

9 to 5 on New Year's Eve

While the rest of the world sips champagne, blows noisemakers, and wears funny hats to count down the minutes to 2004, there are many whose job it is to just keep the revelers content.

**By Susan Greenspon,
STAFF WRITER**

From feeding folks, to pouring libations, to providing music for their partying pleasure, New Year's Eve means business as usual for those who work on this international night of celebration.

"I deal with New Year's Eve every year. I've never had off," says George Costalas, owner of the Country Squire in Broomall. "It's not one of the nights I prefer to have off."

Costalas has been working at the diner - opened by his grandfather, George, and father, Gus, in 1963 - since his high school days. He got involved full time in 1979 after graduating from Widener University.

For this husband and father of 10-year-old twins, New Year's Eve into New Year's Day means seeing his family "just in passing."

Indeed, this night out for so many means so many hours away from home for Costalas. "We get an early dinner crowd, then a lull between, say, 9 and 12, then we start getting a lot of late people coming in for dessert or breakfast," says Costalas of the family restaurant that doesn't serve alcohol. "This continues until about 5 or 6 a.m. and goes right into New Year's Day."

Costalas says he may go home for some shuteye at 1 or 2 a.m. New Year's morning, but returns later to oversee the daytime operations. "I only need about four or five hours of sleep a night," he says, "always have."

Does his wife ever complain about not having a date for New Year's Eve? "I warned her before we got married that I always work this night," says Costalas, who was raised in Broomall and now lives in Newtown Square. "Her dad was in the restaurant business, so she understands."

And where would he prefer to be if not watching New Year's revelers fall asleep in their eggs, as he has witnessed through the decades? "It would be nice to be on an island somewhere," he says. "St. Barts would be a great place to celebrate."

Making parties happen has been the business of Dave Schaffer for a decade and the mission of his brothers, Ken, who founded Schaffer Sound Productions of Havertown in 1977, and Jon, who has since taken the helm.

Dave Schaffer, 26, has worked the New Year's Eve shift for eight years. His gigs have varied, from big bashes at area hotels to private parties in Center City.

This year, he is among some 40 DJs who'll fan out through the tri-state region for New Year's Eve bashes.

"I'll typically work from about 8 to 1 a.m.," says the Archbishop Bonner graduate who lives in Drexel Hill. "I start setting up on site about 7 p.m."

In the company's office on West Chester Pike near Eagle Road, Schaffer was going through the CD collection with fellow manager Joe Mairoano.

"We have over 300,000 song titles in our collection," says Mairoano of Broomall, who has been with the company for 21 years and has had plenty of New Year's Eve parties under his belt. The company made the switch from albums to CDs back in the early 1990s.

What are the songs most requested on this big night on the town?

"When it starts getting late, people will start wanting to hear "Celebrate" and Mummers' tunes like "Golden Slippers" and "Alabama Jubilee," says Schaffer. "And of course, he says, "there's 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

"We play for such a wide variety of people," he says of the many "standard" requests. "We're often playing for four different generations."

Schaffer says most of the time, the crowds on New Year's Eve are having a good time and "don't need a whole lot of coaxing" to get on up and dance.

With his job to be entertaining and keep things lively, Schaffer sees the excesses on this particular evening and it can be sobering.

"We call it amateur night," says Mairoano, with Schaffer nodding in agreement.

"It's a night when people who don't typically go out to drink have a little too much to drink," says Schaffer.

What does all this work on New Year's Eve mean for his social life? "My girlfriend comes with me," says Schaffer. "And my friends will find out where I'm working and they'll buy tickets to come out, too."

The difference is that he's typically not suffering a hangover come New Year's Day.

Two of the area bars hosting New Year's Eve bashes with help from Schaffer Sound DJs are Bryan Street Pub in Drexel Hill and Boulevard Bar and Grille in Havertown. Both are co-owned by Pattie Brower, 35, of Springfield, who has just stopped in to Schaffer Sound offices to drop off some information to the managers.

"We do a package. Open bar, buffet, champagne toast, and Schaffer DJs," says Brower, motioning to the office around her.

Brower has worked New Year's Eves for the last eight years, mostly as bar manager.

"I don't mind working it. It's amateur night," she adds, echoing the sentiments of the DJs who've gone back to an office to work. "People come out for this one situation and overdo it," she says.

"But I'm all set to oversee everybody," says Brower, who says she and her co-owners see it as their mission to get inebriated patrons home, even if it means driving them themselves.

"One of our co-owners was killed by a drunk driver two years ago," says Brower of the August 2001 death of Steve "Stumpy" DiPaolo, 26. She says the owners feel a strong responsibility toward patrons who drink and drive.

As for the bar business in general, it's definitely for night owls, she says. But Brower, a mother of an eight-year-old daughter, is not among those who generally can sleep in.

Where in the world would this woman be if not watching others misbehave at Bryan Street or the Boulevard Bar?

"Oh, Key West," she says, looking away dreamily. "I celebrated two New Year's there and that's definitely my favorite place to be."

"There are no amateurs there," she adds, laughing. "It's strictly for professionals."

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