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December
2020



Traditions

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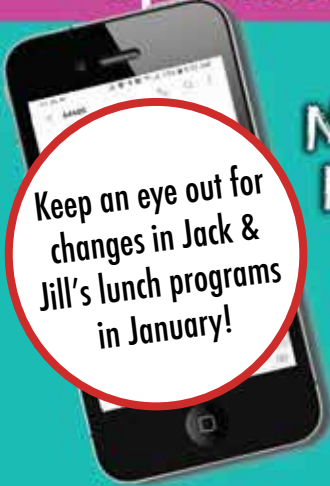
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From The Manager... LINDSEY SPENCER

“

There are two traditions in my family I hold most dear: Decorating the tree with my brother and playing Monopoly on Christmas Eve (which is also my dad's birthday). The past few years the Christmas season has looked more and more different. First, it was interrupted by the college semester and the necessity to travel home – but longer breaks. Then the traveling home was only part of a very short break as I entered the “adult” world with a job and only a couple days off. Now the holidays are filled with coordinating dates to celebrate with my and my husband's family.

Seasons come and go and our lives change and adjust to new circumstances, but traditions keep us connected to the memories we hold dear and the people we love most.

This year is sure to look different for many, but as we adapt and change our traditions to fit inside the year 2020 – like reverse parades – I hope the magic of Christmas is still accessible to all.

In this issue we have rounded up a series of stories tied to traditions. Both that of individual families and some that incorporate our entire community. Our stories are about parades, new takes on past events, and the Christmas story passed down, but together they weave a tale about how traditions can hold us together and remind us of love.

Seasons come and go, and while we must always be learning to change with them, I hope you and your family are able to hold onto your traditions this year, and for many years to come.

”

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GET RICH WITH RICHARD BRUMMETT



Christmas morning has always been a special time around our house, both in my younger years and still today. The anticipation of present-opening carries a definite mystique offered only by the December holiday.

I remember when I was a child and, once the tree was up and trimmed, the present watch for my sister Kathy and me began. Weeks before Christmas day we might have two gifts each wrapped and placed under the tree; a week or so down the road one or two more might somehow appear -- and we always knew exactly how many each of us had -- and then on the morning of the 25th somehow, some way, even more were there, left supposedly by Santa.

In those early years Kathy would have made a much better investigative reporter than I, even though I'm the one who wound up choosing journalism as a career. While I was a "go with the flow" kind of kid, she was more of a "direct the flow" person; she had to know Mom's hiding places for our as yet unwrapped presents, standing on a chair to look on the

top closet shelf, lying on the floor to peek under the bed, snooping around in hopes of uncovering the Christmas cache. Had she been able to lift Mom's car keys I am certain she would have looked in the trunk.

On the other hand, I assumed all closets other than the one in my bedroom were off limits and I wasn't about to stand on a chair and look up there for fear I'd find some test paper I'd hidden from the parents or possibly some clothing I flung up there because I didn't want to wear it and then told Mom I didn't know what happened to it.

That's where we found ourselves one year when Kathy came to my room and said, "I know what we're getting for Christmas!" It seems that year Mom bought some cheaper wrapping paper -- maybe in one of those years when money was tight -- and Kathy figured out that if you waited until Mom was somewhere else and you picked up a present and pulled the paper real tight you could actually read right through it and see the writing on the wrapped up box. She picked up one of hers and showed me, and you could sure enough see that she was getting a doll she wanted. Then she picked up one of mine, the one that sat there tantalizingly glimmering with each blink of the Christmas tree lights, the one that was so big it had to contain something so special I might never stop smiling.

And she wanted me to press on the paper and read what it was.

I had a dilemma; I knew Mom and Dad would disapprove because they wanted us to be surprised on Christmas Day, but here was a chance to know, without a doubt, what this big

old box held. Probably, I should have already figured it out because all I had asked for was a table top basketball game I'd seen at the store, and the aforementioned box was exactly the same size and shape, a long, narrow, rectangular piece of wrapped up something. Again, I wasn't the snoop Kathy was, nor was I a deep thinker. That's why for years I assumed since she was the smart one, I must be the pretty one. I later found that to be incorrect, but that was not my concern at that particular time. Right then, I had one of those Adam and Eve moments: My sister wanted me to bite the apple of Christmas snooper and I still wanted to be the innocent doofus.

I bit.

Succumbing to the pressure, I held the gift and pressed the paper down and I was immediately ... disappointed. I read the magic words "Basketball Game" and smiled for a second, but then I knew the mystery was gone and come Christmas morning I was going to have to feign both surprise and excitement, and I didn't know if I was that good of an actor. I was pretty certain when I had opened packages containing school clothes or underwear on Christmases past and I frowned out, "Thank you, it's just what I wanted," the givers had a pretty good idea those were forced sentiments, choreographed by Mom.

I'm pretty sure when we opened our gifts my parents never knew I was already aware of what I was getting, and I don't think I said, "Oh, boy, I'm going to unwrap my basketball game now!" when it was my turn. But that was the last Christmas I cheated, choosing instead to operate in ignorant bliss, just as I do now. On Christmas Day, I mean, not all the time.

*From Our Family to Yours
Merry Christmas & Happy
New Year!*

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LIVING A *Better Story*

BY JARED PICKNEY

I have a friend who works for hospice. I recently asked him what his biggest takeaway is from being around dying people on a daily basis. Without hesitation he said, "The things we often roll our eyes at are the very things the dying wish they could go back and relive. Things like your daughter asking you to push her in the swing or your son asking you to play Legos with him on the floor."

In the nine years my friend has worked for hospice, he has yet to hear one dying patient lament the loss of stuff. Not once has he heard someone grieve the fact they didn't get a bigger house or better car. But he has heard patient after patient speak of wanting more time with family and friends.

This is because, as Richard Plass points out, we are all relational beings. Plass writes, "At the core of our being is this truth. We are designed for and defined by our relationships. We were born with a relentless longing to participate in the lives of others. We cannot not be relational. We cannot exist well without connection and communion with another."

This doesn't mean that it's wrong to want nice things. It just means that presence is more important than presents. More than we need toys, a shiny new gadget, an updated wardrobe or a luxury car with a huge bow on top, we need each other. We need relationships where we can be known, belong and be loved.

