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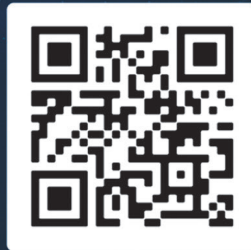
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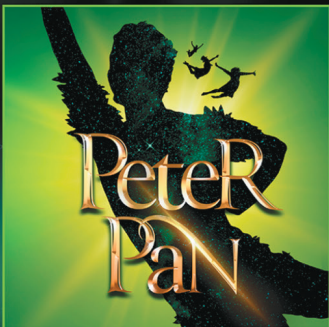


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Welcome

The chilly nights and shorter days in the Shoals mean just one thing – the holiday season is just around the corner.

It seems like every year the holiday season begins to make its presence known earlier and earlier in the year. Big box stores start stocking shelves with Thanksgiving and Christmas items as early as July.

It's not uncommon for cities and towns around the Shoals to even start planning and preparing for the holiday season.

Some residents in the Shoals get into the holiday spirit for many reasons.

Sharon Rutherford decorates her home each year with a great appreciation for Santa Claus and the birth of Christ. She shared her love for Christmas with her husband of 40 years. Lesley passed away not long after the couple spent Christmas 2020 together. Rutherford continues to go all out decorating her home for the holidays not just out of love for Christmas, but more so to savor the 40 wonderful Christmases she spent with Lesley.

Decorating for the holidays has become second-nature for the Syversons in Greenhill.

They try to set up that final strand of lights and Christmas trees before Thanksgiving Day, so that those lights are ready to shine brightly that night.

Duane Syverson says he routinely works on holiday decorations in his shop as early as the first of October to ensure that decorating can begin on Nov. 1.

The decorations aren't just for the Syverson family to enjoy, but all of the Shoals. Visitors of the Syversons can tune their car radio to FM station 107.9 and watch the lights dan and blink to the music.

A Tuscumbia family uses the holidays to take a dark time in their lives to honor a lost son and his girlfriend.

This season and holiday seasons to come, April Vafeas' home shines a little brighter in memory of her son, Tyler "T.J." Morgan, and his longtime girlfriend, Lexie Glass, who had also passed away from injuries she sustained in a car crash on June 18, 2022.

The family decided last December to hang lots of multi-colored light, including a string of red Christmas lights that Morgan himself along the exterior of their home in his last December on earth.

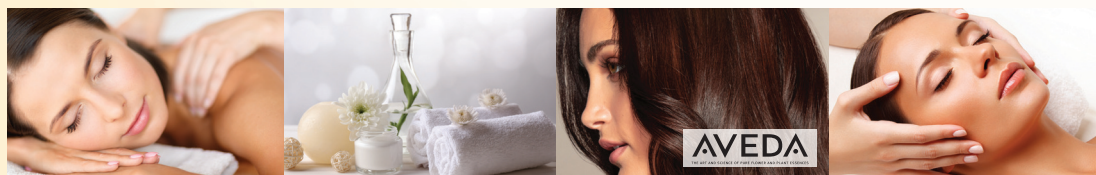
"He was all about putting up red lights. He did not care about the white, classic lights. The gaudier the better. For him it was about fun," Vafeas said.

These are just a few samples of some of the stories to share with you as we head down the backstretch into the holiday season.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Shoals Woman and have a great holiday season!

Kevin Taylor – City Editor

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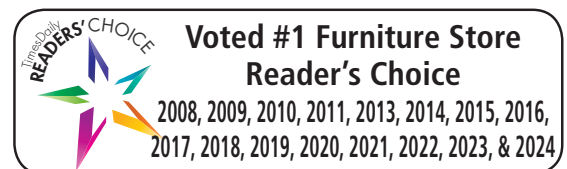
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Busey is a North Carolina native who has been a staff photographer with the TimesDaily since 2020. He earned an associate's degree in photojournalism from Randolph Community College in Asheboro, North Carolina.

He has been awarded various Associated Press awards, as well as many in the Nation Press

Photographers Association's monthly clip contest.

Busey became the first photographer as a member of the Alabama Press Association to earn the 2023 Emerging Journalist Award, which was awarded to him during the APA's winter conference in February 2023.

ON the COVER



When Sharon Rutherford opens her front door, her love of Christmas is immediately evident, as is her appreciation for Santa Claus. Rutherford and her late husband of 40 years began their collection of Christmas décor during their first year of marriage in 1981. While Rutherford always purchases a Fitz and Floyd Santa for her collection, many of the decorations and figurines on display for the holiday were purchased at antique shops and auctions throughout the years.

Photo by Dan Busey of the TimesDaily



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Christmas keeps memories alive

Sharon Rutherford carefully places a Santa ornament on her Christmas tree.

When Sharon Rutherford opens her front door, her love of Christmas is immediately evident, as is her appreciation for Santa Claus. However, just past her entryway, perched on a Victorian-era dining chair, is her favorite reminder of the season: a nativity scene and a copy of the book “A Special Place for Santa,” which depicts the jolly figure kneeling beside the traditional manger scene.

“That’s the greatest gift we could ever have is the birth of our Savior,” she said. “Lesley and I used to talk about heaven and Christmas and what Christmas would be like in heaven.”

Rutherford’s lifelong love of Christmas was shared by her late husband, Lesley, whose memory is intertwined with every ornament and decoration in her home. Now, she thinks of him as both her greatest blessing and her own personal Santa, and she sees his spirit — kind, caring and humble — reflected in the Santa figures carefully placed in every room of her home.

