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November 2025

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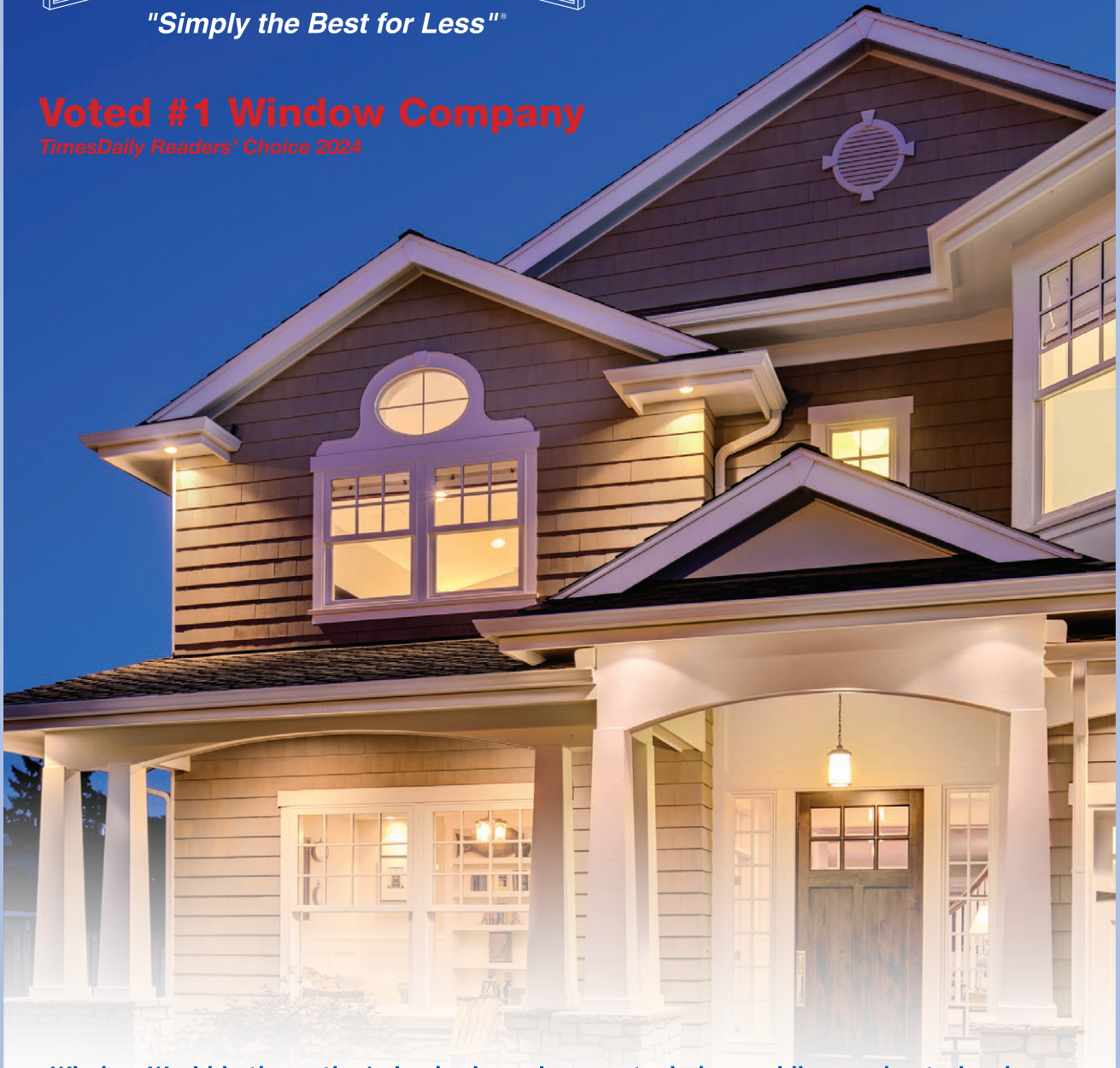
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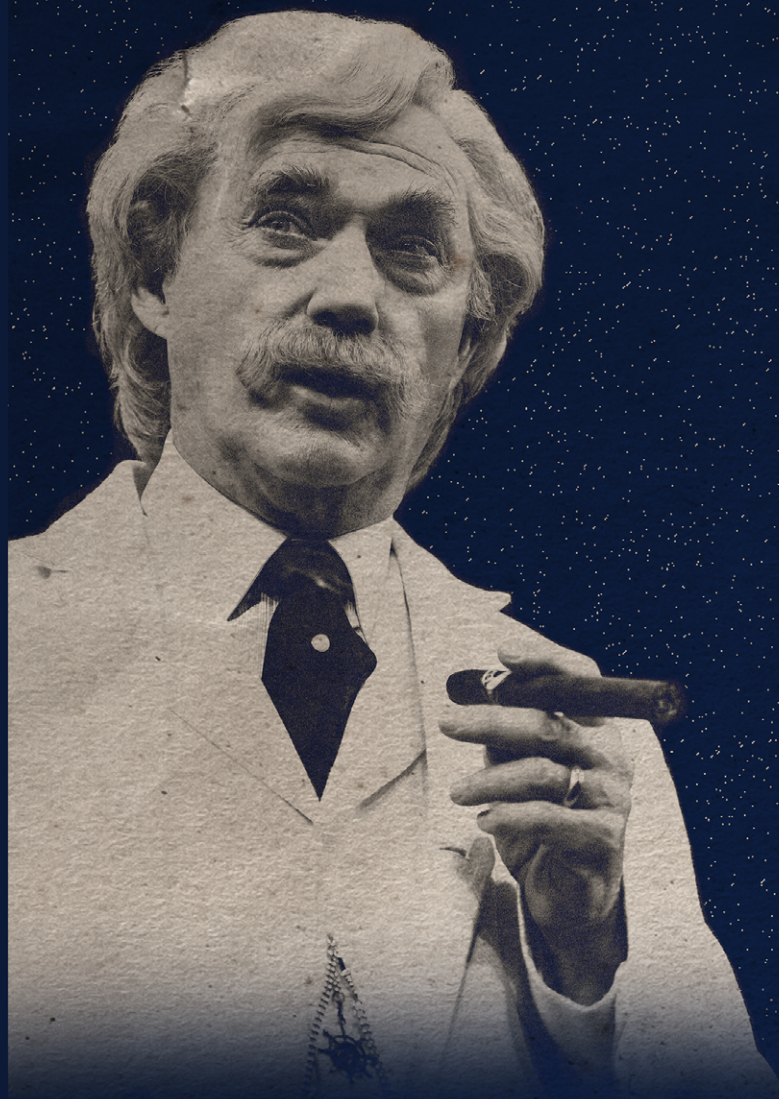
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Welcome

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 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.

When it comes to scheduling an appearance from the Big Guy – meaning Santa Claus - during holiday parade season, organizers have learned to book a date a least one year in advance.

"[Santa and Mrs. Claus] make so many home visits for pictures and events," Sheffield City Clerk Lisa Elledge said. "They are just really busy in December."

It's no different this holiday season. Santa and Mrs. Claus are booked for December holiday parades in Sheffield, Florence, Tuscumbia and Muscle Shoals. The jolly ole elf is even expected to show up in other holiday parades across the Shoals area.

Just as holiday parades in the Shoals are a running tradition, so too, are the annual Tuscumbia Civitan Christmas ornaments.

The club began the venture in 1996 as a fundraiser, and it has since become a mainstay for the past 30 years.

Each year the ornament depicts a well-known landmark from the Colbert County Courthouse to the birthplace of Helen Keller at Ivy Green.

"Sometimes, these things die out, but this became so popular everyone was waiting on what we would do next," said Bonnie Walker, who served as the brains behind the project.

It's early November, and lots of people are awaiting the announcement of what landmark will make up the 2025 ornament.

Some opportunities just seem to present itself to get others into the holiday frame of mind.