This is what makes the message of Christmas so special. It's about God's making a way for us to encounter His presence by stepping into this world and providing a way for us to live in relationship with Him, the only one who truly can satisfy and fulfill our souls.

Take time this holiday season to celebrate this reality. The Creator God wants to share His presence with you. He sees you. He loves you. And He was willing to go from a cradle to the cross just to be with you. That's what Christmas is about.

With that in mind, take time to slow down this season to enjoy the presence of God and others. This is a life well lived. It is a simple life lived close to those we love.

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Sounds Like...Christmas (again?!)

BY SARA BROWN

A playlist for December

Now it's really starting to feel like Christmastime! As you get started or continue with your holiday festivities, enjoy this encore collection of Christmas tunes sure to make the season merry and bright!

1. Don't Need A Reindeer – The Moody Blues

This is an original Christmas tune you probably aren't familiar with. There's no mistaking this one as anything but a Christmas jam. It's so fun to listen to and it never fails to get me into the Christmas spirit. Just try not to dance when this one starts playing!

2. Feliz Navidad – The Last Bandoleros

A cover of the José Feliciano hit everyone knows and loves, TLB put their own harmony-filled, rockin' spin on it and came out with this Christmas banger. It's full of energy, fun, and just the right amount of whimsicality, so turn it up loud. It'll get you on your feet in no time.

3. Please Come Home For Christmas – The Eagles

What Christmas playlist is complete without a bummer of a tune, especially one that grooves as hard as this one does? In fact, this song grooves so hard it's easy to forget it's a sad song. Whether you pick up on the message or not, it's hard not to love this one!

4. Merry Christmas Baby – Hunter Hayes

This track is a big, festive Christmas production. Complete with a horn section, a fiery guitar solo, and a killer vocal, it's hard not to feel good after listening to this one. This is a good one to turn on while you're decorating your tree.

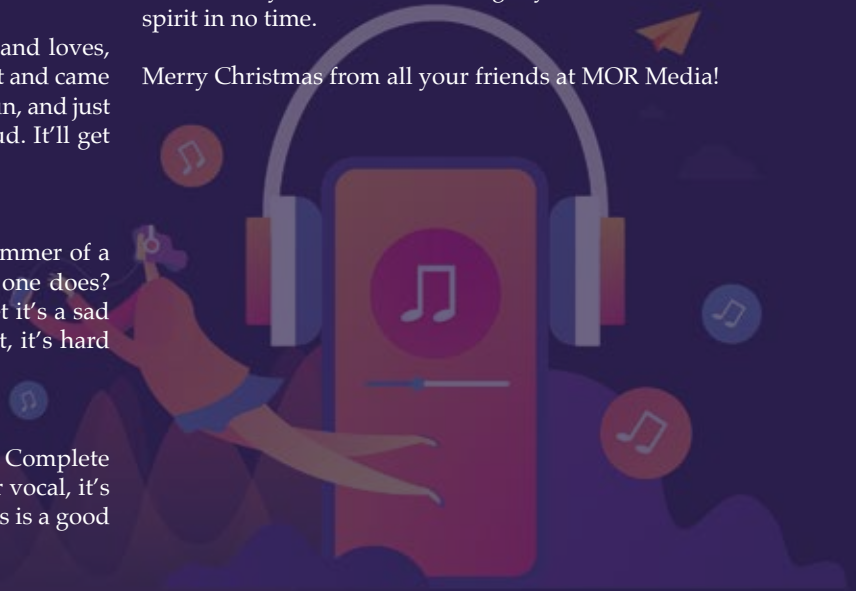
5. Take Me Home for Christmas – Dan + Shay

These guys do just about everything well, and an original Christmas tune is no exception! It's poppy, bouncy, festive, and fun all-around – a perfect song to dance around your Christmas tree to.

6. Christmas All Over Again – Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers

Nothing says Christmas like rock 'n' roll, right? Well, maybe rock 'n' roll isn't the first thing you think of, but maybe it should be. This original Christmas track is the perfect mix of pure rock 'n' roll and that good old-fashioned Christmas whimsicality, and it's bound to get you into the Christmas spirit in no time.

Merry Christmas from all your friends at MOR Media!



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PET OF THE MONTH

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BY KATIE WEST

Shelby is a five-year-old golden retriever with a big personality. She is easygoing, happy, and sweet most of all. She is known to brighten up even the worst days.

Her favorite things include: Shopping and picking out her own new toys and treats, scattering all her toys all over the house (especially if they were just put away), stealing any toy that someone else has, and long, long naps. She could sleep all day as long as she has a pillow and someone to cuddle with.

She loves Sonic – Mozzarella sticks are her weakness. You can't say the word "Sonic" without her reacting with tons of excitement. And she never meets a stranger. She can commonly be found begging everyone she passes for attention in exchange for kisses.

She is our "baby" and acts as rambunctious and charismatic as a typical toddler.

Photo on right by
Checkered Chic Photography



Happy Holidays, furry friends!

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College Tips by a College Student



BY SARA BROWN

December. We're in the home stretch now. Just a few more weeks of classes, finals, and then a well-deserved break! Can you believe we're already almost done? It has certainly been a challenge to get to this point, but we're almost there, so keep trucking along! You may be stressed out with lots of upcoming deadlines and feeling like you don't have enough time to do it all. You may be worried that your grades won't be as good as you want them to be. You may just be tired and ready to be done. Whatever your situation, it's going to be okay. We're almost there, and I know you can do it. Here's some tips to get you past the finish line of this semester.

Tip number one: Make sure you know when your finals are and how they're being delivered. Some online finals may be open for a full week, others may only be open for a few hours, or you may have to take yours in person. Make yourself aware now. You don't want to find out five minutes before your exam begins that it's in-person, and you haven't left your dorm room yet. You want to be prepared for everything in advance, so seriously, go check after you finish reading the rest of the tips. You'll be really glad you did.

Tip number two: Pay attention to your deadlines. The end of the semester typically means a bunch of deadlines at once, and it's easy to get them mixed up, especially if you're in a self-motivated online course like I am. Go into your syllabi (while you're in there looking at your finals info!) and write down all your end-of-semester deadlines. Put that note somewhere you can see it while you work, and get those assignments and projects knocked out.