“A lot of men don’t like Christmas, but not my Lesley,” Rutherford said. “He just made it so special, always.”

The couple began their collection of Christmas décor during their first year of marriage in 1981. Rutherford recalls

selecting their first Christmas tree, which was flocked to create a snowy appearance, and choosing to string it with red lights.

“We would turn all of our lights out at night and just sit and look at the Christmas lights,” she said.

After that first year, the couple began to expand their collection, and they did so for 40 years. The Rutherford family never had children of their own, but Lesley often joked that they had a Christmas fund instead of one for college.

But her decorations do not break the bank.

While Rutherford always purchases a Fitz and Floyd Santa for her collection, many



Santa Claus is a favorite decoration found inside Sharon Rutherford’s home during the holiday season.

Decorations throughout Sharon Rutherford's home mostly feature traditional shades of red and green.



of the decorations and figurines on display for the holiday were purchased at antique shops and auctions throughout the years.

The decorations throughout the home mostly feature traditional Christmas shades of red and green, which Rutherford said she and her late husband both loved, creating a Christmas atmosphere to rival Santa's own workshop — and with his likeness on nearly every surface.

Somewhere in each room, Rutherford includes a nativity, carefully making sure she reflects the true reason for the holiday throughout her home.

Rutherford said her decorating usually begins on Oct. 1 and is completed by the Friday

Sharon Rutherford said she usually starts decorating her home on Oct. 1.



after Thanksgiving. Then, she entertains throughout the entire Christmas season — and sometimes into January.

While it might seem counterintuitive to entertain with so many breakable decorations placed throughout each room, Rutherford has one rule of thumb about her décor: “enjoy it!”

“Even the China — why have it if you can't enjoy it!” she exclaimed. “I don't have anything that can't be replaced.”

Rutherford has multiple Christmas-themed dishes on display throughout her home, but her favorite China set graces the kitchen where every available surface is covered by “The Night Before Christmas” China, Santa figures, embroidered Christmas

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linens and a Christmasy hot chocolate station — complete with red coffee maker.

Once the season arrives, Rutherford also loves to purchase and bake Christmas goodies to incorporate into her decorations and offer to guests.

From each bedroom and bathroom to the laundry room, sunroom and every living space between, Rutherford's home is decorated from baseboards to crown molding — even some of her rugs are Christmas-themed. While her decorations are countless, each one is a personal treasure for Rutherford, who cherishes the cheerful colors, jolly Santas and twinkle of lights and glitter throughout her home.



Rutherford said she and her late husband loved creating a Christmas atmosphere to rival Santa's own workshop.

She said remembering the stories behind every piece and seeing each on display is one of her favorite parts of decorating for the Christmas season.

"Lesley's favorite decoration was this ceramic Christmas tree from the San Francisco Music Company," Rutherford shared, winding the base of the tree to play a soft Christmas tune. "We liked anything with bells and whistles on it. If it didn't light up or have a battery or make music, we probably didn't buy it."

Another favorite item is a Fitz and Floyd Santa that features a toy train — something Lesley loved — and the name "Sharon" on a nice list. Rutherford said those features made the decoration feel personal to the couple.



Each year Rutherford buys a Fitz and Floyd Santa to add to her collection.



Once the holiday season arrives, Rutherford loves to purchase and back Christmas goodies to incorporate into her decorations.

The most special of all is a pair of German-made Santas purchased at an antique store in 2020. It was Rutherford's last Christmas with her husband.

"They're the last decorations we bought together," she said. "This is the first year I've been able to put them out — it just felt too hard before."

Rutherford remembers the couple's final Christmas together fondly. She said that, due to Lesley's illness and the COVID pandemic, the couple spent Christmas 2020 alone but together, and she would not trade the time they shared if she could.

"I wouldn't take anything for those memories," she said. "We spent it together here, and it was one of the best Christmases we

had. The Lord worked it out so I could spend our favorite time of the year with my favorite Santa, and we enjoyed it and made such beautiful memories."

As she moves forward, Rutherford has no plans to stop collecting and decorating for Christmas, and she intends to continue sharing the joy she finds in the season with all, just like she and Lesley did for 40 years.

"We enjoyed sharing our love for each other and our home with people," she said. "That's what it's all about — love and family and friends."



Rutherford says she has no plans to stop collecting and decorating for Christmas.



Jolly Santas and twinkle of lights glitter throughout Rutherford's home.



Each room in Rutherford's home is decorated during the holiday season.



Rutherford's last Christmas with her husband Lesley was in 2020.



Rutherford says there's a story behind each piece on display.

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A LIGHT IN A DARK PLACE

Vafeas Christmas lights honor late son, girlfriend

by CHELSEA RETHERFORD

Photos by DAN BUSEY

Each December, the Vafeas house at 201 W. 1st St. in Tuscumbia is lit in an array of colorful Christmas lights, but in 2022 those lights went dim after April Vafeas lost her son in a car crash on June 18, 2022.

Last season, her home shined a little brighter in memory of her son,

Tyler “T.J.” Morgan, and his longtime girlfriend, Lexie Glass, who had also passed away from injuries she sustained in the crash.

“[That] year (2022) was our first Christmas without him,” Vafeas said tearfully. “That’s why we didn’t do anything. It was just too

hard.”