Tina Knight learned to quilt during the pandemic and has since created approximately 30 quilts – ten of which are Christmas themed. She didn't stop there. She even quilted stockings because she couldn't find the right size or color stocking that matched her holiday décor.

"My husband says that I get in [the craft room], and I won't come out," she said. "I get in the zone."

These are just a few samples of some of the stories to share with you as we head 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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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



Handmade quilted stockings hang off the mantel inside Tina Knight's home. Knight said she looked for stockings to incorporate with her Christmas decoration colors, but couldn't find the right size or look. So, she quilted her own. Knight also has crafted approximately 30 quilts – ten of them being Christmas themed.

Photo by Dan Busey of the TimesDaily



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Quilting Christmas

How a COVID craft became a holiday hobby



Tina Knight sits for a portrait in her living room decorated for the holidays with personalized, quilted stockings she crafted for her family.

by ALYSSA SUTHERLAND

Photos by DAN BUSEY

Just over five years ago, Tina Knight had never quilted before. She could not read a pattern let alone stitch fabric squares together to create a quilt.

Now, she has crafted approximately 30 quilts — ten of them Christmas themed — along with an assortment of pillow covers, table runners, tree skirts and even personalized Christmas stockings which adorn her home each year.

“John (Knight’s son) going to college inspired me,” she said, noting that he was a 2020 graduate. “I wanted to give him a

quilt, but I’d never done it before. It was fun and scary at the same time. I thought, this could all go in the trash, but we’re going to try.”

That first quilt was far from perfect, Knight said, but she found herself ready to create another.

“I didn’t have anyone to teach me,” she said. “I started watching and reading everything on the internet and teaching myself how to put quilts together.”

Since the first quilt, which was a simple, large block pattern, Knight has progressed

to intricate quilting patterns, often using small quilting squares in an overall design. Currently, she is working on a quilt which will involve more than 2,000 2-inch squares she said will be beautiful when finished — even if it takes two years to get there.

The only part of the process she does not complete herself is the long arming, or having the front, back and batting (stuffing) stitched together using a longarm machine. That part of the process Knight outsources to a



Tina Knight straightens a holiday quilt in her bedroom, where she regularly changes out quilted bedding and pillow covers to match the season.

A guest bedroom in Knight's home is decorated with her holiday quilt designs, including tree-patterned pillows.



quilting studio based in Utah before the quilts are returned to her for the binding process.

"I went from just squares to the process of cutting them in pieces and wanting to make them into something bigger," she said. "I guess the math person in me was intrigued to take things apart and put them back together."

Knight quickly realized her new-found hobby — and talent — could be used to craft much more than bedding. Her craft room, which was already filled with paper, wood, wreaths and more, was soon filled with fabric.

Sometimes, she said fabric comes as part of a quilting kit. Other times, she finds a new fabric designer and becomes enthralled by working through their



Another quilt made by Knight features a "Joy to the World" label stitched into the pattern.

products. Every scrap of fabric Knight purchases is used. Over the years, she has used leftover quilting fabric to quilt patterns onto pillow covers and even shirts.

"My husband says that I get in [the craft room], and I won't come out," she said. "I get in the zone."

While she occasionally gets "stuck" on a theme she particularly enjoys — snowmen were a big part of her quilting this Christmas — Knight said her inspiration changes regularly.

She includes an embroidered label on the back of every quilt she creates along with the name of the quilt, which she chooses based on the quilting pattern, and the year.

What started as a college gift for Knight's



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son has become a central part of her home's décor. Through every season, she changes out quilts and pillow covers both on display and on beds.

"I had some stockings my sister had knitted years ago, but they were not for our whole family now, and I wanted to incorporate my own Christmas decoration colors," Knight said. "Two years ago, I went looking for stockings, and I couldn't find the look or the size I wanted, so I decided to just quilt my own."

Knight's stockings perfectly match the rest of her holiday decorations and include a small elf and family members' names. Each elf shares the eye and hair color of its corresponding recipient — even the family pets.



An appliquéd elf detail is stitched onto a stocking Knight created as part of her holiday quilting projects.

When John was married this year, Knight immediately got to work on a new stocking for her daughter-in-law. Once that was finished, the pair sat down to discuss a new set of stockings just for the newlyweds. Those were quickly quilted, too, and like the quilts, Knight hopes they will be enjoyed and passed down through generations of the family.

"I get a lot of requests, and I've made quilts for several family members — my goal is to make one for every family member," she said. "I love giving them to people with the thought that someone will cherish and want to have them."



A snowman pillow rests on a chair beside a snowman-themed quilt Knight made for this year's holiday season.



A row of stockings Knight quilted for her family, including one for the family pet, decorate the fireplace mantel.



A label stitched to the back of one of Knight's quilts identifies it as "Christmas Among the Stars," completed in 2023.

Tuscumbia Civitan **CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT TRADITION** celebrates 30 years

A photograph of Bonnie Walker, an older woman with short grey hair and glasses, standing in a room. She is wearing a black blazer over a white and black striped top, a black skirt, and a black watch. She has her hands clasped in front of her. To her left is a wooden display rack filled with stacks of red boxes, each containing a Christmas ornament. A large red ribbon is draped over the top of the rack. Above the rack, several gold-colored Christmas ornaments are hanging from a decorative metal stand. In the background, there are wooden shelves with various items, including books and a green shirt hanging on a rack.

Bonnie Walker stands for a portrait beside a display of collectible Tuscumbia Civitan Christmas ornaments at Fiddledee D in downtown Tuscumbia. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the ornament series.

by ALYSSA SUTHERLAND

Photos by DAN BUSEY

An annual fundraiser, which began in 1996 by the Tuscumbia Civitan Club, has become a timeless and cherished community Christmas tradition.

Every November and December, the club sells brass ornament depictions of a well-known Tuscumbia landmark. The first ornament featured the Colbert County Courthouse and a little card including information about the building's historical significance to the city. Over the years, the ornaments and

corresponding cards have featured popular Tuscumbia landmarks such as Ivy Green, Spring Park, Deshler High School and The Palace.

"My idea was that if we could do a few years of these, it would be a pretty good thing," said Bonnie Walker, a former Tuscumbia Civitan and the brains behind the ornament project. "Sometimes, these things die out, but this became so popular everyone was waiting on what we would do next."

Walker said that she got the idea while

attending market in Atlanta for her own store — the Christmas Corner.

The shop started as a small corner area of her husband's hardware store. Sales were so successful from the little corner that after the first season, Walker said they moved her shop into the building adjacent to her husband's store. She soon began selling items for holidays year-round.

"I didn't sell anything that anybody had to have — it wasn't plumbing or electrical," Walker said. "But everyone wanted to buy a little happy, and the



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people who came in wanted to be there.”

Ahead of the 1996 Christmas season, Walker was on the hunt for some ornaments for her shop which could be made to feature the name of the city. While she found what she was looking for, she found something else, too — a company that would design ornaments based on photographs.

Walker, who knew the Tuscumbia Civitan Club was looking for a fundraiser, thought this could be a great option. The rest of the club members agreed.

“We would take pictures of the building, and they would send me a drawing back to approve,” she said. “Then they’d send us a sample, and I’d approve it before they ran.”

Each rendition of the ornament has been stamped with the year it was sold except for one.

“When we did the Helen Keller Home (Ivy Green), it was my suggestion to not date it so they could sell it forever,” Walker said. “They can reorder them, since it’s the only one that’s not dated.”

Ninon Parker, who handles ordering the ornaments today, said that the popularity of the ornaments is so great that she hears from some folks who attempt to hunt down the ornaments that sold out and were retired.

“They go to yard sales and estate sales to try to catch some of the ones that have been retired,” she said.

Parker and Walker both believe that nostalgia plays a role in the popularity of the ornaments, because they often feature locations

Collectible Tuscumbia Civitan Christmas ornaments, including designs from past years, hang on display at Fiddledee D in downtown Tuscumbia. The ornaments are sold for \$20 at local retailers.