Tip number three: Find ways to motivate yourself. Like the middle of the semester, the end of the semester can

be a time where you start feeling burned out. Believe me, I'm there myself, but you can't let that feeling of burn out prevent you from meeting your deadlines and doing the best you can. We're so close to a break, so find ways to motivate yourself to get your work done. Reward yourself with an episode of your favorite Netflix series after you finish a book chapter. Take a nap after you finish your semester project. If you need more frequent rewards, take a 5-minute break after every half hour of work. Tailor your rewards to your needs, but make sure they actually encourage you to do your work!

Tip number four: Make sure you're good to go for Spring semester. It's typically a lot harder to get hold of faculty over winter break, so if you don't get everything sorted out now, like making sure you're registered for classes, you may be stuck waiting until the semester starts to get those issues taken care of. You'll be a lot better off getting those things taken care of now, and doing so will give you one less thing to worry about, which is always a good thing.

And finally, tip number five: Realize what you've done this semester. You've made it through. Your grades may not have been as high as you wanted, you may not have been as productive as you thought you should have been, but that's not what's important. You've pushed through a confusing combination of online and in-person classes, trying to complete assignments while still following Covid guidelines, and all the negative mental health effects that have resulted from going to school during a pandemic. It's okay if you didn't do as well as you wanted. What matters is that you're almost to the end, and you're going to make it. Finish strong, then rest up and get ready to do it all over again next semester!



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In Performance at A-State

KASU Launches New Program



“In Performance at A-State,” a new weekly radio program, will debut on KASU 91.9 FM, the public media service of Arkansas State University. The new series features recordings of musical performances from Arkansas State University Music Department students and faculty members.

The program is one hour and will broadcast on KASU 91.9 FM every Wednesday at 9 p.m., and on Sunday at 6 a.m.

“KASU continually strives to share with

the public the many diverse and incredible things that are happening at Arkansas State University,” said Marty Scarbrough, program director. “This radio series will be an outstanding showcase of the amazing musical talents of both the students and the faculty members in the A-State Music Department. I feel the series will not only be entertaining, but it will also encourage members of the public to attend A-State musical events in person in the future when the pandemic is over.”

Dr. Lauren Schack Clark, Music Department

chair, expressed her excitement for the program: “I’m delighted that we have this opportunity to showcase A-State’s talented music students and faculty to a wider radio audience and to have this partnership with the station.

Support for the production and promotion of the series is provided by grants from the Kays Foundation and the Arkansas Arts Council. The program host is Dr. Ed Owen, associate professor of music. Nathan Taylor, KASU production engineer, produces the program.

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Collins Theatre Celebrates 95 Years of Music



The Historical Collins Theatre celebrated 95 years of music and entertainment on November 13 in Downtown Paragould. The theatre shared a live stream on Facebook so fans could tune in from all over in the safety of their own homes to celebrate nearly a century of live entertainment.

Keep an eye out for a "Then and Now" story covering NEA's beloved entertainment venue in the January issue of Premiere as we take a look at when the theatre opened and what it is today.



Vicki Bishop kicks off the 95th Birthday Celebration via Facebook Live



Cue the Applause

Alex Brewer



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Christmas is a special time for our family. Even though we have always been closeknit, that sense is heightened by the Christmas season. That closeness led to wonderful times during the Christmases of my youth. Though most of those years run together in my mind and have become a little foggy, I can remember a few snippets of the celebrations and a few of the gifts of the early years. As a child you think of presents and there were toys, clothes and other various gifts. But I always hoped for outdoor related treasures. I am not sure if I ever got an “official Red Ryder, carbine action, 200-shot range model air rifle,” but Santa did bring several pieces of outdoor gear that are still with me today.

A mainstay of our celebrations was the Christmas meals. They were always top notch and those smells and tastes are still vivid in my senses. The main course was grand, with turkey and ham filling the table, along with the normal sides that often included dressing made with mallards taken in the St. Francis River bottoms. Even more prominent than the entrées were the vast amounts of desserts. My favorite was, and still is, a chocolate cake piled high with seven minute icing, but a pecan pie is a close second. There were all kinds of candy, all handmade by my Mama Blanton or Grandmother Long. Peanut brittle, lace cookies, chocolate covered peanuts, tiger butter, party mix, various kinds of fudge, and many other sugar filled concoctions begged to be eaten before, during and after the meal. That led to an almost euphoric sugar induced high, which quickly faded into a coma-like nap, at least for the men.

As with most families, my parents, grandparents and other relatives would try to choreograph

our holiday get-togethers so they would flow like a wonderful Nutcracker ballet. But it seemed the events of our Christmases often ended up playing out more like an episode of Hee Haw. Yet that did not matter as our hearts and tummies were both full at the end of each celebration.

The outdoors added many wonderful layers to those festive times of holiday joy. Everyone in our family realized Christmas festivities had to be planned in tune with the events happening in the outdoors. Duck season ruled the winter in the Blanton family and it was imperative that all Christmas get-togethers were scheduled after noon if Pa and Uncle Ted were expected to be there. For Granddad Long, it was running the beagles or caring for the farm in the hills. Those things would take place on an almost daily basis so feasts and festivities might have to fall in line with time spent chasing rabbits or tending to cows. The desire to be out there began flowing through my veins at an early age, so I always tried to influence the Christmas schedule as well.

An opportunity to be out there, in the fields and woods, led to great anticipation of the Christmas season and the break provided during the school year. That would give time to celebrate with the family, but also a great opportunity to live out the expeditions I had read about in Field and Stream. Though I could not go far, chasing greenheads with my cousin Steve in the Stanford area or listening to beagles run a swamp rabbit through the St. Francis River bottoms were as gratifying as any story that graced the pages of an outdoor magazine.

The bounty brought home from days in the field was also noteworthy as it graced the table on many occasions. Many of our Christmas break meals were ducks, doves or rabbits that were prepared by one of my grandmothers as a family meal or for a meal with my fellow young hunters.