When the time was right, the Vafeas family hung lots of multi-colored lights, including a string of red Christmas lights that Morgan himself had hung along the exterior of the house on his last December on earth.

“He was all about

putting up red lights. He did not care about the white, classic lights. The gaudier the better. For him it was about fun,” Vafeas said.

“The white lights are pretty,” she added. “Our neighbor has beautiful classic Christmas wreaths, but they don’t have a deer feeder.



William, Jamie, April and Reagan Vafeas gather with their dog, Ace, at the front of their Tuscumbia home.

T.J. would think that's hysterical. He would love that."

The lit deer feeder was just one new element in the Vafeases' display last year. The family also added an inflatable Santa dressed in camo and two wooden silhouettes poised behind a duck blind entangled with bright blue lights.

The hunting theme was inspired by Morgan's and Glass' shared love for the sport, and Vafeas wanted the world to know. She said one of her son's classmates, Bess Smith, created a sign for the Vafeases' lawn that reads, "In Loving Memory of T.J. and Lexie," who loved to hunt deer, turkey and duck together.



Christmas lights cover a deer feeder along with the shape of a deer.

"T.J. hunted with his dad from the time he was very young. I think he killed his first deer when he was about 7 [years old]," Vafeas said. "Lexie was very athletic. She played volleyball and basketball. She could hold her own with the boys, that's for sure. She had a love for photography, so she would record their hunts and things."

Despite Morgan's love for the hunt, Vafeas said her son was also an animal lover. When her son passed away, she said she inherited his dog, Ace, who no longer trains for duck hunting but comforts the family following its loss.

Because the couple died young — Morgan had just turned 21 and Glass was 20 — Vafeas

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Cutouts of hunters duck hunting in a blind.

said she wanted to do all she could to honor their memories.

“I wanted people to know why the lights were done the way they are,” she said. “For me, it’s about keeping his memory alive. He was

so young. He didn’t have any children. His legacy would be very short, so to me, this is a way to show other people who he was. It’s a way to introduce T.J. and Lexie to people who never got to know

them.”

Aside from his passion for hunting, Vafeas said she also hopes her son is remembered for his fun-loving kind heart.

“He was such a jokester,” she said with a laugh. “He used to hide plastic cockroaches and rubber mice for me to find. He thought it was great to scare somebody like that.”

Though he enjoyed the antics, Vafeas said her son was also the first to jump whenever a friend or even a stranger needed help. As she reminisced about old stories of her son, she expressed several ways Morgan had demonstrated his giving nature in his lifetime.

Once when he was about 10 years old, Vafeas said she had instructed him to sit in the car with his younger

twin siblings, Reagan and William, while she ran into Foodland for a quick errand. When she returned, she said she found the twins in the car alone.

After a glance around the parking lot, she spotted Morgan nearby, helping an elderly woman load sacksful of groceries into her trunk, and Vafeas said her anger melted into admiration.

“He knew he might get into trouble for that. He was supposed to be sitting in the car, but he was one of the helpers,” she said. “Again, with the helping, he was 16, and he was at Walmart. It was raining, and he finds this little kitten in the parking lot.”

She said her son brought the lost kitten home, but instead of announcing his plans to



An inflatable Santa wearing camo was a recent addition to the Vafeas’ home decorations.

his mother, he left it on the front porch, hoping his mother would think it had wandered up on its own.

"He came inside and said, 'Momma, do you not hear this kitten on the porch? It's raining, and there is this poor kitten out there.'"

Vafeas agreed to help the kitten find a permanent home, but the sleek black kitten, now a full-grown cat, answers to Shadow and can often be found curled up on the couch with Vafeas and her other three children.

"He was so being so sneaky with it," Vafeas said endearingly. "T.J. was responsible for us having this cat."

When Morgan's younger brother, William Vafeas, is asked about what he hopes others will remember

about Morgan, he answers simply, "Alrighty then."

"He used to say that all the time," William Vafeas said without offering much more explanation. He said those that were closest to Morgan would understand.

Though the grief doesn't get any easier, especially around the holidays, April Vafeas said she found a little peace in doing what she can to honor her son. She said she hopes others who've experienced tremendous loss find healthy ways to cope as Christmas draws near.

"Grief is different for each of us," she said. "Some people may want to keep every tradition alive and not change a thing. Others, like us, will move the Christmas



Decorated deer stand in front of the Vafeas' home.

tree to a different room and create a light display in memory of our son.

"It's important to do what feels right to them and give themselves space and permission to grieve. For those of

us grieving, we cannot separate our pain from the holiday. Grief is always with us. As long as we love, we will grieve."

The Vafeas decorate their home in memory of their son TJ and his girlfriend Lexie Glass, who both passed away in a June 2022 car crash.



It's always Christmas *at* *David Christopher's*



David and Jennifer Smith have been responsible for decorating celebrities' homes over the years.

David and Jennifer Smith, owners of David Christopher's Artistic Design, Gifts & Décor in Sheffield and private label David Christopher's Collection, which is sold worldwide, have been recognized globally for their décor.

They've even decorated for Christmas the homes of celebrities like Cardi B and Jaelyn Hill. However, when David thinks about what he loves most about designing decorations used in Christmas celebrations around the world, it simply comes down to nostalgia.

"I like the idea of being able to create things that bring people back to their childhood and give them that nostalgic feeling," he said. "I feel like Willy Wonka, creating crazy

stuff that makes you have that sense of amazement and wonder you have when you're little."

