**HOLIDAYS**

*Martin Luther King* was a civil rights leader famous for his peaceful efforts to help black people. Born January 15, 1929, his birthday is celebrated the third Monday in January. King was killed April 4, 1968. He is well remembered for his bravery and leadership. Purdue does not have classes on this holiday.

*Abraham Lincoln*, the 16th president of the U.S. led America through the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. He is probably best known for preserving the Union, or keeping the country united, and for freeing the slaves. He was killed by an assassin, John Wilkes Booth in 1865. His birthday is celebrated February 12.

*Valentine's Day* is a special day observed on February 14. On this day, people send greeting cards called valentines to their sweethearts, friends and family members. Many valentines have romantic verses. This is not a legal holiday.

*George Washington* was the first President of the U.S. Born February 22, 1732, Washington's birthday is celebrated as a legal holiday called *President's Day* the third Monday in February.

Green, green, green! It must be *St. Patrick's Day*! In honor of the Irish, many people celebrate the birthday of the Irish St. Patrick by wearing green, by drinking beer and Irish whiskey, and by enjoying Irish fiddling. Many Americans are of Irish descent, and this is their special day.

What's this? A cat being cooked for dinner!? "April Fool's!" You better think twice before you believe everything you see and hear on April 1, for that's *April Fool's Day*, a day for pranks and jokes.

*Passover* is one of the most important Jewish holidays. It celebrates the survival of the Jews in Egypt at a time when a plague killed many Egyptians. Also, it celebrates the Jews passing from slavery into freedom. Special symbolic food is bought and prepared for the Seder, the big Passover dinner held on Thursday night. The date of Passover, always in the spring, varies, because it is determined by the lunar calendar.

*Easter* is a Christian holiday, the first Sunday after Passover. The Friday before Easter Sunday, called Good Friday, Jesus Christ was crucified. Three days later, according to the Bible, He rose and began His eternal life. Easter is a joyful celebration. Symbols of birth are common -- chicks, ducklings, eggs and rabbits. Dyeing and decorating hard-boiled eggs is a popular tradition. The mythical Easter Bunny leaves candy in Easter baskets for the children.

On *Mother's Day*, the second Sunday in May, many children give their mom some flowers, candy, a gift, a card, or just a hug that says "I love you!"

*Memorial Day*, the last Monday in May, is a legal holiday in honor of all those who have been killed in wars. Many people display the American flag. In Indianapolis, Indiana, a famous auto race, the Indianapolis 500, is held on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend.

The third Sunday in June is *Father's Day*. Now it's dad's turn to get cards, candy, and presents.

The 4th of July, *Independence Day*, celebrates the birth of the United States in 1776. Our first flag had only thirteen stars, one for each of the original states. Now the flag has fifty stars. On the 4th of July,
flags are displayed and it is traditional to observe the day participating in picnics, bar-b-ques and outdoor fun. Fireworks are also traditional.

The first Monday in September is **Labor Day**. It is a legal holiday -- a day off -- in honor of all the working people in America. Purdue does not have classes on this holiday.

Christopher Columbus, an Italian ship captain hired by Spain, discovered America in 1492. **Columbus Day** is celebrated the second Monday in October. Government offices, banks and most schools are closed that day.

**Halloween**, October 31, is a traditional holiday especially enjoyed by children. According to ancient superstitions, Halloween was the night that witches could fly and ghosts and skeletons were on the loose. Children wearing Halloween costumes and going "trick or treating" in the early evening is a tradition. Groups of children walk from house to house and when the front door is opened, the kids yell "Trick or treat!" Candy is the treat usually given to the children. Halloween tricks are usually pranks.

**Veteran's Day**, November 11, is a legal holiday honoring all those who have served in the armed forces. Vets often organize parades and memorial services on this day to remember their past military service for their country.

The fourth Thursday in November is **Thanksgiving**, a holiday for feasting. The tradition began in 1621 with the pilgrims, English settlers in the northeastern part of America which we now call New England. They celebrated a successful harvest with the helpful Indians. Today Thanksgiving is a time for families and friends to enjoy being together. Some businesses and most schools close for the four-day weekend. The central focus on Thanksgiving Day is a roasted turkey. The huge meal ends with traditional pumpkin pie.

**Christmas** is the day Christians celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. Most Christians observe Christmas on December 25. People attend church services, take part in other religious ceremonies, exchange gifts, decorate their homes with Christmas trees, send Christmas cards, gather with friends and family, hang stockings for Santa Claus to fill with small gifts, and much, much more.

America is a big country, and different regions sometimes have their own special celebrations. For example, New Orleans is famous for its Mardi Gras parade six and a half weeks before Easter. In areas where there are many people of Mexican background, "Cinco de Mayo," a national holiday in Mexico, is celebrated by parades and traditional dancing on May 5.