But even though all those outdoor things were important, my thoughts of time spent in the outdoors during the Christmas season now always drift back to time with the family. I can still smell the wet, rotting willows and cane that graced the outside walls of Pa’s duck blind. I can hear the sounds of Granddad’s anxious



CHUCK LONG

Regional Education Coordinator Northeast Education Division Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

beagles as they run a hot track. I can also taste the wonderful holiday meals that were prepared, including the duck and dressing that Mama Blanton made and the burned pie crust Grandmother Long made just for me.

There is a somewhat melancholy feeling each year with the holidays as my Granddad Long passed away only two days before Christmas in 1985 after a battle with cancer. The rest of my grandparents have since left this earth and that sometimes throws an air of somberness on the holiday gatherings. But the stories of our times together are rich and vibrant and far outweigh the sorrow from the loss.

Christmas and the outdoors are deeply intertwined in our family. They go hand in hand, just like duck and dressing or mashed potatoes and gravy. During the Christmas season quotes from Christmas movies like the “Grinch” and “Christmas Vacation” fly almost as often as duck feathers. The two separate entities of the outdoors and the holidays share different spaces but are locked together by traditions, and for that I am truly thankful.

As the great green orator Mr. Grinch says, “Maybe Christmas doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas means a little bit more.” And so it does. The beauty of Christmas comes from family, friends and memories which can be enhanced with some time outdoors. Whether it be hunting, fishing, hiking, or other activities, get outside and make some memories with your family this holiday season. Merry Christmas from our family and I hope for God’s richest blessings on you and yours as we wind down 2020. Spend some time enjoying God’s great creation and I hope to see you out there!



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17th Annual Shrimp Shak



On November 6, St. Mary's Catholic School and Preschool hosted their 17th Annual Shrimp Shak fundraiser. Though it looked a little different this year, the shrimp, corn and red beans pleased the eager supporters. A drive-through was set up in the parking lot and more than 500 meals were passed through the windows.



Bryce Anderson delivers meal to Jennifer



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Dash for Trash



On November 7, the West End Neighborhood Association held a “Dash for Trash” neighborhood cleanup. Teams of two to four dashed about the neighborhood filling trash bags with litter. Upon return to the base, bags were weighed and the groups departed again. Jonesboro Mayor Harold Perrin dropped by to congratulate the winning team and thank participants for helping keep their neighborhood clean.

To the left: Jaedyn Dowdy and Mona Johnson



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Teamwork

BY JENNY BROWN

Organized sports teach valuable lessons such as working as a team, overcoming loss, and winning with grace. However, recently, not only are players learning life lessons but the coaches are also learning some things about overcoming new obstacles.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, typical recreational sports look very different. Tryouts have been affected, practice with social distancing has been an adjustment, and trying to schedule games has been a feat. Wearing a mask at all times while participating in physical activity has also been a challenge.

Some local coaches have weighed in on how they are managing coaching during a pandemic. Oak Grove Middle School Coach, Kelly Stewart said the thing she misses most is watching the girls learn to build social skills. Normal interactions such as high-fiving, shaking hands with

the opposing team, and sitting together on the bench are not allowed due to social distancing.

Another challenge is the restriction on how many family members are allowed to come and watch their team member(s) play. Social distancing in the stands means fewer spectators can watch. Coach Stewart says her players have been wonderful about following the rules because they know if they don't follow them, they can't play. The girls want to stay on the court.

Coach Jacob Cook from Jonesboro also spoke about his experiences coaching a girls youth traveling soccer team, Arkansas Revolution. He started coaching because his daughter wanted to play on a competitive traveling team, and he's been coaching for about two years. Tryouts were difficult because they were in the summer, just when the kids were getting allowed back into sports.

It is difficult to gauge a child's skill level when others aren't allowed to be close to them. He said when he had his first tryout, he wasn't sure if anyone would show up. Some changes have become second nature for them now, including pre-game temperature checks and keeping a distance. He says that coaching the girls is still the same in many ways. They are a great group of girls, and he loves the excitement in their faces when they run onto the field with something new to share with him about their week. He – no doubt – will always have someone ask at a game, "Coach, who is on my team?" or "Coach, who won?!" Another thing that hasn't changed are his expectations: "Have fun, learn, and do your best!"

Things have not only changed for youth teams. Jesse Duvall, ASU Cross Country and Distance coach, says they have changed some for adult competitors, as well.

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Coach Duvall is currently in his fourth year of collegiate coaching, and the situation we are in with COVID is unlike anything he has had to face thus far. Duvall said, "Thankfully, we are a part of the Sun Belt Conference, and they have gone above and beyond concerning student-athletes' safety and still allowing them to have a season."

The teams are still continuing to follow protocols put into place by the NCAA, the Sun Belt Conference, and Arkansas State University, which have been provided and shared by public health authorities, the state of Arkansas, and appropriate government agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Goals haven't changed, though. The women's team still worked hard to defend its title, the Sun Belt Conference Cross Country Champions – and succeeded. The men's team also strove to build upon the success of its second place finish a year ago.

Teamwork, in itself, is a skill built by competitive sports, but during this time in our lives, the COVID pandemic is teaching us a whole new level of teamwork, flexibility, and staying healthy.

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BY RICHARD BRUMMETT



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Some stories just get better with age and as far as Larry and Kayla Ring are concerned, their habit of sharing the Christmas story in an interesting way will always be a family favorite.

“Several years ago, like 45 maybe, we started our Christmas celebration on Christmas Eve but before we opened gifts we read the Nativity scene in Luke 2,” Larry said. “Then, later on, Kayla had this little presentation box and inside it were more little boxes all aimed at explaining ‘What God Wants For Christmas.’ There was something new in each box – an angel or Mary or Joseph – and at the start, the Nativity scene was empty.

“By the end, it was full; with each little box opened, Kayla read a story or poem that went along with it and then had placed the character into the scene. Our kids and grandkids go through the story every year. The last box opened has a mirror in it, because

the message is what God wants for Christmas is you.”

Theirs is a family tradition that will never grow old. Larry said the Christmas box opening and reading has been going on for 14 years now. Those who once enjoyed the presentation as children now have children of their own and are excited to see them take part in the story-telling, just as they did years before.