David explained that his love of Christmas decorations stems from his own childhood Christmas memories — particularly decorating the family Christmas tree with his parents and sister. Since his parents owned the wholesale floral business, Smith Wholesale Floral, which eventually became David Christopher's, he and his sister were adamant about having a live tree instead of an artificial one. After they would choose one, David fondly recalls the family joining together to put the decorations on the tree, and he hopes his designs offer the same opportunity for other

families.

While David grew up working alongside his parents in the family business, he found his niche in Christmas design a little later. He said initially his parents would pay others to come decorate trees for customers, and he realized that he could meet that need and save the business money.

"Because I went into this without formal training, I took my own spin and was a little different," he said. "I guess it worked pretty well, and we ran with it, and it's become what it is today."

David credits some of his success to the creative freedom he has due to the lack of formal training, which kept his designs from becoming too formulaic.

David Christopher's Collection is sold worldwide.



As others noticed his talent, Jennifer said that he gained big customers and began decorating for them at their Dallas and Atlanta showrooms. It was then, she said, that he realized he wanted products to use for décor that were not available. David began working with factories to create his own design label, which became David Christopher's Collection.

"That was his niche," Jennifer said. "He could come up with so many different ideas and it sort of exploded. He's sort of like a trendsetter, because he's having to come up with stuff a year ahead of time."

Jennifer said that by January, David will be preselling his Christmas 2025 line to wholesale customers — the "bones" of their company — around the world. Then, in July, those orders begin to ship before the designs hit the floor in the retail store. Shortly after, David will begin working on designs for

Christmas 2026.

"It's always Christmas at David Christopher's in some capacity," Jennifer laughed, though she noted that the company and retail store also carry spring and everyday décor.

For David, the opportunity to touch others through his creativity is where he feels "like [he's] been gifted and blessed by God." He said that it's the thought of those who enjoy the result of his creativity who keep it flowing.

"We have customers who come every year from all over the country — California, Texas, Ohio — to make a visit to the store at Christmas," David said. "There are places they can take photos and lots of things that really stand out to them, and they want to be able to experience it year after year. Building that tradition is kind of what drives me to keep doing what I do."



"It's always Christmas at David Christopher's in some capacity," Jennifer Smith said.



David Smith will begin preselling his Christmas 2025 line in January, according to Jennifer.

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Lindsey Crider, left,
and Lisa Pendergrass
at the CaringPlace of
the Shoals.

Jackie Gibbons positioned her walker beside her friends, Norma DeGroot and Sue Henson, eagerly awaiting instructions from Lisa Pendergrass, who fiddled with the remote to a large-screen television in front of the room at CaringPlace of the Shoals, a non-profit center that provides services to elderly and homebound clients in the area.

Gibbons and about eight others were lined up and ready for a dance party — a typical Tuesday routine for Gibbons and her fellow clients at CaringPlace, Pendergrass said.

As the music rang out and Pendergrass began leading the session, singing along with the first lines of “Jailhouse Rock,” RN Lindsey Crider noticed Tim Downey lingering by the entrance to the activities room.

When she asked Downey if he’d like to join in on the dance session, he replied, “I don’t know, I don’t think I have time to get to that today.”

Downey, who had worked many years as a maintenance supervisor at the former Eliza Coffee Memorial Hospital in Florence, was likely experiencing some memory dissociation, a symptom common among adults with memory loss due to dementia, Alzheimer’s disease or other disorder.

Rather than correct or redirect him to the dance activity, Crider said she and staff members at CaringPlace meet clients “where they are,” and take direction from their behavioral cues.

This is an approach that follows the principles laid out in the Montessori Method of learning and development.

“We want to provide (our clients) with as much independence as possible,” Crider said, explaining the approach.

The Montessori Method was first developed in the early 20th century as a child-centered learning experiment by Italian physician and educator Maria Montessori. It is most often utilized in

what they want to do,” Crider said. “Making sure they are happy and having a good time — that’s the biggest part of my job, and they make it easy. I do not have a hard job by any means. This place is just good for the soul.”

As a registered nurse who started out in the critical care unit of ECM, Crider said it took some thoughtful adjustments to settle into her role at the CaringPlace.

“This was just a 180

for” patients, but rather instructs caregivers to give their clients the freedom and space to regain their independence.

“Of course, we’re here to take care of our clients. If they need assistance we’re here,” Crider added. “You always take care of your patients, but this is more about letting them do for themselves.”

Pendergrass, who joined the CaringPlace team a little over a year ago when the adult day services facility reopened



Jackie Gibbons, left, and Norma DeGroot sing and dance during an activity inside the CaringPlace of the Shoals.

pre-school and special education classrooms in the 21st century.

The approach is now being applied in elderly care.

The Montessori Method focuses on hands-on learning in a thoughtfully prepared environment where children’s — or in this case, adults’ — natural interests are emphasized.

“It’s all about promoting what they can do and

for me,” she said. “It was all kind of new. I had to learn to use a different part of my brain. I came here from NAMC, and I was in the CCU and ICU. I was at ECM for over eight years, and you know, coming from that side of nursing, we always do for our patients.”

Crider placed an extra emphasis on the word “do,” and added that the Montessori approach focuses less on “doing

at 216 Marengo St., was among the first staff members to begin Montessori training. She said it was a major career shift from her former job in human resources.