Ninon Parker, top, and Bonnie Walker hang holiday decorations at Fiddledee D in downtown Tuscumbia as part of the Tuscumbia Civitan ornament display.

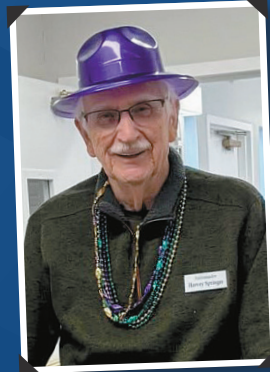
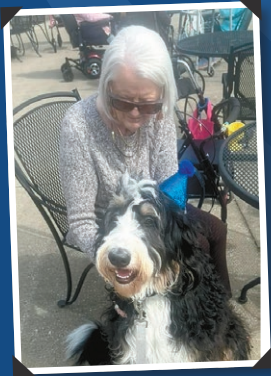


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tied to special memories.

"Tuscumbia is such an historical town, and everybody knows all of these buildings — we pass by them every day," Walker said. "I think that's what makes them so desirable."

"People often purchase them to give to family members," Parker added. "Maybe

children who grew up in the area. They're very popular to give to those who moved away."

Parker said that every fall, the Civitan members meet and discuss which city landmark should be placed on an ornament for the coming Christmas season. Nominations are taken, and secret-ballot voting helps narrow the

selection. A finalist is then selected based on which location would be most attractive and a good seller.

"Evidently, this idea became a great success," Walker said. "I know people who have all of them, and some who have a little tree with all the Tuscumbia decorations on it."

Bonnie Walker adjusts a collectible Tuscumbia Civitan Christmas ornament at Fiddledee D in downtown Tuscumbia.





Since
1996, there
have been 30
Tuscumbia Civitan
Christmas ornaments.

Here is a list of the locations
depicted on each ornament from
1996 until
2024:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| • 1996: Colbert County Courthouse | • 2006: Howard Chappell Stadium | • 2016: Cold Water Stagecoach Stop |
| • 1997: Spring Park | • 2007: Cottage at Ivy Green | • 2017: Manush Home |
| • 1998: Winston Home | • 2008: First Baptist Church | • 2018: Helen Keller Public Library |
| • 1999: Buzzard Roost Bridge | • 2009: Belle Mont Mansion | • 2019: Old Colbert County Courthouse |
| • 2000: Tuscumbia Depot | • 2010: Locust Hill | • 2020: Trenholm High School |
| • 2001: Ivy Green | • 2011: Gov. Lindsay Home | • 2021: Commercial Row |
| • 2002: Spring Park Waterfall | • 2012: Our Lady of the Shoals
Catholic Church | • 2022: Almon House |
| • 2003: St. John's Episcopal Church | • 2013: Sparkey's Drive-in | • 2023: Deshler High School (Centennial) |
| • 2004: The Palace | • 2014: Tennessee Valley Country Club | • 2024: Coldwater Seed & Supply |
| • 2005: First Presbyterian Church | • 2015: Alabama Music Hall of Fame | • 2025: TBD |



A selection of Tuscumbia Civitan collectible Christmas ornaments, featuring local landmarks, is displayed at Fiddledee D in downtown Tuscumbia.



Mrs. and Mr. Claus wave to the crowd from their ride during the 2024 Florence Christmas Parade in downtown Florence.

SANTA'S SCHEDULE

Parade organizers book the big man a year in advance

by ALYSSA SUTHERLAND

Photos by DAN BUSEY

A Christmas parade would not be a success without Santa Claus, himself.

However, it is not easy to get the big man on the books — his schedule each December is so busy that it is necessary to get on his calendar at least one year in advance.

Chris Stangel, executive director of Downtown Florence Alliance, said that the elves add next year's parade to the calendar

before Santa and Mrs. Claus even arrive for the current event.

"We have to do it the year before," he said. "He gets so busy at that time of the year."

Sheffield City Clerk Lisa Elledge agreed.

"Those two make so many home visits for pictures and events," she said. "They are just really busy in December."

While parade planners across the Shoals agree Santa must be booked early, other parade plans

differ.

For example, in Sheffield and Tusculmbia, parade participation is open to anyone who submits a parade application, but Muscle Shoals and Florence both must cap their numbers.

"Last year, we had about 80 entrants, and with the length, that might have been too much," said Muscle Shoals Parks and Rec Director Brooks Canup. "However, we'll allow

Eagle Pro Heating & Cooling soars above others during the 2024 Florence Christmas Parade in downtown Florence.



folks in [the parade] based on a first-come, first-served basis.”

Stangel said organizing the Florence Christmas parade is a balancing act with organizers attempting to manage the number of businesses, community groups and nonprofit organizations in a fair manner. However, once that number has been decided, they also allow entrants based on who applies first.

“We want to have this be a wonderful experience downtown while also being aware that there are a lot of things happening in the community,” he said. “We couldn’t do this without the whole community coming together.”

Tuscumbia Police Capt. Mike Smallwood said he has helped organize the



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city's Christmas parade for 25 years. The easiest part, he said, is setting the date.

"We always have our parade on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving," he said. "Sometimes, it's even in November. We keep things pretty consistent."

While Sheffield, Tusculumbia and Muscle Shoals let general Christmas spirit be the theme of their parades, Florence takes a different route.

"We try to settle on a theme every year so folks can decorate and build with that target in mind," Stangel said. "This year's is 'Hometown Holiday', so we're asking folks to think about returning to Florence for the holidays."

Still, across the four Shoals cities, the most important part of each Christmas parade can be summed up in one word - community.

"It's a highlight in our community for sure," Canup said. "It brings people together ... and is a fun way to bring together the ones you love for the joys of the Christmas holiday."

Shoals Christmas Parades

- Tusculumbia:Dec. 2
- Muscle Shoals:Dec. 4
- Sheffield:Dec. 9
- Florence:Dec. 11



The Grinch swings from a ladder from a Simpson's wrecker during the 2024 Florence Christmas Parade in downtown Florence.



Familiar faces reunite during the 2024 Sheffield Christmas Parade.



Laughs are had by the York Bluff Baptist Church float during the 2024 Sheffield Christmas Parade.



Santa Claus himself waves to the crowd below atop a Sheffield Fire engine during the 2024 Sheffield Christmas Parade.

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Bryan Roberts spreads *Christmas cheer* with light display



Christina, Bryan
and Lori Roberts
at their home in
Tuscumbia.

Bryan Roberts laughed and called his obsession with Christmas a “slippery slope” as he tinkered with a string of lights that had gone out near his front door.

“Once I started all this, it became a little bit of an addiction,” he said.

Roberts’ Christmas light display started with an 18-foot Christmas tree made up of about 50 strands of red lights, which he first put up about 10 years ago. Since then, he’s added several blow mold Santas, reindeer, snowmen and other figurines. He’s even started making his own plywood decorations.

Roberts admitted his

wife, Lori, and their daughter, Christina, are a little less enthusiastic about all the lights and figurines, but they support Roberts each year when he gets ready to start decorating in November.

“It stresses the family out a little, to be honest,” Roberts said with another laugh. “They love it too, though. My wife will ask, ‘Don’t you think you’ve got enough?’ And I’ll tell her, ‘Babe, do you think Michael Jordan dunked too much?’”

Though she might feel the Christmas collection has gotten a little out of hand, Roberts’ wife has lent a hand to the effort

and bought a few pieces herself, he said.

“She bought that polar bear over there,” Roberts said, gesturing to an ice pond display made of blue LED lights and skating figurines and penguins.

Lori Roberts also encouraged her husband to attend the big sale held by the Wrights of Spring Valley—who had for years put up one of the largest Christmas light displays in north Alabama—when the Wrights made the tough decision to shut down their operation for health reasons.