“We’ve done it for so many years now and have passed it down,” Larry said. “Our daughter was having our first grandchild years ago – I believe she was in Oregon at the time -- and she had to get on the phone to hear Daddy read the Christmas story; she had to hear it. The kids and grandkids love doing it. It’s one way to make it clear to kids – and to adults– that it’s not about us. It’s not at all about us.”

He said the story and message are the same every year, a procession of

Christmas story characters coming out of the boxes and taking their rightful places in the Nativity scene, but the reaction is always precious.

“Nearly all the characters of the Christmas story ... angels, Mary, Joseph, the Christ child, shepherds ... every basic character ... the Magi. Each box has a poem kind of directed at the telling of the story and at the end each character is where it belongs in the tale for all of us to see. It’s a neat way to tell the story of Jesus, to relive it and to appreciate it.

“I look forward to it every bit as much as the children do, because it’s a pretty good story, you know.”

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The Same But Different

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Some traditions look the same year after year, but just as we change and grow, most traditions change and grow, too. Such is the case with Downtown Paragould’s previously known “Holiday Traditions” which will adjust this year to serve more people – a blessing and also a necessity to be able to offer some returning staple traditions considering current guidelines.

This December, Main Street Paragould presents Enchanting Evenings. Instead of one night to celebrate, the event series will take place each Thursday evening and will include merchants staying open later, new lights, and a new large Christmas tree. Some local favorites will be back, too, including the horse-drawn carriage rides.

This year, thanks to the Paragould A&P Commission and downtown merchants, carriage rides will be free.

“We had to reimagine how to do things,” said Main Street Paragould Director, Gina Jarrett. “We still want people down here, we just can’t have them all within four hours.”

Because the lights will be on, merchants will stay open later and the carriages will be out every Thursday so visitors can enjoy the festivities they love on the day that works best for them. Touchless hand sanitizer and free masks will also be provided.

“We are doing everything we can to keep everyone safe,” Gina shared.



The Paragould High School band is set to perform on the evening of December 3 and the Greene County Tech Band is scheduled for December 10. The Collins Theatre will have people out in costumes reading Christmas stories, and hot cocoa and popcorn will be available.

“We didn’t want to get away from things that have become family traditions,” Gina said. “Instead of having so many people in the space on one evening, we just decided to spread it out.”

More days, more fun, in our opinion. What began as a challenge may be a sign of more good things to come.

Enchanting Evenings is made possible with the help from the Paragould A&P Commission.



For more information see Page 43.

You can also visit exploremornea.com for regular event information.

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Happy Holidays!

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The Tradition Must Go On

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Something about traditions make us feel safe and happy. Perhaps it's the sense of nostalgia stirred up, or maybe the act of doing something familiar because it has always been done. They often bring a smile to our faces or perhaps a roll of the eyes.

Game night on Christmas Eve? Smile. All the competitive smack talk before the game begins? Eyeroll.

The familiar baked good Grandma makes every single year and it is always just as good as you remember? Smile.

Setting cookies and milk out even though everyone in the house knows who's going to eat it? Eyeroll.

Mom orders you to come help decorate the tree even though you're a grown adult? Smile. And eyeroll.

Some traditions are honored in the confines of our own homes and others are community events. One such community tradition's plans which were altered due to COVID would have celebrated 73 years this year.

Despite the setback, though, those who make the Jonesboro Christmas Parade a family tradition year after year still have hope of keeping the spirit alive – if altering plans only a little.

Hosted annually by the Jonesboro Jaycees, a group of local citizens who volunteer their time and energy into giving back to the community, the 2020 parade was canceled before alternative plans were officially made.



Photo taken in the 1950s. Courtesy of the Craighead Jonesboro Public Library. Provided by the Jonesboro Regional Chamber of Commerce for the TIMELINE Project.





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"Like most organizations this year, the Jaycees' board was forced to take a tough look at the realistic ability to continue the parade in a way that keeps our community members safe from the pandemic that has been rapidly rising in our area," said Hilary Trickey, the External VP for the Jaycees and the 2020 Parade Chair. "The parade draws hundreds and hundreds of spectators and participants each year. The ability to keep spectators socially distant while adhering to all Arkansas Department of Health guidelines proved to be near impossible. Therefore, the Jaycees board decided to err on the side of caution and cancel a long-standing tradition. This decision was not one that wanted to be made or was easy. The Jonesboro Parade serves as a great

event to kick off the holiday season for our area, but it serves as a fundraiser to further efforts to distribute toys and food to families in need during the holidays. However, as members of this community ourselves, the health and wellbeing of the citizens here are our main priority."

Hilary, the Jaycees and all of Jonesboro were in for a pleasant surprise, though, when community member Adam Sartin called with a solution: a reverse parade.

"Adam had heard the news and wanted to help," Hilary said. "He graciously offered his resources through Christmas at the Park to allow us to have a modified but safe parade for the city of Jonesboro."

This year the parade will take place at Christmas at the Park on December 3. Spectators will be able to enjoy the lights through the park as well as enjoy the floats built by locals.

Admission will be waived for the evening of December 3, but attendees are asked to consider making a donation upon entering to help raise money for the Jaycees Christmas for Kids project. The Christmas for Kids project helps provide gifts and food to families in need in the area every year.

"We truly have a great support system in our community," Hilary said.

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December 3rd, 10th & 17th
Enchanting Nights
Downtown Paragould
4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.



January 7th
Jeff and Sheri Easter
The Collins Theatre
7:00 p.m.

A complete listing of all Downtown events can be found under "Events" at downtownparagould.com or facebook.com/oneandonlydowntown/events.

Some Things Change, Some Don't

BY CAITLIN LAFARLETTE



Keith and MaryJo Cooper joined the Paragould Christmas parade lineup over 15 years ago with simply decorated motorcycles and candy to pass out. Now, they have continued the tradition but added on many bells and whistles to entertain the public.

When the Gold Wing Road Riders decided to join the parade, the Coopers dressed their bikes up and tossed out candy. Then one year, MaryJo decided to order a Frosty the Snowman costume.

"The little kids and even the big kids were shouting, 'Frosty! Hi Frosty! Merry Christmas, Frosty!'" she said. She told her husband it was the best \$40 she ever spent, and she still wears the costume to every parade they participate in. The couple continues to come back for the children.