“I was like an HR trainer at Belk for 20 years. I was over associate engagement, and I did all the special events, the fashion shows, and those kinds of things,” Pendergrass said, admitting she felt a

little underqualified for the CaringPlace position when she applied.

"I thought, they're not going to want me because I don't have a medical background," she said. "I don't have a quote-unquote, 'educational background,' but I had been an educator — just not in the most traditional sense."

Pendergrass did have experience in event planning and delegating tasks to employees who were engaged in the process. As it turns out, those duties more

of football season in the South.

Those small themes are applied to group activities, facility décor and even the weekly lunch menu to help orient clients who might have a hard time remembering the day of the week, or even the month of the year from day to day.

"That's another Montessori thing; we leave little signs everywhere throughout the center that point to the date, the weather, and whatever is going on in the world as far as current

job to pivot to something else they do respond positively to.

"If they're not feeling it, we move on to something else. They lead and we follow," Pendergrass said.

Pendergrass did have experience in event planning and delegating tasks to employees who were engaged in the process. As it turns out, those duties more closely resemble the role she took on as activities director.

At the center, Pendergrass plans daily activities and weekly

lunch menu to help orient clients who might have a hard time remembering the day of the week, or even the month of the year from day to day.

"That's another Montessori thing; we leave little signs everywhere throughout the center that point to the date, the weather, and whatever is going on in the world as far as current events," Pendergrass said. "It helps keep them grounded, but it also helps us sort of tie everything together. Every day, there's a new party feel."

Though her role as activities director is to lead games, dance sessions, exercises and other engaging activities for the CaringPlace clients, Pendergrass said no client is ever forced to participate. In fact, when they aren't engaged or enjoying a particular activity, it's Pendergrass' job to pivot to something else they do respond positively to.

"If they're not feeling it, we move on to something else. They lead and we follow," Pendergrass said.

Pendergrass, who's grandmother suffered from Parkinson's disease and Lewy body dementia, said she also feels her loved one would have benefited from services at the CaringPlace had it existed in her lifetime.

"The fact that the Shoals has a place like this is just amazing to me," Crider agreed. "(The clients) may not remember each other at all, but they remember each other's faces and they know that they love each other and that they are best friends.

"They come and have so much fun, and it keeps their minds knowing, it keeps them engaged, and it gives them purpose."



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At the center, Pendergrass plans daily activities and weekly themes according to what's going on in the current season — recently, all the floral arrangements in the activities hall featured sunflowers and No. 2 pencils as a nod to the back-to-school season transition between summer and fall. The following week, clients were treated to a tailgate party to mark the kickoff

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Syverson Christmas Lights

They judge success by smiles per hour

by CHELSEA RETHERFORD
Photos by DAN BUSEY

It was the night before Thanksgiving, and Duane and Debbie Syverson were setting up the last of their Christmas trees, and stringing the final rows of lights in their front lawn on Lauderdale County Road 47 in Green Hill.

The couple, in their 70s, said they started their Christmas tradition 33 years ago when they moved into the home just down the street from Lone Cedar Church of Christ.

Duane said he usually turns on the lights on Thanksgiving night and makes some final refinements in the following week.

"I've been working on

things in the shop since the first of October, but I started putting it out on November first after Halloween was over," Duane said.

He and his wife must get an early start each year. He said it can take over two hours to sync their twinkling lights to one minute of music, and that's just one element of their elaborate display.

Debbie said the couple has a few favorite decorations, like the Gingerbread House made from strings of lights and a painted wooden display of Santa driving a John Deere tractor with

presents in tow.

Many of those cutouts are lit with LED flood lights, and some — like the plastic molds of Santa and Frosty — were modified with LED strips of their own.

"They're getting rare," Duane said of the molds. "I've converted mine to have lights on the inside of them, because otherwise, you can't see them in the dark."

Each of the engineered molds, the lighted figures in the lawn, and the strings of lights that line the Syversons' roof, windows,

and porch columns, blink along with a curated list of holiday hits like "I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas."

Visitors who come to enjoy the spectacle can tune their car's radio to FM station 107.9 to watch the lights dance and blink to the music.

The Syversons said their collection grows and changes from year to year as they add new elements, and retire some old figures that have stopped working properly.

Still, some favorite decorations remain the same, like



Duane and Debbie Syverson at their home in Greenhill.

a small Nativity scene that has a special spot on the Syverson lawn.

“That’s the first thing that goes out and the last thing that comes in,” Duane said, adding that the lights are always turned on nightly from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Eve each year.

Several of their decorations — like the dozens of candy canes that line the Syversons’ driveway and border their lawn — were snagged in clearance sales after Christmas over the years.

“If we’re in a store and we see something reasonably priced, we’ll snag it up,” Duane said.

One of their latest additions is a red, white and blue Christmas tree that twirls near the center of their yard. Other newer decorations include a fun holiday mouse and the Grinch.

The Syversons said they added the Enter and Exit signs, and configured a small drive through their front lawn in 2008 to make it safer for admirers who want to take photos, or slow down and enjoy the music.

The couple said it’s always been about the smiles they hope they bring to passersby.

“I judge how good we did by the smiles per hour,” Duane said, pointing across the road to Lone

Cedar. “When that church lets out after I turn them on, it’s like single file coming through here, and they’ll be waiting in line to turn in.”