Roberts said he has several pieces from the Wrights, including a

Bryan Roberts adjusts a vintage Santa Claus blow mold at the Roberts’ home in Tusculum.



large blow mold Santa and two nutcrackers lined with white lights, which he restrung himself. He added that he found a little inspiration from visiting the Wrights' display each year before they ended their Christmas lights tradition.

Like the Wrights, Roberts said eventually he began customizing several of his decorations and painting a few of his own Christmas scenes, like his most recent piece, a back-lit Nativity scene featuring Mary and Joseph looking over Jesus in the manger.

"I make newer pieces as some of these get old. I made this one this year," he said, gesturing to the painted Nativity scene. "Once something gets worn out, I'll take it out and replace it. I've developed a process."

Typically, if Roberts decides to add a new handmade piece to his collection, he can be

found in his garage in the summer, blasting Bing Crosby Christmas carols as he works on the next project.

Whether he's added a new piece or not, Roberts usually starts putting his lights and figures out in early

November as it can take him weeks to finish.

Even after the lights are all strung and each decoration anchored in place, Roberts said the work continues until it's time to bring the display down for the year.

"I don't think people

realize, there's a lot of maintenance that goes into all of this every night," Roberts said. "You might come home, and something has blown over, or a set of lights might have gone out. There's a little more to it than just setting it up."

All his efforts haven't gone unrecognized.

A year or so after the Roberts moved to their current home in the Cornelius Landing neighborhood in Colbert County, Roberts won third place for best light display in the 2020 "Let's Light Up Muscle Shoals" Christmas lights contest.

Aside from the contest honors, Roberts said he enjoys being greeted by friendly passersby who slowdown in their vehicles to take in all the lights. Roberts said he's also delighted to see many of his neighbors string up a few extra lights and add lawn decorations in response to his annual display.



A polar bear "skates" around an ice rink decoration at the Roberts' home in Tuscumbia.



A large deer decoration bulbs at the Roberts' home in Tuscumbia.

"It's a little contagious," Roberts said. "When we moved out here five years ago, a few houses put up string lights, but that was about it. Now, a few of our neighbors have added more and more."

Still, for Roberts, it's not about recognition or setting trends. He said it's a desire to pass on the story of Jesus' birth, and a passion for spreading Christmas cheer that keeps him motivated.

"I do have a great love for Jesus Christ, so that's part of it," Roberts said. "I've read that people who go all out and decorate big for Christmas are usually friendly and outgoing, you know — people

who love people. If you look at the Wrights, they were those kind of people.

"I've just always loved Christmas. I love making people happy and trying to share the love of Jesus."

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CHRISTIAN HOLIDAY SEASON TRADITIONS



Fun books to read to children this Christmas

by METRO NEWS



Christmas is a special time of year for people of all ages, but children might be the most enthusiastic celebrants come December. Children spend much of the holiday season anticipating the arrival of the man in the red suit, and that enthusiasm can be contagious.

Families have their own unique traditions during the holiday season, but one popular way to harness kids' enthusiasm between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day is to read them Christmas stories. There's no shortage of great Christmas books for kids, and here are a handful that kids may remember well into adulthood.

"The Polar Express," by Chris Van Allsburg: The beloved tale is the story of a young boy who boards a mysterious train bound for the North Pole.

"The Littlest Elf," by Brandi Dougherty: Part of a series, this story focuses on a tiny elf named Oliver and a series of misadventures as he navigates his way through Santa's workshop.

"Olive, the Other Reindeer," by Vivian Walsh: Olive is no ordinary reindeer. In fact, Olive is a dog who heads to the North Pole believing she is a reindeer. Her decision to join Santa's team ultimately benefits the big man and his trusty reindeer.

"The Miracle of the First Poinsettia: A Mexican Christmas Story," by Joanne Oppenheim: A little girl named Juanita is the star of this retelling of a traditional Mexican tale with a valuable lesson.

"Gingerbread Mouse: A Christmas Holiday Book for Kids," by Katy Bratun: A fallen tree branch almost ruins Christmas for Mouse, whose determination and resourcefulness mixed in with a little Christmas magic ensures she finds a place to call home in time for the holidays.

"A Night in Santa's Great Big Bag," by Kristin Kladstrup: Santa saves the day in this tale starring a young boy's favorite stuffed animal, whose excitement

for Christmas compels him to climb into Santa's big bag of presents on Christmas Eve.

"Santa Claus and the Three Bears," by Maria Modugno: This twist on the popular tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" finds three unsuspecting bears encountering a familiar fellow in a red suit upon returning home after a nighttime walk.

"Twas the Night Before Christmas: Edited by Santa Claus for the Benefit of Children of the 21st Century," by Clement C. Moore: Parents will appreciate this updated version of the popular tale that, among other things, has removed the reference to Santa smoking.

"How the Grinch Stole Christmas!" by Dr. Seuss: Children can join generations of fans that came before them as they hear the redemption story of the Grinch who was once determined to ruin Christmas for the happy people of Who-ville.

"The Nutcracker," by the New York City Ballet: The classic story is retold based on famed choreographer George Balanchine's production.

The holiday season is steeped in tradition. Reading new and classic holiday stories to children is one tradition any family can embrace.

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Traditions associated with Chanukah celebrations

by METRO NEWS

Come December, the holiday season has hit full swing. Celebrants of various faiths and backgrounds participate in holiday celebrations, which are unique to each faith.

Although Chanukah is a relatively minor holiday on the Jewish religious calendar, it has enjoyed a greater share of fanfare in recent years. That popularity is perhaps due to the proximity of Chanukah to another major December celebration featuring a bearded fellow in a red suit. Chanukah isn't mandated by the Torah, and isn't even mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, it was created by the ancient rabbis.

Judaism is one of the world's oldest and most influential religions. World Population Review estimates there were approximately 15.2 million Jews worldwide in 2021.

Many likely will participate in Chanukah celebrations. Chanukah begins on the 25th day of Kislev each year. In 2023, Chanukah begins at sundown on Dec. 7 and ends on the evening of Friday, Dec. 15. Here are some Chanukah traditions.

Lighting the menorah: Participants will light a special nine-pronged menorah, sometimes called a hanukkiyah. It is practice to light one candle per night to recall the miracle of the sacred lamp oil that lasted for eight days during the rededication of the Temple. The ninth candle (shammash) is used to light the others. Lighting the menorah has been a primary ritual for at least 1,800 years. Lit menorahs are placed in prominent locations, including front windows in homes.

Playing dreidel: There are various stories about the origins of the dreidel, but historians say the first mention in Jewish writings did not



occur until the 18th century. The four sides of the dreidel are marked with different letters, which in German are G "ganz" (all), H "halb" (half), N "nichts" (nothing) and S "schick" (put). This dictates whether the player who spun the dreidel gets all, half or nothing in the collective coin pot, or has to put in his own. Yiddish is quite similar to German, and the letters on the dreidel also correspond to the first letters of the Yiddish phrase "nes gadol haya sham," which translates to "a great miracle happened here," a reference to the Chanukah miracle.

Time at home: Unlike other Jewish holidays, Chanukah is celebrated primarily at home rather than in a synagogue. This means that family time is a big component of Chanukah celebrations, which include singing songs, praying and cooking foods.

Fried dishes: Eating dishes cooked in oil is another commemoration of the miracle of the oil. Potato pancakes called latkes and jelly doughnuts may be served during Chanukah celebrations.

Giving gelt and gifts: Gelt was the gift of coin that would be given out to independent workers come Chanukah as an end-of-year gratuity. Later it became a way to offer small tokens to children. Today's gelt is typically discs of chocolate wrapped in foil to resemble coins.

Many families also give gifts during Chanukah, particularly on the sixth night. But Chanukah gift-giving generally is not to the extent of gift-giving in other religions. Gifts may be monetary but also can include gifts of time.

Traditions that make Kwanzaa special



by METRO NEWS

Traditions are a major component of the holiday season. No matter which holiday individuals celebrate, chances are they cherish certain traditions that make the season more special.