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Lights of Paragould will be a DRIVE-THRU family experience with a mixture of community-built and commercial displays. Contact us regarding entries. All profits from the event will be donated to the Greene County Foster Parents Association.

Lights of Paragould

December 7th - 12th 6p-9p @ the Greene County Fair Grounds





"It makes us happy," she added.

While their first parade was to promote their organization, Keith said they return each year because they "enjoy the young, small kids and the older people who really like to look at the bikes, but mostly the young ones."

The Coopers' granddaughter, Caitlyn Morrow, said when they started the parade, their bikes had some tinsel and a few stuffed animals. That has changed over the years.

"They go all out with lights, decorations, displays, stuffed animals," Morrow said. "They put quite a bit of hard work into dressing up their bikes, cleaning them and making them look nice and presentable for the parade."

Morrow added that while she doesn't ride bikes, she hopes the Gold Wing Road Riders continue joining the parades since her grandparents helped start the tradition.

"Maybe one day I'll inherit the Frosty costume and find a way to ride in the parade to keep waving at all the kids," she said.

The Coopers spread their Christmas joy beyond Paragould, too. One year they participated in 11 parades and have traveled to Jonesboro, Swifton, Brookland, Newport, Bono, Lake City, Monette and Cash.

"We try to go to the hometowns of our members so we can represent," MaryJo said, adding that they try to get involved in as many as possible to keep the tradition of parades going.

Over time the couple has seen the number of parade goers grow, and their own organization began decorating its bikes more. The one thing that hasn't changed, however, is the excitement from children when they see Frosty, and the happiness that brings the Coopers.

"The little kids get so much enjoyment out of it we just want to keep repeating it," Keith said. "It brings joy to them and to us."



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Where to find Christmas Spirit in NEA

BY TAYLOR DICKINSON

Christmas is such a fabulous time of year. The sounds, the lights, baking with family and friends on the weekends and bingeing Christmas movies: It's a season that can't be beat! Northeast Arkansas has so much to offer, too, during the holiday season. Open houses, parades, and Christmas day trips are sure to entertain many.



(REVERSE) PARADES

This year, Jonesboro and Paragould are both getting creative and holding drive-thru parades. There are a couple of options on the calendar. The Paragould Christmas Parade will be known as the "Lights of Paragould" this year, located at the Greene County Fair Grounds from December 7-12. More info on page 32. The Jonesboro Parade will take place on December 3 from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. It will be hosted at Joe Mack Campbell Park this year to provide more room for community attendance.

CHRISTMAS TREE FARMS

Another favorite Christmas activity for many is visiting the local Christmas Tree Farms. There are multiple places in NEA that light up with Christmas cheer each year. The Christmas Tree Plantation has a warm fire pit and hot cocoa that can warm you up on any cold winter's night. Crow's Nest Farms will be selling trees in Downtown Paragould this year, details outlined in a November story which you can read online at premiere-magazine.com.



DOWNTOWN ACTIVITIES

Downtown strips always hold their own character that set them apart from the rest of the city, but during the holidays they seem to shine even brighter. Tree lighting ceremonies and local traditions make them the place to be for families and individuals of all ages. Enchanting Nights is one event in particular already on Downtown Paragould's calendar. They will be offering horse drawn carriages, visits with Santa, extended shopping hours and more.



More information about Enchanting Evenings on Page 26 and Page 43.



Downtown Jonesboro is hosting Joy Fest and opening night, December 5, will begin with a holiday-themed Broadway concert from the Link Theatre Company, featuring Matt Cavenaugh and Jenny Powers among other NEA talents at 5 p.m. Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony takes place at 5:30 p.m. Other Christmas entertainment includes a Cory Jackson Acoustic Christmas Concert and White Christmas presented on the big screen.



OTHER IDEAS

If you're looking for a true Christmas day trip in NEA to help you get into the Christmas spirit, try getting FREE tickets to the largest Christmas warehouse in the area. Guess and Company, in Des Arc, has available time slots most days through Christmas. Reserve your free slot online and get two hours to shop all of the holiday you can imagine.



For more on Christmas activities in the area, be sure to follow Explore MOR NEA on Instagram and Facebook or check out the community calendar for a routinely updated list of what's happening in Northeast Arkansas:

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On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me ... 10 things that I probably will never use and definitely didn't need!

All Christmas carols and joking aside, the feeling that we all have in our chests during the Christmas season is something that needs no explanation. We all know the feeling we get being surrounded by family, the lights, the trees, the sweaters and scarves, the drinks, the community, the songs, the colder weather, and the family traditions. Most of us remember the feeling of being a child waking up on Christmas morning with anticipation to quickly open the boxes that Santa had left for us the night before. Each of us has our own idea of Christmas and what it means to us as individuals, but one central idea that ties us all together in our holiday spirit is what Christmas has been advertised to be: a time of giving.

From advertisements starting as early as September, gift giving at Christmas is a staple. We wait for the best deals on Amazon, fight crowds in the middle of the night to get 20 percent off of our purchases, and make sure each gift is wrapped and given to those we love. Most of us think of gift giving in these terms, but what we truly need (especially after the year 2020 has been) is a different type of gift: the gift of time, kindness, love, listening, empathy, compassion, advice, sharing, and conversation. These are the things you don't wait in line for, don't spend money on, and don't have to wrap, but they are the most important gifts of all and the gifts society is craving and needing.



In the spirit of the giving season, try to rethink what you are giving to the people in your lives. This season, let's shift our idea of a gift to something less materialistic and more intrinsic.

Gift ideas you don't have to spend money on and that aren't a material item include: calling or texting a friend to ask how they are; listening to someone talk about how they are doing; simply letting someone know how important they are to you; telling someone the things you love about them; having conversations that will grow your relationship (even if they are hard ones); if you're a singer, ring someone's doorbell and carol to them from more than six feet away; if you are a writer, write a letter to a loved one; if you have a little extra money, Venmo or Paypal a friend to pay for their cup of coffee; if you're a baker, bake someone some Christmas cookies and leave them at their door; if you disagree with someone, message them to have a constructive conversation with them; if someone cuts you off while

driving or does something to upset you, show them kindness anyway.

