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## Crafty Holiday Ideas Replace Costly Ones

By Lisa Fogarty

As newlyweds, Filomena and Rob Gamez have treated each other to many upscale dinners, nights out with friends and even the dream journey of a lifetime – a safari trip to South Africa. But, like many New Yorkers concerned about the economy, the Forest Hills couple has made a pact this Christmas – to keep the holiday humble.

Instead of combing store shelves for tennis bracelets or cashmere sweaters, Filomena will be treating her husband to a sumptuous and wallet-friendly treat: her homemade cooking.

“I haven’t done any Christmas shopping at all this year but Rob and I aren’t getting each other gifts because we’re trying to save money,” she said. “I also just told my sister and brother that we are not doing Christmas presents this year and they agreed that we’re better off that way. I’m sure it was a relief for them.”

Jenn SanAngelo, a resident of Astoria, said she and her large group of friends are strapped for cash and have opted to think of theme-oriented gifts to exchange.

“One year, I gave everyone a \$9.99 bracelet and a 1978 penny,” SanAngelo said. “Last year I gave everyone board games because it was the year before we were turning 30 and I wanted something youthful. And this year, I’m just giving \$10 Starbucks gift cards.”

Even though most gift-givers’ piggy banks are a bit lighter this season, many are taking advantage of alternative gift ideas – and some are even putting their old Art 101 techniques to good use. At Cook’s Arts & Crafts Shoppe in Glendale, co-owner Michelle Cook-Lopez has noticed a significant increase in the number of people who have expressed interest in making their own holiday gifts or in ordering uniquely-designed crafts to give to their loved ones.

“When you’ve given someone something you’ve taken the time to make yourself, it means a lot more,” Cook-Lopez said. “You’re not just running to the store and buying a last-minute scarf. You’re actually putting thought into it. It puts meaning back into the holidays again.”

In addition to selling art materials, the shop, which has been around for 37 years, even offers classes in crochet and craftwork. Their most popular items



Cooks Crafts in Queens can offer inspired ideas.

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this season are the loopy scarf tools, which allow amateur knitters to complete a scarf in one night (\$20) and bead kits that can be used to make necklaces and bracelets (\$6 per kit).

"You can buy a plain watch face and a \$2 mixed bag of beads and for under \$20 you can make a great-looking, unique watch as a gift for someone," Cook-Lopez said.

Buy Nothing Christmas, a national movement that began in Canada to encourage the de-commercialization of Christmas, offers several alternative gift ideas on their Web site, [buynothingchristmas.org](http://buynothingchristmas.org), including creating coupons that offer free babysitting or housecleaning, putting together recipe books or books on tape and offering to teach someone a skill you already have.

"It's just more important for us to have more money in the bank," Gamez said. "A new house one day would be the best gift of all."

Cook's Arts & Crafts Shoppe is located at 80-09 Myrtle Ave. For more information, visit [cookscrafts.com](http://cookscrafts.com).

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