Kwanzaa celebrants know that tradition figures prominently in this week-long celebration of African American culture that begins each year on Dec. 26. Kwanzaa was created more than half a century ago, and in the years since its creation in 1966 many traditions have been become part and parcel of celebrants' holiday seasons. The following are a handful of Kwanzaa traditions that can make celebrations more special.

Lighting the kinara: Candles feature prominently in both religious and secular holiday season celebrations, and Kwanzaa is no exception. The kinara is a special candleholder with three red, three green and one black candle, and each night during Kwanzaa celebrants light a new candle. The African American Cultural Center-Los Angeles notes that candles are lit beginning with the black candle, which is at the center of kinara. Candles are then lit in alternate left and right, lighting inward to outward.

Discussion: The Nguzo Saba are the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Each principle is named after a Swahili word that expresses a particular concept, including unity

(umoya), purpose (nia) and creativity (kuumba). After lighting the kinara each night, families discuss the principle of Kwanzaa that correlates to the candle they lit that night. For example, the black candle that is lit on the first night of Kwanzaa represents unity, so families will discuss that principle after lighting the candle.

Family meal: Feasting with family is a holiday tradition in many households, including those that celebrate Kwanzaa. The Karamu Ya Imani ("Feast of Faith") typically takes place on the sixth day of Kwanzaa (Dec. 31). Traditional African cuisine is typically prepared for the meal, and each person present may take a turn drinking from the Kikombe cha Umoja (Unity Cup). Some celebrations of the Karamu Ya Imani are community-wide events that extend beyond immediate family members.

Gift exchange: Exchanging handmade gifts known as "zawadi" is another Kwanzaa tradition. Gifts are typically reserved for children, though adults may exchange presents as well. The gift exchange typically occurs on the final day of the week-long celebration of Kwanzaa.

These are just a handful of Kwanzaa traditions that can make the celebration of African American culture more meaningful this holiday season.

Christian holiday season traditions

by METRO NEWS

Many adjectives can be used to describe the holiday season, including festive, jolly and religious. Another word that may come to mind is tradition. Traditions factor heavily into holiday celebrations of faith and family.

According to The Public Religion Research Institute's "2020 Census of American Religion," 70 percent of Americans identify as Christian. Data from the Pew Research Center indicates that 55 percent of Canadians identified as Christians in 2018. Millions of Christians will be celebrating Christmas this year, and many of those celebrations will feature cherished traditions. Here are some popular Christian traditions during the holiday season.

Advent calendars and wreath: The word "Advent" is derived from Latin and means "coming forward." Advent is the four-week period preceding the Christmas celebration. Advent wreaths and calendars typically are part of Christmas

in Christian households. Advent calendars are sold in stores or can be made as craft projects. Most of them contain small prizes like chocolate treats or other trinkets behind each date on the calendar. Advent wreaths have four candles (three purple and one pink). One is lit each Sunday of Advent. The evergreen wreath signifies continuous life.

Nativity scene: Another popular religious tradition is setting up a nativity scene. A nativity scene places the focus on Jesus Christ. One tradition involves moving nativity figurines closer to the manger leading up to Christmas, and placing the infant Jesus in the manger on Christmas Day.

Some churches and towns also put on living nativity scenes, in which adults and children dress up, and together with live animals, depict the manger scene.

Christmas caroling: Caroling has a long history and was originally tied to winter solstice celebrations. Christians started



singing carols to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Many of the songs carolers sing are traditional religious hymns. During Advent, carols will herald the coming of Jesus. After Christmas, carols are even more joyous in nature.

The three masses: Midnight Mass is a special celebration that takes place in the late hours of the evening on Christmas Eve. It is the first liturgy of Christmas that begins at midnight. It originated in 430 AD under Pope Sixtus III in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. The popularity of Midnight Mass

grew by the 12th century, when the celebration of three Masses on Christmas day was granted to all priests. Midnight Mass is treated as a solemn High Mass, which involves singing and praying by the light of candles. A Mass at dawn is the second Christmas mass, followed by Mass of the Day, which is the midmorning Mass of the Christmas celebration.

Christmas is steeped in tradition. While the secular traditions are well known, Christians also embrace various religious traditions at this time of year.

Tips to pick the perfect Christmas tree

by METRO NEWS

Christmas trees are among the most recognizable symbols of the holiday season, and the popularity of trees is undeniable. According to the National Christmas Tree Association, approximately 25 to 30 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States each year. Christmas trees also are big business in Canada, where Statistics Canada notes cash receipts from Canadian Christmas tree producers totaled nearly \$163.5 million in 2022.

Annual spending on Christmas trees underscores how important they are to holiday decor. Christmas trees serve as the centerpiece in millions of holiday home decor schemes, so it's important to pick a tree that can shine in that role. This holiday season, celebrants can consider these tips as they look for the perfect Christmas tree.

Measure the area where the tree will be placed: A large tree can be awe-inspiring, but also can stick out like a

sore thumb if it takes up too much space. There should be enough room around the tree for families and their guests to sit around it. The home interior experts at Better Homes & Gardens recommend leaving a minimum of six inches between the top of the tree and the ceiling. If a tree topper will be added, make sure the top of the tree is at least 12 inches from the ceiling. Measure the area before leaving to buy a tree so it can fit nicely into the room and the surrounding decor.

Try the shake test: Anyone who has purchased a fresh-cut Christmas tree is undoubtedly

familiar with the shake test, which remains an effective way to measure the dryness of the tree. A slight shake will produce some fallen needles. If the needles are brown and few and far between, then the tree likely is not overly dry. However, a lot of falling green needles indicates the tree is already drying out, which means it could shed quite a bit and lose its looks before Christmas Day.

Pick a tree with a symmetrical look: Trees are living things, so it's unlikely that buyers will find a perfectly symmetrical tree. However, a

tree that's misshapen or already has some sagging branches won't make for an awe-inspiring addition to a home decor scheme.

Find the trunk (if you can): A trunk that's visible through the branches indicates the tree does not have dense branches, which will be necessary if homeowners want to dress the tree with ornaments. If it's hard to find the trunk because of all the thick branches and green needles, then the tree is likely pretty healthy.

Test the needles: The home improvement experts at Lowe's note that needles should be flexible but still snap when bent sharply. Avoid trees with needles that are already losing their color and can easily be pulled off.

A Christmas tree garners a lot of attention come the holiday season, which only underscores the significance of finding a tree worthy of being the centerpiece of holiday decor.



Willis celebrates end of breast cancer journey with friends, family

by CHELSEA RETHERFORD
Photos by DAN BUSEY

Mary Lindholm walked arm-in-arm with her sister, Lessa Willis, as they entered the Singing River Cancer Center, which houses Clearview Cancer Institute and Alliance Cancer Care Radiation, in Florence on a snowy Feb. 19.

Secretively, Lindholm stole back into the lobby to greet friends and family as Willis sat in the waiting room to be called back for her final round of radiation treatment. She'd been diagnosed with Paget's disease, a rare form of breast cancer, about

three months earlier.

Willis' two sons, Jeffrey and Nick, and their families, fared a light snow and bitter cold to drive from their homes in Priceville and Huntsville to be with their mother on the celebratory occasion. Gradually, about 20 others trickled into the lobby.

Most were dressed in pink; some came bearing flowers and balloons; but all were there to show support and love for their mother, grandmother, aunt, in-law, friend, fellow church member, sister — breast cancer survivor.

"Lessa is my sister," Shelia Willis, who is actually Willis' sister-in-law, said. "Her husband and my husband were brothers, but that's how close we are. She would do anything for me. She'd do anything for anybody. She is an

amazing person."

Lindholm said their entire family shares that bond. As she corralled her own children and grandchildren into the waiting room, she hugged her nephew close.

"My kids are like Lessa's kids, and her kids are like my kids," she said. "We're all family. It doesn't matter if you're a Held, a Willis, a Lindholm or a Booth. We're all lumped into one family, and we're a very close-knit family. If one person is going through something, we're all going through it."

