar has earned a moment to shine and relax. The graduation party is usually

attended by all those who have supported the student through his or her academic career. Often gifts are given to help the student's transition into the next stage of life, whether that be another round of study or entering the workforce. Graduations usually rank among the least extravagant as far as celebrations go. According to the website *GraduationParty.com*, on average, the bill doesn't exceed \$1,000. But the party plays an important cultural role, recognizing students' achievements in this increasingly knowledge-centered world.

Until the early 1900s, retirement was the time at which you took yourself off to bed. Germany's Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was the first to design an old-age social insurance program for those 70 or older in 1889. The program allowed those who had reached the then unusually old age to retire from work and be provided for by the government. In 1916, the program reduced the age to 65. This idea of old-age security took hold in the United States in 1935 when the country established Social Security.

Progress, it would seem, was the impetus for retirement. The industrial revolution and its subsequent technological revolutions required speed and agility





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to succeed. Enter retirement! Those who were beyond the healthfulness to work in mind, body, or spirit were encouraged to leave work to the able-bodied and enjoy their old age. Over time, retirement has changed, and now in most professions 20 to 25 years of service grants the ability to retire with pension benefits.

Retirement has come to symbolize a major life transition into the golden years. As such, a party is in order. Sometimes thrown by the company for which the person worked, or by friends and family, or even by the retiree themselves, the occasion is usually marked by food and drink, music, and dancing. Often a gift recognizing the retiree's contribution to the workforce is given; these gifts are notoriously unequal to the merits of the retiree and are often satirized in pop culture.

Whether it entails a keg in the basement or chocolate fountain in a banquet hall, parties are a deeply embedded part of our culture. For millennia people have been coming up with reasons to come together and celebrate. Life's sweetest moments create the best party atmospheres. And it seems that there is no end in sight to the party line.

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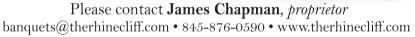
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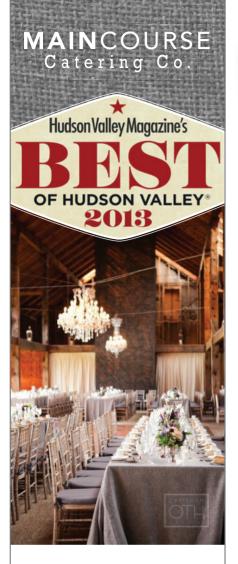
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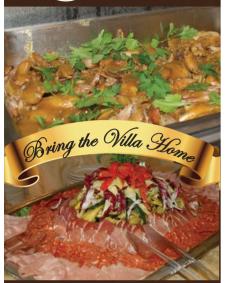
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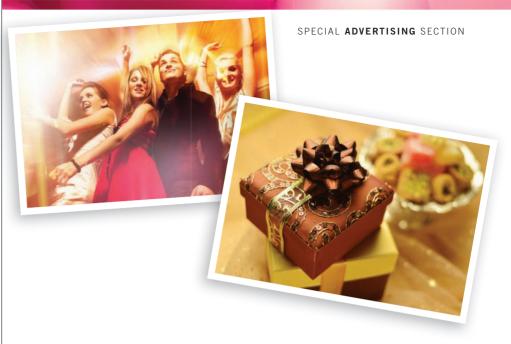


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Traditionally, while the bride has been concerned with money matters, the bridegroom has wanted to let off the final vestiges of single steam before being shackled to the ball and chain. The bachelor party far precedes the bridal shower — by about 2,300 years. It is believed that in the fifth-century B.C., the Spartans first celebrated the groom's last night as a single man, making toasts and drinking to his pending nuptials. This merrymaking tradition to mark the end of bachelorhood has continued in lavish style. In fact, Las Vegas has become almost synonymous with bachelor party debauchery. You know: "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas!" The Sexual Revolution of the 1960s led to the equal opportunity demonstration of bachelorette parties, giving women license to the same vice as men right before taking the leap.

ACHIEVEMENT

In fact it seems that many parties are attached to the concept of taking a leap into the next phase of life. Achievement parties are no different, the most observed being graduation and retirement. While the first is by no means a new concept, the latter is really a 20th-century invention.

Whether from high school or higher education, the graduation is often marked by not only an official academic ceremony, but also an after party. Academic study can be just as rigorous as a paying job, and so at the end of a full course, the dutiful scholar has earned a moment to shine and relax. The graduation party is usually

attended by all those who have supported the student through his or her academic career. Often gifts are given to help the student's transition into the next stage of life, whether that be another round of study or entering the workforce. Graduations usually rank among the least extravagant as far as celebrations go. According to the website *GraduationParty.com*, on average, the bill doesn't exceed \$1,000. But the party plays an important cultural role, recognizing students' achievements in this increasingly knowledge-centered world.

Until the early 1900s, retirement was the time at which you took yourself off to bed. Germany's Chancellor Otto von Bismarck was the first to design an old-age social insurance program for those 70 or older in 1889. The program allowed those who had reached the then unusually old age to retire from work and be provided for by the government. In 1916, the program reduced the age to 65. This idea of old-age security took hold in the United States in 1935 when the country established Social Security.

Progress, it would seem, was the impetus for retirement. The industrial revolution and its subsequent technological revolutions required speed and agility





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PARTIES, WEDDINGS&CELEBRATIONS

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to succeed. Enter retirement! Those who were beyond the healthfulness to work in mind, body, or spirit were encouraged to leave work to the able-bodied and enjoy their old age. Over time, retirement has changed, and now in most professions 20 to 25 years of service grants the ability to retire with pension benefits.

Retirement has come to symbolize a major life transition into the golden years. As such, a party is in order. Sometimes thrown by the company for which the person worked, or by friends and family, or even by the retiree themselves, the occasion is usually marked by food and drink, music, and dancing. Often a gift recognizing the retiree's contribution to the workforce is given; these gifts are notoriously unequal to the merits of the retiree and are often satirized in pop culture.

Whether it entails a keg in the basement or chocolate fountain in a banquet hall, parties are a deeply embedded part of our culture. For millennia people have been coming up with reasons to come together and celebrate. Life's sweetest moments create the best party atmospheres. And it seems that there is no end in sight to the party line.

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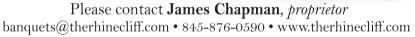
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