Another important gift you can give during this time of year is quality time with the person you have the most important relationship with: yourself. Gifts you can give to yourself include: scheduling time in your day for creativity; scheduling in quiet time; spending time in nature; cooking for yourself; taking an exercise or yoga class online; saying no to things that do not serve you; letting go of the idea of always pleasing others.

2020 has forced us to look at what is really important in our lives. Christmas gift giving does not have to be a candle, a gift card, clothing, or a materialistic item at all. The spirit of gift giving comes intrinsically from your heart, and the true gift we can never get back is time with loved ones and the relationship we had to them, as well as the relationship we have with ourselves. Shift your perspective on giving. What gift can you give this season that is priceless?

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Project Paragould Photo Walk Winner

Project Paragould, a organization with a mission to encourage community and provide more things to do in Paragould, invited community members to participate in a Photo Walk Contest by submitting photos that fell into one of four categories: Looking Up, Where I Tread, Follow the Lines or Broken.

Knight Productions narrowed down winners for each category and chose an overall winner who submitted the photo to the right.



"I felt like out of all the options it was the most fitting," said Nathan Knight with Knight Productions of the winning photo. "It represents real life, and though it's broken, it can be fixed. It's also an extremely clean and crisp photo."

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Making a Difference Year After Year

BY TAYLOR DICKINSON

Every year, families in NEA enjoy helping others. Community comes together and often goes above and beyond helping other families have a Christmas they would otherwise not be able to experience. One organization, which stems from the Samaritan's Purse, is Operation Christmas Child.

National collection week this year took place from November 16-23. Churches in NEA which helped make collections possible include Brown's Chapel Baptist

Church of Paragould and Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro – both heavily involved in collecting boxes this year. Many boxes are now in transit to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, traveling on a DC-8, which also holds 10 tons of medical supplies, and translators, and a three-cockpit crew.

Sammy Burton, a volunteer from Brown's Chapel, realized after moving there the congregation did not take part in Operation Christmas Child and she was

eager to get the organization introduced to the members. After Sammy's first mission trip to Nicaragua in 2012, she developed a passion for helping others in any way she could. "I decided it was something I needed to do, and some had not heard of the organization and everyone had been so receptive to it. The excitement grew and everyone was so generous and helpful. In turn, this will now be an annual event for Brown's Chapel Baptist Church. I was the one who truly received the blessing," Sammy stated.

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Sammy Burton

Community Participant and Michelle Shannon



Reverend Dale, Susie Noe and Sammy Burton

The drop off in NEA, Central Baptist Church, provided drop off for seven counties in the area. Michelle Shannon, the Pre-K Director, has been involved with the program for four years now. Last year, the church received roughly 10,000 boxes from churches all over NEA to ship off, adding to the 10.5 million boxes that are received on average from the U.S.

"It's not only the gift, it's the Gospel," Michelle stated. Michelle's favorite

memory of Operation Christmas Child was when one of the church members, who was adopted from Ukraine, came to her and told her about the experience of receiving a box from the program. After that moment, she related to the program on such a deeper level and truly developed a love for the organization.

If you're looking to get involved, reach out to either church and they will welcome you and your boxes with open arms!



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PJs and the Christmas Story A Family Tradition

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT



Lots of families have Christmas traditions that have stood the test of time, many aimed at adding excitement to the moment for younger children. One Paragould family has a couple of rituals that have come to be expected and cherished at the same time, even though there are no longer little ones in the home.

James (Jimbo) Clayton, his wife Tammie, and daughters Tristin and Jaime have always pointed their celebration in two directions -- the expected gifts and the true meaning of the day -- while embracing the moment as a family. A lighthearted part of the annual gathering around the family tree has been for the girls to receive new matching pajamas, an act that was cute when they were young but even cuter as they grew into young adults.

"We get to open one present on Christmas Eve," said Tristin, now 28, "so that is usually our new pajamas, unless we get them early."

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Younger sister Jaime, 24, said, "I was always so excited to get new pajamas and I would always get to open them on Christmas Eve so that I could wear them on Christmas morning. Last Christmas I even ordered bandannas so all of the dogs would match and I plan to keep doing so because dogs are part of the family too!"

Again, fun for all to see but the true tradition always followed on Christmas morning when Jimbo pulled out his Bible and sat his family down for the reading of the story so important to the day. "The reading of the Christmas story is something Tammie and I started years ago," he said. "If I remember correctly, Tammie suggested it one Christmas morning after all the presents had been opened. I thought it was a great idea so I got my Bible and opened it up to Luke 2 and read from verse 1 to verse 20. The story of Jesus' birth is also found in Matthew and most years I would read both to them, but I always read from Luke because I believed it gave a more detailed account of Christ's birth."

He said he and Tammie "always wanted the girls, especially while they were young, to know the true meaning of Christmas. From a very young age they knew they would always get 'neat stuff'

for Christmas, but more importantly that it was Jesus' birthday and that He was the greatest gift of all. My wife and I have always believed that teaching our children about our Lord was our primary job and responsibility above all else, not the pastor's job or the Sunday School teacher's job, although we as a family have been involved in church since before the girls were born. I with all my heart believe that it is of vital importance that our children see Christ in us at a very young age and if not a very young age, then today. It's never too late, because with God, all things are possible."

The girls get it, understanding the importance of the message and the moment.

"The reading of the Christmas story was something our parents started doing with us when we were young," Tristin recalls. "We would finish opening presents and then Dad would get out his Bible and read it to remind us what Christmas is really about, the birth of our savior! We have been reading the Christmas story after opening presents ever since I can remember. I am very thankful to have been raised in a Christian home where the importance of CHRISTmas was taught from a very

young age, because there is no better gift than Jesus!"

Jaime agrees: "Sure the gifts and shiny things are nice, but my parents always wanted us to know the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ. Dad has read the Christmas story from the Gospels on Christmas morning for as long as I can remember. He always reads it in the living room right after we open our gifts, just the four of us. I am so thankful that through all of the hustle and bustle that my parents took the time out to teach my sister and I WHY we really celebrate Christmas and that it isn't about gifts and Santa Claus. Although gifts and Santa Claus are great, the birth of our Savior is so much greater and it is the reason we celebrate."