The tight-knit family members are no strangers to tragedy or tribulation.

While Lindholm and Willis have another sister, Leah Held, who is also a breast cancer survivor, the dreaded "c-word" took Willis'



Lessa Willis, surrounded by family inside Alliance Cancer Center.

husband, Neal, just five years ago. Three years after that devastating blow, Willis lost her daughter, Sarah Willis Singleton.

"It was so tragic, losing Neal," Lindholm said. "It was hard, but you know, Lessa would encourage women in her Bible study who had also lost husbands. Then when she lost Sarah, we thought, 'Oh no, this is going to take her.' It was hard, but she picked herself back up, and then she started ministering to people who had lost children."

Lindholm described her sister as someone who frequently puts others' needs and grief before her own. In fact, when Lindholm received news of her sister's cancer diagnosis, she said it was Willis who comforted her.

"I cried, I had a fit and everything, but she was the one encouraging me," Lindholm said as more friends and loved ones

trickled into the lobby at Singing River Cancer Center.

"I came here with her for her report, because I needed to hear everything from her doctors. I said, 'You're sure? You're sure this is what they're saying?' She told her doctors, 'My sister is going to be alright,' and she was there comforting me," Lindholm said. "That's how she is. That's why all these people are showing up."

Becci Nix, who is Lindholm's and Willis' elder sister, agreed and chimed in as she walked into the room.

"She is generous, caring, and selfless — definitely selfless," Nix said. "If you ever call to check on her, she'll say, 'Well, how are you? Tell me about you.' She's a nurturer."

As each person filed into the waiting room after Lessa had been called back for her treatment, most shared stories of how they'd felt cared for by Lessa in times of need. Now

Lessa Willis, right, reacts as her family is revealed inside Alliance Cancer Center.



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they were there to reciprocate in kind.

Friends of Lessa's children shared stories about her caring for them like a second mother as they were growing up. Grandchildren shared stories of their grandmother baking their favorite cakes and treats, even at times when she was grappling with grief.

Lindholm said those shows of kindness extend beyond friends and family. Even Willis' physicians have been treated with homemade baked goods as a way for Willis to express her gratitude.

"She has had excellent care, and they've had excellent cakes," Lindholm said with a laugh.

As the final family members arrived to surprise Willis on the day of her final radiation treatment, they began quietly filing into the waiting room of the Alliance Care Radiation Center. They were ready to greet Willis when she would ring a ceremonial bell, signaling what they hope to be the end of her cancer journey.

All those people had a little longer to wait, however.

Willis, who had no idea anyone other than her sisters were waiting for her, took her time thanking and hugging each one of her physicians and nurses on her way out. When she finally rounded the corner and saw all those familiar faces crowding the room, she took her time again

Family of Lessa Willis watch in admiration as she rings the bell inside Alliance Cancer Center.



Nick Willis, Lessa's son, center, pumps his fist as he arrives to surprise his mother inside Alliance Cancer Center.



Becci Nix and Mary Lindholm embrace before surprising Lessa Willis inside Alliance Cancer Center.



to hug and greet each person who'd shown up for her that day.

"I've just been blessed in my family," Willis said, beaming. "I know I'm so fortunate to have so many people who care. I know I'm so blessed to have a family like that."

In all the hustle and bustle, Willis even got to enjoy a Facetime call from her brother, Jeff Held, who wanted to show support for his sister all the way from his home in Florida.

As the four siblings talked about Willis' battle with breast cancer — and how grateful they are that she overcame — Held said he hopes Willis' story will help even one person who might be facing a similar struggle.

Willis' sisters said they also hope their sister's illness and recovery encourage other women to take their health seriously and stay on top of their breast cancer screenings.

"I don't miss a mammogram. After having two sisters diagnosed, I go for every screening," Lindholm said. "I think Jeff summed it all up perfectly. We hope Lessa's story encourages people, and even if it encourages just one person to seek early detection, sharing it will have been more than worth it."

Lessa Willis embraces family after ringing the bell inside Alliance Cancer Center.



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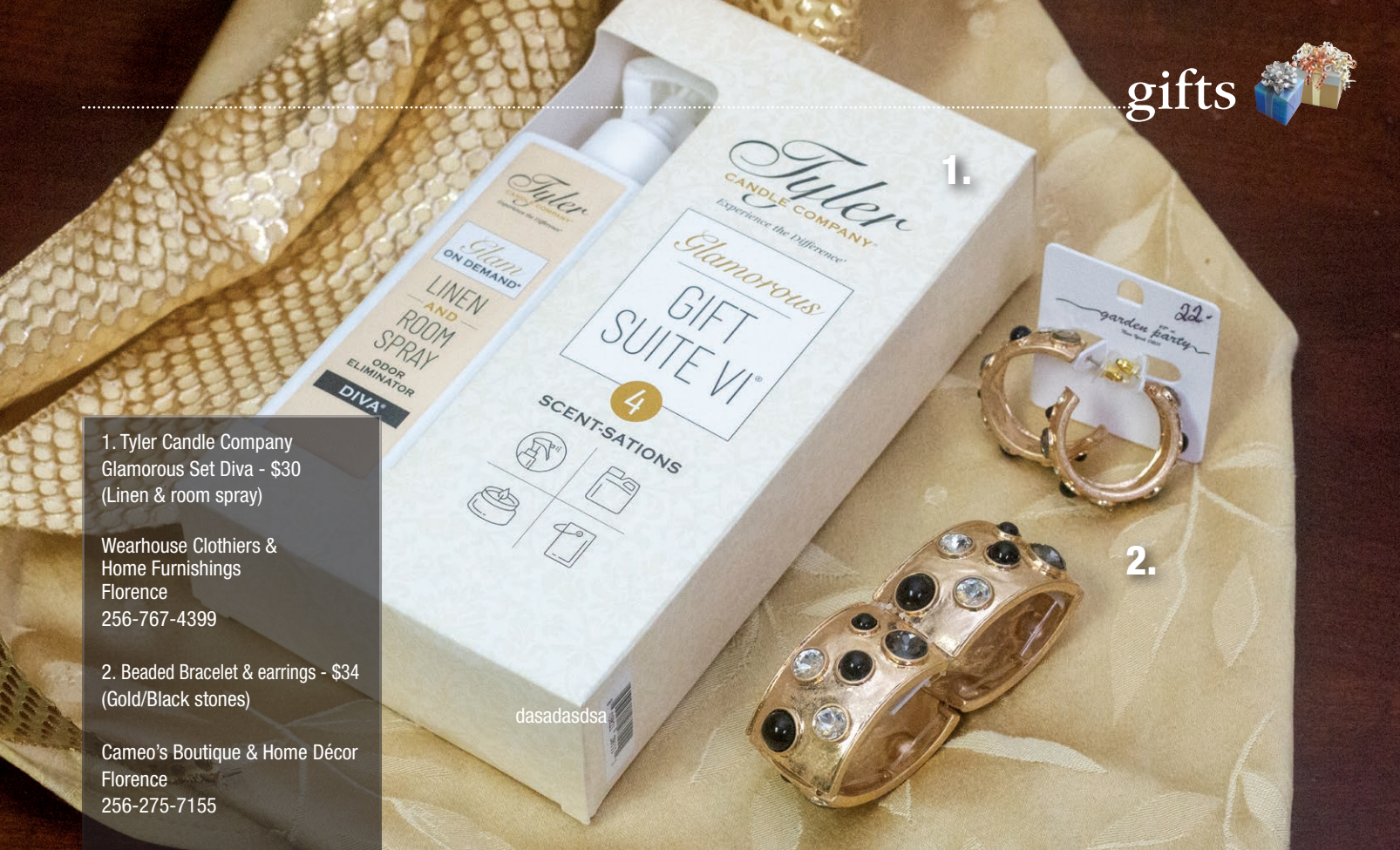


