

# CRAZY STIRRING

STAVE OFF BOREDOM WITH THESE OFF-THE-WALL EVENTS



BY GARIN PIRNIA

The winter of our discontent is upon us. Again. Instead of hibernating and watching bad movies on cable, combat the winter blahs with alternative activities. We're talking about a crazy shopping cart race, playing board games at dive bars and celebrating some weirdo named Robert Burns.

## SantaCon (Dec. 8, 2007)

When you ponder the idea of the Jolly One, elves and chubbiness come to mind, but Billy Bob Thornton in *Bad Santa* also pops up. Because we need a lot of booze to assuage the demands of the holidays, promoter Santa Tom has arranged Chicago's best Christmas event, SantaCon ([santaconchicago.com](http://santaconchicago.com)). "There are a lot of Santa crawl-type events that happen around the city where you must sign up or know somebody," says Santa Tom. "Or it's in protest of commercialization of the holiday. This isn't about that. It's about getting people together. Sometimes Chicago feels so segregated. This is about letting your guard down and laughing at yourself and having a great time." Anyone can participate as long as they dress up in Santa regalia. Santas congregate at the bar in the Congress Hotel at 2 p.m., then set out on a spontaneous route through the Loop and up to Rush and Division, spreading cheer and imbibing along the way. No one can resist a board of "happy" Santas.

## Burns Night at the Globe Pub (Jan. 24, 2008)

Most people haven't heard of Scottish poet and lyricist Robert Burns, but he's left an indelible impression on the world. He's credited for penning the ubiquitous New Year's Eve tune "Auld Lang Syne" in the 18th century, writing a folk song about John Barleycorn (like the Wrigleyville bar) and the simile-heavy poem "My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose." Born on Jan. 25, 1759, his legacy lives on, as every year on his birthday people get together to feast in his honor. The Globe Pub (1934 W. Irving Park, 773/871-3757) has been hosting the free, RSVP-required event for the past two years. A traditional

evening consists of eating haggis, reading poetry, playing music dressing in your tartan best, and, of course, downing a lot of whiskey. "Last year because the weather was so bad our piper and a couple of readers did not make it in," says organizer Stuart Johnston. "I had to play the pipes on a CD, and more people from the audience than was planned read poems. You know how in adversity you sometimes have the most fun? This is how the evening turned out."

## The Chiditarod (March 1, 2008)

Every year a lone man and his dogs trek 1,000 miles across Alaska for a test in endurance, but here in the big city, dressing up in outrageous costumes and rushing shopping carts through the streets to win cash prizes and "best of" awards seems more compelling. The Chiditarod ([chiditarod.org](http://chiditarod.org)), Chicago's version of the 13-year-old San Francisco Urban Iditarod, is now in its third year. Teams customize their carts and don costumes in a competition where sabotage is highly encouraged, crossing checkpoints (aka bars) to, um, re-hydrate. It's also a food drive, where you have to carry at least 15 pounds of food in your cart. The team with the most food at the end wins. Organizer David Breen says the event grows annually, and this year the goal is to collect two tons of food. "The comment we get on the street most often is, 'What is this and how can I sign up?'" remarks Breen. Apparently being silly and drunk helps the impoverished.

## Boardgames and Bars (all season)

Drinking and games are synonymous, so hit up some of your favorite neighborhood hangouts to forgo cabin fever in exchange for a friendly night of drunken competition. Wicker Park's Beachwood Inn (1415 N. Wood, 773/486-9806) boasts Connect Four, Clue, Millipede and a rockin' jukebox. Head to Wrigleyville's Guthrie's Tavern (1300 W. Addison, 773/477-2900) for their drinking Jenga game and Scrabble. Finally, hit Newport Bar and Grill (1344 W. Newport, 773/325-9111), offering Risk, a Chicago trivia game and darts.