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KEEPING SPIRITS BRIGHT

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It's that time of year again, when New Yorkers dust off their dancing shoes, brush up on small talk and head to the company holiday party.

For real estate brokers, these soirées take on a particular significance: As independent contractors, many agents spend little time with their coworkers, so holiday parties offer a rare bonding opportunity.

"Real estate can be a very lonely business," said Kathy Braddock, cofounder of Rutenberg Realty, which is throwing a bowling/cocktail party at Lucky Strike to celebrate the season. "Part of our job is to lend emotional support."

That's especially true after the roller-coaster ride of the past month. While some firms said party plans were delayed or scaled back due to the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, most said there's a greater need than ever for brokers to unwind after a difficult few weeks.

"I always think when something bad happens, it's nice to go to something happy," said Fox Residential founder Barbara Fox, who is throwing her annual holiday party this month for clients and brokers at her Upper East Side apartment. "It's a very warm and inviting thing to have people into your home after such a tragedy."

Braddock said Rutenberg chose bowling for its holiday party in hopes that the activity would be fun and foster team-building. Plus, she said, the venue provides "enough space to socialize."

Other firms opt for more glamorous locations. Platinum Properties held its holiday party last year at Cipriani Downtown serving cake and champagne, and the venue was such a hit that this year's party will also take place at the Soho hot spot.

Brooklyn-based MNS is throwing its party this year at the King & Grove Williamsburg hotel, relocating from Manhattan's equally trendy Gansevoort Park Avenue hotel, where the soirée was held last year.

MNS selected the Brooklyn venue in part because "we're opening up a new office in Williamsburg and have done a tremendous amount of business there in 2012," said CEO Andrew Barrocas.

Of course, brokerage holiday parties can be more than just an opportunity for too much punch. These fiestas provide opportunities for schmoozing clients, cementing business relationships or bolstering a firm's image.

Town Residential this year is throwing a combination holiday party and birthday celebration at the Meatpacking District's swanky Dream Downtown hotel.

The party, which is expected to draw over 1,000 brokers, staff and clients, will take up the entire hotel, from lobby to roof.

"Town Residential has a lot to celebrate," said Andrew Heiberger, Town's founder and CEO. "This is a time to show our sincere appreciation for those who have helped us in our rise to the top."

Last year, two-year-old brokerage Blu Realty had a dinner in a small restaurant, according to managing partner Vince Rocco. But this year, with nearly 70 employees in total, Blu is planning a larger cocktail party at Bar Basso at 235 West 56th Street in Manhattan.

Festive holiday parties are "even more important for a new company," Rocco said.

"We want to show people — both our brokers and others in the industry — that we're solid and we're sound," he added.

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