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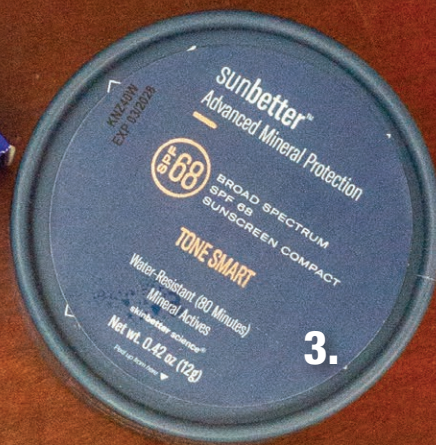
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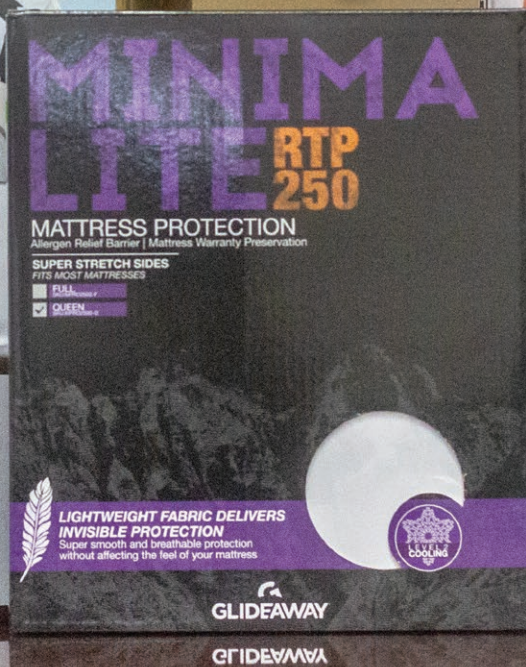
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Recipes to try this holiday season

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 recipes will be sure to please family and friends this holiday season.



Photo by METRO



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Slow Cooked Turkey

Makes 15 servings

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 fresh turkey, about 15 pounds, preferably free-range
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 quart apple cider
- 2 teaspoons dried poultry seasoning, coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper



Photo & recipe by METRO

DIRECTIONS:

Remove the giblets from the turkey and discard (or save for another use). Rinse the turkey inside and out and pat dry with paper towels. Rub it all over with salt and pepper. Refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 12 hours and up to 24 hours. During that time, the surface of the turkey will become visibly dry and the skin will tighten; this encourages a nice crisp skin on the finished bird.

Remove the turkey from the refrigerator 1 hour before you plan to start roasting. Preheat the oven to 450 F.

Put the turkey on a rack set in a large, flameproof roasting pan. Drizzle the oil over the top.

Roast for 1 hour. Reduce the oven temperature to 175 F. Pour the cider into the roasting pan and sprinkle the poultry seasoning in the liquid. Continue roasting until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a thigh (but not touching bone) registers to 170 F.

Transfer the turkey to a carving board, tent loosely with aluminum foil, and let rest for about 15 minutes (see tip). Meanwhile, skim the fat from the surface of the liquid in the pan. Put the roasting pan over two burners and bring the pan drippings to a boil over high heat. Cook until the juices reduce and thicken slightly, enough to coat a spoon, about 10 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Carve the turkey and serve with cider pan juices.

Resting tip: Slow-roasted meats need far less resting time (pretty much none) than those that are traditionally roasted. The reason for resting meat that has been roasted at a high temperature is to allow juices that have collected in the cooler center time to migrate back into the dryer (hotter) exterior sections after it comes out of the oven. Because slow-roasted meats are cooked evenly and a temperature that keeps most of the juices in place, a resting period is largely unnecessary. A brief resting time does allow the meat to become a little firmer as it cools, making it easier to carve.

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Gnocchi with Roasted Cauliflower



Photo and recipe by METRO.

Serves 4 (as a main course)

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 small head cauliflower, cut into small florets
- 1/4 cup fresh sage leaves
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 1 pound gnocchi (fresh or frozen)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan

DIRECTIONS:

Heat oven to 400 F. On a rimmed baking sheet, toss the cauliflower and sage with the oil, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Roast, tossing once, until the cauliflower is golden brown and tender, 25 to 30 minutes.

Fifteen minutes before the cauliflower is finished, cook the gnocchi according to the package directions. Divide the gnocchi among bowls and top with the cauliflower and Parmesan.

Tip: Cauliflower florets are easier to separate if you remove the core first. Place the head stem-side up. Using a paring knife, cut around the core at an angle, creating a cone-shaped piece, then lift it out. If the head is very large, halve it first through the core.

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves, minced
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh sage
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano
- 3 medium garnet sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice
- Kosher salt

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Spray a large roasting pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, thoroughly combine the olive oil and herbs. Add the sweet potato dice to the mixture, and use your fingers to coat them well. Season with salt to taste.

2. Transfer the mixture to the prepared roasting pan. Bake for 45 to 60 minutes, until your desired consistency is reached, whether you want them a bit firm or fork-tender.

Edible Tip: A good alternate variety to Garnets are Red Jewels, which are easy to come by at both farmers' markets and local grocers. Look for a deep, bright color, and be sure to cook them fairly quickly after purchase. Unlike potatoes, sweet potatoes do not store very well.

Herb-Roasted Garnet Sweet Potatoes



Photo and recipe by METRO.



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Roasted Pork Hock With Cider, Apples and Rosemary Potatoes

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 onions, roughly diced
- 2 carrots, roughly diced
- 3-1/2 ounces celeriac, roughly diced
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground caraway
- 4 small ham hocks, approximately 500 grams each
- 10 ounces meat stock
- 1 pound waxy potatoes, peeled, halved or quartered
- 2 apples, peeled and cut into 8 wedges each
- 1-1/4 cups cider
- 1 to 2 sprigs rosemary, leaves picked

DIRECTIONS:

1. Heat the oven to 400 F and oil a roasting pan.
2. Add the onions, carrots and celeriac to the pan and brown lightly in the oven for around 30 minutes.
3. Crush the garlic and mix with the caraway, salt and ground black pepper. Rub this mixture into the hocks. Place the hocks on top of the vegetables and pour on a little stock. Bake in the oven

for approximately 1 hour, turning the hocks regularly and adding more stock as required.

4. At the end of the cooking time, remove the root vegetables from the meat juices using a slotted spoon. Turn the oven up to 425 F. Add the potatoes and apples, stand the hocks upright, add the cider, and cook for a further hour.

5. Take the cooked hocks out

of the roasting tin and place on a baking tray. Return to the oven to form crackling.

6. Meanwhile, pass the juices through a sieve. Put the apples and potatoes in a warm place. Reduce or thicken the sauce as required and season to taste with salt and ground black pepper.