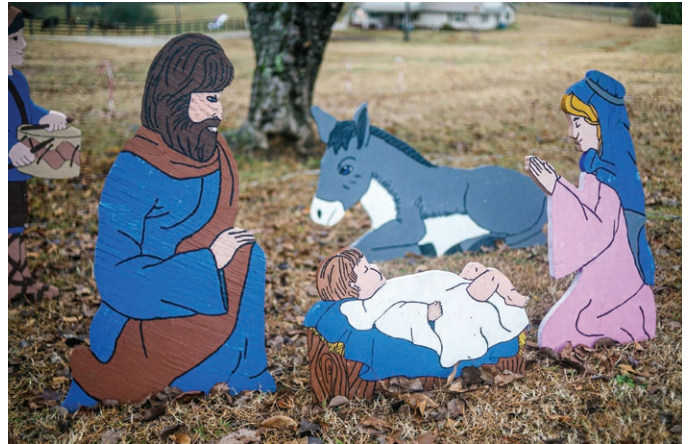
The Syversons also hope their winter wonderland inspires others to pass on some joy throughout the giving season.

Years ago, their Christmas lights also featured a collection box that took up donations for Shriners Children’s International organization. Duane said he and his wife would match the total that was taken up by the end of the season.

The Syversons chose to give back to Shriners Children’s specifically because their daughter, who was born with an ankle deformity, benefited from research funded by the organization.

Duane said they stopped taking donations after the box was stolen from their property one year, but the couple still encourages others to give to Shriners or St. Jude’s children’s hospitals each Christmas.

“If you’re out here on a nice night when it’s not drizzly or nasty, Santa Claus is usually handing out candy canes, and I tell everybody, ‘If you like it and want to donate, give it to St. Jude’s or to the Shriners.’ Either one is great. They do the same thing,” Duane said.



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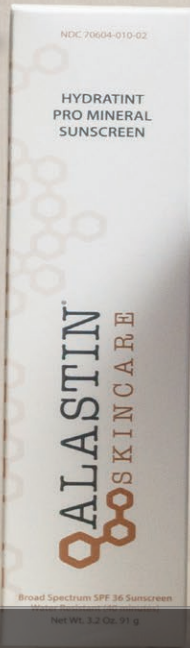
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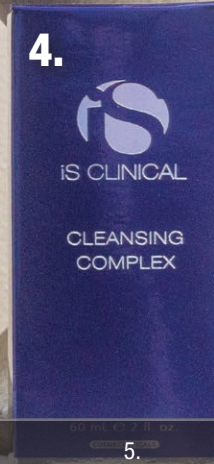
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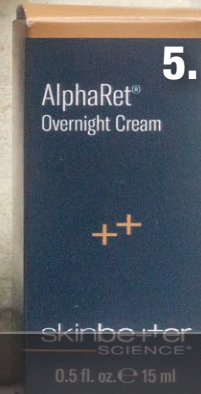
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Recipes to try this holiday season

Holiday hosting is a big responsibility. While nothing quite captures the essence of the holiday season like a home filled with family and friends, those doing the hosting have a lot on their plates, and a lot to put on others' plates, once guests arrive.

Busy hosts can free up more time for family and friends by making a concerted effort

to get out of the kitchen. Simple cooking can be just as delicious as more complex dishes, and the easier it is to prepare a meal, the more hosts can mingle with their loved ones.

The following recipe for Roast Ham requires minimal preparation but will be sure to please family and friends this holiday season.



Photo by METRO

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Gluten-Free Fruitcake with Sugar Glaze

INGREDIENTS:

For the cake:

- 4 ounces golden raisins
- 2 ounces chopped candied orange peel
- 8 ounces candied cherries, quartered
- 6 ounces raisins
- 3 1/2 tablespoons sherry
- 4 ounces butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 pinch grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon ground mixed spice
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup self-raising gluten-free flour
- 6 ounces chopped almonds, blanched

For the icing:

- 1 cup confectioner's sugar
- 3 tablespoons water

DIRECTIONS:

1. For the cake: Place all the fruit in a bowl with the sherry, stir well, cover and leave to stand overnight.
2. Heat the oven to 325 F. Grease a loaf pan and line the base with parchment paper.
3. Beat the butter with the sugar, salt and spices in a mixing bowl until light and creamy, then gradually beat in the eggs.
4. Gently fold in the flour, followed by the soaked fruits and almonds, stirring well.
5. Spoon into the pan and bake for 2 to 2 1/4 hours until cooked through. Leave to cool in the pan.
6. For the icing: Mix the sugar with a little water, adding a little at a time, until it is thick and smooth.
7. Spread the icing on top of the cake, allowing it to run down the sides. Leave to set.

Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO



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Roast Ham

Makes 6 to 8 servings

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup honey
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- 4 apples, cored and quartered
- 1 8-pound cooked ham, trimmed
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper



Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Warm the honey with the mustard in a heavy-based saucepan, stirring, until smooth and starting to bubble at the edges of the pan. Set off the heat.
3. Arrange the apple quarters in a large roasting pan and place the ham on top. Score a diamond pattern on the outside fat; brush with some of the honey-mustard glaze, seasoning with salt and pepper at the same time.
4. Bake the ham until the thickest part of it registers at least 160 F, about 1 hour 20 minutes; brush with more of the glaze from time to time.
5. Once the ham has reached 160 F, increase the oven temperature to 450 F and cook for a further 5 to 10 minutes until the top is golden brown and starting to caramelize.
6. Remove from the oven and let cool before slicing and serving. Can also be chilled and served cold.



