



Tree skirt under Paula's Christmas tree on page 80

Bringing New Life to Unwanted Cast-offs

A Chicago-based interior designer focuses on revitalizing worthless, second-hand goods while helping others. This time of year, his tree skirt with its kaleidoscope of colors is front and center in his home and design studio.

Mitch Pennell's nonprofit organization, Chicago Lost and Found, is aptly named. By gathering supplies from dumpsters and alleys, they literally work with junk and trash.

When Mitch started Chicago Lost and Found, he was between jobs, fresh from a reality television show called *Wickedly Perfect*. During the auditions for the show, he constructed his now famous Christmas tree skirt out of men's ties. The project blossomed into Lost and Found, where Mitch gives

new life to other people's junk. "I've always been very creative and imaginative, and it's just my gift," he says.

Chicago Lost and Found uses the profits from its sales to fund art classes for all ages throughout Chicagoland. "I love to create, I love to teach, and I love to help people," Mitch says.

The tree skirts have 250 pieces in each design, and each tie is hand selected by artists at the organization. They require 40 hours to construct and are lovingly handcrafted by employees of the nonprofit.

Finding purpose for unwanted items is an art form itself. "People love to connect to the past because as long as you can have your past as a touchstone, you can better guide your future," Mitch says.

Another favorite at Christmas: his recipe for cranberry relish. "It's one of my favorite things to cook and share during the holidays," Mitch says.



Cranberry Relish

Makes about 5 cups

- 1 ¼ cups cranberry juice
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 large Granny Smith apple, cored and finely diced
- ¼ cup finely diced crystallized ginger
- 1 (12-ounce) bag fresh cranberries
- ½ cup orange liqueur*
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ⅓ cup fresh orange juice
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ cup chopped toasted pecans
- ½ cup chopped toasted walnuts

1. In a large saucepan, combine cranberry juice and sugar; bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat; add apple and ginger, and cook, stirring frequently, for about 10 minutes or until apple is softened. Add cranberries, liqueur, raisins, orange juice, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. Cook for about 10 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently, until cranberries pop and mixture is thickened. Remove from heat, and stir in pecans and walnuts.

2. Let cool for 30 minutes. Store in sealed containers and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

*We used Grand Marnier.