7. Stir the rosemary through the potatoes and plate up.

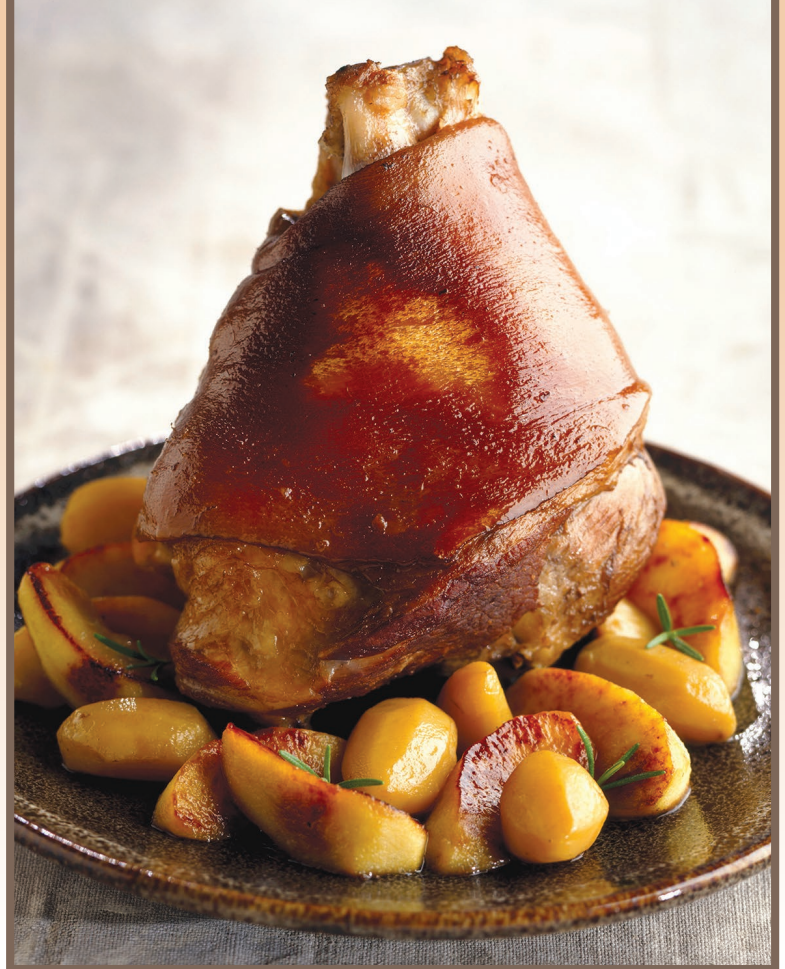


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Christmas Tree Cake Pops



Photo and recipe by METRO.

Makes 24 cake pops

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 box vanilla cake mix
- 3/4 cup canola oil
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar

- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon milk
- 3-1/2 cups green candy melts
- 24 cake pop sticks
- Icing dots, icing stars

DIRECTIONS:

1. Prepare cake according to package instructions, adding 3/4 cup canola oil to the cake mix before baking.
2. Once cake is cool to the touch, transfer to a large mixing bowl and break up into crumbs. Allow to cool completely.
3. In a medium bowl, add the butter, sugar, vanilla, and milk. Use an electric mixer and beat on medium speed for about 4 minutes until light and fluffy.
4. Add 3/4 of the frosting to the cake crumbs and mix until mixture can hold together well. Refrigerate for at least an hour.
5. Using your hands, shape the cake pop mixture into 24 conical shapes.
6. Melt the green candy melts. Dip one end of each of the cake pop sticks into the melted chocolate before inserting into the bottom of the cake pops. Dip each cake pop into the melted chocolate, making sure to cover completely, allowing excess to drip back into bowl.
7. Use a toothpick to create the textured look of the tree and decorate with the icing dots and stars before standing upright to dry completely.

Makes 2-1/2 dozen

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1/3 cup baking cocoa
- 1/2 cup cold butter
- 1 8-ounce package reduced-fat cream cheese
- 1 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1-1/4 cups milk chocolate English toffee bits, divided

DIRECTIONS:

1. In a small bowl, combine the flour, confectioners' sugar, cocoa, and baking soda. Cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Press in the bottom of an ungreased 13-inch x 9-inch baking dish. Bake at 350 F for 12 to 15 minutes or until set.
2. In a large bowl, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Add the milk, eggs and vanilla; beat until smooth. Stir in 3/4 cup toffee bits. Pour over crust. Bake 18 to 22 minutes longer or until center is almost set.
3. Cool on a wire rack for 15 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining toffee bits; cool completely. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours overnight.

Toffee Cheesecake Bars



Photo and recipe by METRO.

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Wrap Up the Year by Honoring a Woman Who Shines!

**Nominate Your Shoals Woman of the Year 2026 ~
Because Giving Recognition is the Greatest Gift of All!**

**This is your chance to nominate the next Shoals Woman of the Year.
All nominations must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. April 24, 2026.**

The purpose of the Shoals Woman of the Year award is to recognize an individual woman who distinguishes herself in her community as a leader. The recipient of the Shoals Woman of the Year award demonstrates excellence in leadership and has a visible impact on others. She represents the best of who we are as women and as leaders.

Please explain in detail, with examples, how the nominee makes an impact in the following areas:

Leadership: How has the nominee demonstrated strong leadership abilities, whether in their workplace, community, or volunteer activities.

Impact: How have they made a visible difference in the lives of others through their actions or initiatives.

Presence: In what ways do they possess a strong presence, demonstrate integrity, and inspire others.

Service: How does your nominee go above and beyond in their immediate job responsibility to benefit others.

Nomination Guidelines:

- In a 200-300 word summary tell us your nominee's story and specifically how it relates to your nominee being selected for Shoals Woman of the YEAR along with how she has given back to the community including her involvement in the Organization representing courage, determination, heritage, heroism, initiative and vision. **(Please detail on a separate sheet)**
- Nominee Name/Address/Phone/Email
- Nominated by Name/Contact Phone
- Name/Describe your nominee's Organization (list Professional positions held within the last 2-5 years and general responsibilities)
- List all civic/community activities, clubs, groups and or boards they have served on within the last 2-5 years. Any awards received.

For USPS Mail, send nomination letter to:

TimesDaily
Attn. Shoals Woman of the Year
219 W. Tennessee Street
Florence, AL 35630

OR

For Email, send nomination letter to:

swoynominations@timesdaily.com

For online entry visit

https://www.timesdaily.com/site/shoals_woman_of_the_year_nomination_form.html

For more information on Shoals Woman of the Year nominations or the event, please contact Mara Beth Cravens at 256-740-5811 (marabeth.cravens@timesdaily.com) or Renita Jimmar at 256-740-5815 (renita.jimmar@timesdaily.com).

Red Velvet Cake

Makes 12 servings

INGREDIENTS:

For the cake:

- 1 cup unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra to coat pans
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1/4 cup natural unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 tablespoons red food coloring
- 1-1/2 tablespoons water
- 1-1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1-1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2-3/4 cups sifted cake flour, plus extra for coating the pans
- 1-1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar

For the frosting:

- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup butter, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Red decorative sugar

DIRECTIONS:

For the cake:

1. Preheat oven to 350 F. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans generously with butter, then dust with flour, tapping out any excess flour; set aside.
2. Cream butter and sugar together using an electric beater, until very light and fluffy. Add eggs one at a time and beat well.
3. Make a paste of the cocoa, red food coloring and water; add to creamed mixture.
4. Mix salt, 1 teaspoon vanilla, and buttermilk together. Add the flour to the batter, alternating with the milk mixture, mixing just until incorporated. Mix soda and vinegar together and gently fold into cake batter. Don't beat or stir the batter after this point.
5. Pour batter into prepared pans. Bake until a cake tester or toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and let the cakes cool in their pans on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Slide a thin knife around the edges and invert the cakes onto a wire rack to cool completely, at least 1 hour, before frosting.



Photo & recipe by METRO

For the frosting:

In a medium saucepan, cook flour and milk over low heat, stirring constantly until thick. Let cool completely. While mixture is cooling, combine sugar, butter, and vanilla, beat until mixture is light and fluffy. Add cooled flour mixture to the sugar and butter mixture; beat for 10 to 20 minutes until frosting is thick and spreadable.

To assemble:

1. Place one of the cake layers, bottom side up, onto a serving plate or cake stand. Spoon 3/4 cup of frosting into the center of the cake layer. Gently work a rubber spatula in a swirling motion and spread the icing from the center toward the edges of the cake. Carefully set the second cake layer on top of the first and ice the second layer, beginning with a dollop in the center and working it out toward the sides. Ice the sides of the cake last. If the sides are crumbly, brush excess crumbs away and place a thin layer of icing on the sides of the cake to seal the crumbs in. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, then apply another, thicker layer of icing over the sides. Sprinkle with decorative sugar.
2. Store the cake in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Remove the cake from the refrigerator at least one hour prior to serving.



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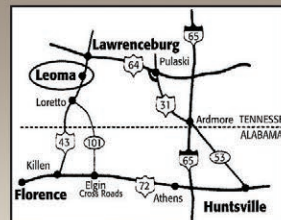
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