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Green Beans with Bacon and Pecans

Makes 6 servings

INGREDIENTS:

For the cake:

- 4 cups fresh green beans, rinsed and ends trimmed
- 2/3 cup bacon, chopped
- 1/2 cup pecan halves
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 2 cloves of garlic, chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons butter



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DIRECTIONS:

1. Place green beans in boiling water and cook for about 5 minutes, until crisp and tender.
2. While the beans are cooking, brown the bacon, pecans, sliced onion, and garlic in a large skillet over medium heat.
3. Drain the green beans and add them to the skillet. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté together for 2 to 3 minutes on high, stirring frequently.
4. Transfer green bean mixture to a serving dish. Serve hot.


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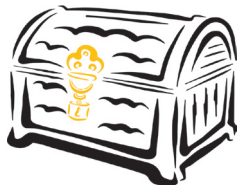
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Santa's Whiskers

Makes 20 to 24 cookies

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 1/2 cups confectioner's sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 12-ounce jar pitted maraschino cherries, strained and stemmed
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups sweetened shredded coconut

DIRECTIONS:

In a stand mixer, with a hand mixer, or by hand, cream the sugar and butter until light and fluffy.

Add the cherries, vanilla, almond extract, and salt. Mix thoroughly. Fold into the flour and mix until it forms a crumbly but moist dough.

Lay a 16-inch sheet of parchment paper onto the counter. Sprinkle 1 cup of the coconut on the center in a loose rectangle, making sure it does not reach the edge of the parchment. Place the cookie dough on top, flattening a bit with your fingers, and sprinkle the remaining coconut over the top of the dough.

Form the dough into a 12- to 14-inch log, about 3 inches thick. Evenly press the coconut around the log and roll to make the log an even cylinder.

Roll the parchment up with the dough inside and twist the ends. Chill for at least 2 hours or overnight.

Preheat oven to 350 F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Slice cookies in 1/4- to 1/2-inch rounds, place on the prepared baking sheet, about 2 inches apart, and bake 12 to 15 minutes. Allow to cool before serving. Store in an airtight container.

Recipe from "Butter, Flour, Sugar, Joy" by Danielle Kartes • Photo by METRO



Pecan-Cherry Bread Stuffing

Makes 8 servings

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 loaf crusty white or wheat bread, cut into 3/4-inch cubes
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus extra for baking dish
- 1 medium yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 2 large celery stalks, rinsed, trimmed and diced
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled and roughly chopped
- 1 cup packed dried tart cherries
- 1 cup roughly chopped toasted pecans
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage leaves
- 1 tablespoon crushed fennel seed
- Coarse salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup fresh chopped parsley
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken broth



Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 400 F. Position oven racks in the middle and lower third of the oven. Arrange bread in a single layer on two rimmed baking sheets. Toast until dry and golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool.
2. Lightly butter a 9 x 13-inch baking dish. In a large skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add onion, celery and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until onion and celery are softened, about 7 minutes. Add cherries, pecans, sage, and fennel seed; cook, stirring for 1 minute. Transfer to a large bowl and season with salt and pepper.
3. Add parsley, eggs and bread to the cherry mixture; stir to combine. Add broth in two additions, stirring until absorbed. Season generously with salt and pepper; transfer stuffing to butter baking dish. Bake on middle rack until the top is deep golden brown, about 25 to 30 minutes. Let sit for 5 minutes before serving.

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Christmas Biscuits

Makes approximately 24 cookies

INGREDIENTS:

For the dough:

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, sifted, plus extra for dusting
- 1 1/3 cups confectioner's sugar, plus extra for dusting
- 3/4 cup almond meal
- 1 cup unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon cold water
- 1/2 teaspoon fine salt

For the icing and decoration:

- 4 cups confectioner's sugar
- 3 tablespoons meringue powder
- 7 tablespoons warm water, combined with 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, assorted food color (e.g., red, pink and turquoise), assorted colored sugar crystals (e.g., red, pink and white)



Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO

DIRECTIONS:

1. For the dough: Preheat oven to 350 F. Grease and line two large baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. Combine flour, confectioner's sugar and almond meal in a large mixing bowl. Stir well to mix.
3. Add butter, egg yolk, water, and salt, and mix well with an electric mixer with spiral attachments until mixture starts to come together as a dough.
4. Turn out onto a floured surface and knead briefly until even. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for 30 minutes.
5. After chilling, roll out dough on a lightly floured surface to approximately 0.25" thickness.
6. Use assorted star-shaped

cookie cutters to cut out approximately 23 variably sized star shapes. Arrange between prepared sheets, spaced apart.

7. From remaining dough, cut out one teardrop and two semi-circles of dough, using appropriate cutters or working freehand with a paring knife. Arrange on one of the baking sheets.

8. Bake cookies for 12 to 15 minutes, until golden and dry to the touch. Remove to cooling racks to cool.

9. For the icing and decoration: Thoroughly stir together confectioner's sugar and meringue powder in a large mixing bowl.

10. Gradually beat in warm water and vanilla extract

mixture using an electric mixer until icing is smooth and of a flooding consistency; you may not need all of the water.

11. Divide icing between three bowls. Color two bowls pink and red, respectively, by beating in enough pink and red coloring to achieve uniform colors. Leave the third bowl uncolored.

12. Spoon pink and red icing into separate piping bags fitted with small, round-tip nozzles.

13. To ice the cookies, pipe around their perimeters with the icings to create borders. Fill in middle of cookies with more icing; you can use a damp, warm offset palette knife to spread out icing to an even finish.

14. Carefully transfer iced cookies to cooling racks, decorating with the sugar crystals in festive patterns.

15. Using same technique as in steps 13 and 14, ice teardrop cookie with red and white icing for Santa's hat and beard, respectively. Ice the two semi-circle cookies with white icing.

16. Before icings have set, carefully attach semi-circle cookies to teardrop cookie to fashion Santa's mustache. Color any remaining white icing with turquoise coloring and then dab onto teardrop cookie for Santa's eyes. Pipe some pink icing below eyes for his nose.

17. Let cookies set and harden before serving.

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Chocolate Reindeer Cupcakes

Makes 12 servings

INGREDIENTS:

For Chocolate Cupcakes:

- 2/3 cup butter, softened
- 3/4 cup superfine sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups self-rising flour
- 2 tablespoons cocoa powder

For Chocolate Frosting:

- 3/4 cup butter, softened
- 3 1/3 cups confectioners' sugar
- 7/8 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 to 6 tablespoons milk

For Decorations:

- 12 sets candy eyes
- 12 red gumdrops
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS:

For Chocolate Cupcakes:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Line muffin tin wells with 12 paper cupcake liners.
2. In a large mixing bowl, using an electric mixer, cream butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating after each addition. Gradually add flour and cocoa powder, mixing until all ingredients are incorporated.
3. Spoon the batter into the paper liners. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until tops are springy to the touch. Cool in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove cupcakes from pan and allow to cool completely before decorating.

For Chocolate Frosting:

1. In a large bowl, cream butter until light and fluffy. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar, cocoa and vanilla. Add milk one tablespoon at a time until frosting reaches the desired consistency. Frost each cupcake using an offset spatula.



Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO

To Decorate:

1. Arrange candied eyes and gumdrop nose on frosted cupcake.
2. Melt semisweet chocolate in a heatproof bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Cool slightly, and transfer to a pastry bag fitted with small plain round tip. Pipe antlers

with chocolate on parchment or waxed paper; place in the refrigerator or freezer and allow to set.

3. Once the chocolate has set, carefully remove antlers from paper and insert in cupcake. Serve.



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Ginger Bread House

Makes 8 servings or 1 house

INGREDIENTS:

For the house:

- 3 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra as needed
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon ground ginger
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 3/4 cup molasses, warmed
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the frosting:

- 2 cups confectioners' sugar, plus extra as needed
- 1 1/2 tablespoons meringue powder
- 1 to 2 tablespoons warm water

TO DECORATE:

Assorted colorful candies, sugared chocolate candies, round peppermint candies, candy canes, etc.

1. For the gingerbread: Combine the flour, cornstarch, spices, and salt in a large



Recipe by Lines+Angles • Photo by METRO

mixing bowl. Stir well and set aside.

2. Beat the softened butter with the molasses and vanilla in a separate mixing bowl until pale and creamy, about 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Beat in the flour mixture in 4 additions, mixing well between additions until you have a rough dough; add more flour as needed to form a stiff dough.

4. Turn out and knead briefly. Shape into a round, wrap in parchment paper, and chill for 2 hours.

5. After chilling, preheat the oven to 325 F. Grease and line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper.

6. Remove the dough from the refrigerator. Roll out to about 0.333" thickness on a lightly floured surface.

7. Cut out two rectangles approximately 4.5" x 4" for the roof. Cut out 2 pointed rectangles approximately 5" at their tallest points and 3.5" wide at the base; these will be the front and back of the house as per the image. Make sure that one side has a round window cut out.

8. Using some of the remaining dough, cut out the 2 rectangles to be the sides of the house, approximately 3" x 4" in diameter. Use the remaining dough to cut out 4 even rectangles, approximately 2" x 1.5", to

shape the chimney.

9. Arrange the pieces across the baking sheets. Bake for about 25 minutes until browned and dry to the touch. Remove to cooling racks to cool.

10. For the frosting: Combine the confectioners' sugar, meringue powder and 2 tablespoons warm water in a large mixing bowl.

11. Beat with an electric mixer until the frosting is thick and glossy, about 4 to 5 minutes; beat in more confectioners' sugar if too thin and more water if too thick.

12. Spoon into a piping bag fitted with a thin, round nozzle. Chill for 15 minutes.

13. To decorate: Using the frosting as "glue," assemble the chimney using the 4 even rectangles of gingerbread. Let dry and set.

14. Start to assemble the rest of the house by gluing the pieces together as per the image, attaching the front and back of the house to the sides before attaching the roof in place. Let set dry and set at each building interval.

15. Once the sections are dry, pipe more frosting onto the edges of the roof and down their sides, shaped as icicles.

16. When the chimney is set, attach it to the top, cutting the pieces to fit if necessary, and decorating the outside with frosting.

17. To decorate: Attach the assorted candies to the house, decorating the roof with a tiled pattern using the frosting.

18. Let the house dry and set until ready to serve.



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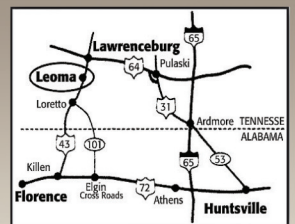
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