Having enacted the scene for about 20 years now, Jimbo said he gets satisfaction knowing it remains an important part of the celebration for his entire family. "I can remember on Christmas morning," he said, "a couple of times the girls bringing me my Bible and saying, 'Read the Christmas story to us,' in which I always thought, 'Yeah, this is the good stuff right here. Thank you, Lord.'"

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John J. Pershing VA Medical Center Accepts Donation



The John J. Pershing VA Medical Center in Poplar Bluff accepted a large donation delivered by Robert Wake, co-founder and CEO of the Wake Foundation. The donation consisted of safety equipment and funding to support several programs the VA has in place to benefit veterans in need.

“Mr. Wake dropped by the medical center saying he wanted to help out his fellow veterans and our staff who serve them,” said VA Voluntary Services Chief, Dale Garrett. “And, wow! Help, he did! He brought in about 500 cloth face masks, 200 disposable face shields, and a check for \$1,500 to support our Wall of Valor, Care and Share, and monthly Veterans Healthy Food pantry.”

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Have a Greener

Christmas This Year

BY BETHANY GALLIMORE

The holiday season is known for its magic: From brightly-lit houses and decorated trees to festive presents and family meals, we connect the spirit of celebration to these experiences. When considering how to take those treasured traditions into an environmentally-conscious future, a few simple steps can help.



Gift With Purpose

The holidays wouldn't feel the same without gifts, but what can we do to keep gifting green? Holland LeDelia, owner of Eastern Livity and member of the Jonesboro Chamber Green Business Committee, uses a specific strategy when considering potential gifts: "I try to see the life cycle of that product," she said. "What happens to it when I'm finished with it? Does it compost, does it break down, can I pass it down or donate it, or ultimately, is it going to end up in the landfill? That really influences the way I purchase things now." To help make gift-giving a more environmentally-aware practice, consider gifts that reflect the receiver's interests, use sustainable packaging, and are of lasting quality.

Shop Sustainably

Holiday shopping can mean hauling home dozens of plastic bags, but that doesn't have to be the case, says Plant Cartel owner Jen Nobles. Nobles, who practices low-waste and eco-conscious habits in both home and business, recommends a simple strategy: "Bring your bags as often as you can," she said. "Single-use plastics are a huge problem. If you will accept a bag, try to make sure it's one that's paper." Reusable bags can even celebrate the holiday season: If you know you tend to shop more during the holidays, invest in quality bags that you'll be excited to return to year after year.

Collapse the Cardboard

Online shopping is in full swing this year as more people stay inside and avoid the bustle of crowded stores. For those ordering online, getting that cardboard box can be not just helpful packaging, but an opportunity for greener living as well. "There are so many uses for cardboard," said Brandi Hodges, a member of the Jonesboro Beautification Commission and the public relations manager for the Jonesboro Public Library. Hodges, who makes recycling a family priority, repurposes cardboard as a base layer for her garden, uses sections for help in furniture refinishing, and recommends even using a cardboard box to begin a composting pile. At the end of its life cycle, cardboard can also be recycled, making it one of the easiest products to use, reuse, and revert to an eco-conscious form.



Create a Low-impact Meal

Although holiday dinners may look a bit smaller this year, smarter choices with food selection and serving strategies can still make big environmental impact. When it comes to serving up the Christmas or New Years' dinner, reduce red meat and pull out the high-quality dinnerware, says LeDelia. "This is the time to bring out the China!" she said, encouraging others to continue treating the holidays as special celebrations. Reducing single-use paper and plastics extends to more casual gatherings, too: "If you end up eating out, find those places that have the good compostable, recyclable, biodegradable take-out boxes," she advises. As for leftovers of that delicious, green-conscious meal? Savor what you can, then consider composting remaining plant-based products.



Reduce Gift Wrapping

Once we've found that purposeful, sustainable gift, presenting it becomes the next challenge. LeDelia knows one of the most joyful parts of the holidays can be unwrapping that gift, and she has solutions for those who'd like to see the wrapping mean as much as the gift. "Everyone loves unwrapping gifts! Don't get rid of the wrapping, just think of better ways to do it," she advises.

Simply reusing bows, bags, and tissue multiple seasons can drastically reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills. In addition, changing the way we wrap gifts can create more opportunities for creativity. Instead of single-use paper wrapping, experiment with fabric, burlap, reused paper, or handmade packaging. "Paint, stamp, decorate, make that a part of the gift-giving process as well," LeDelia suggests. "Then, you're also giving art to your loved one on top of the physical gift."

Choose Natural Décor

Whether a tree, a wreath, or a centerpiece, using natural décor can provide welcoming indoor greenery while reducing waste. Natural trees are the environmentally-aware and meaningful choice for Kimberly Dale, owner of the Crow's Nest Farms in Paragould: "The smell really is appealing to me; I love the smell of a real Christmas tree," she said. "Maybe it's a nostalgic thing, maybe it's bringing the outdoors inside."

The Crow's Nest website highlights the environmental benefits of selecting real trees and wreaths during the holiday season. While growing, these pines, firs, and spruces produce clean oxygen and support natural ecosystems, including providing shelter for wildlife. After harvesting and use, a natural tree will easily decompose, which presents a direct contrast to the centuries-long impact that the plastic and metal in many artificial trees can create. With any artificial décor that is used, Dale strongly encourages recycling: "We need you to recycle; everything needs to go back into the cycle and not leave a footprint here in Arkansas," she said.



Conserve Electricity Use

Between lights, heating, and appliances, holiday-season energy use can be high. Monty Williams, vice president of marketing and communications for Craighead County Electric Cooperative, recommends a few simple strategies to save energy this winter. For those whose holidays don't truly start until the outdoor lights twinkle on, try to find LED and solar options, he says. Then, use a timer whenever possible: "You don't need the lights to run all night; have them run 4-5 hours in the evening then shut off," Williams advises. Smarter lighting, coupled with year-round strategies like regularly changing air filters and using thermostats wisely, can make the holidays greener and even more affordable.



Greener choices are everywhere this season, and it's no surprise more NEA residents are stepping up to show off their sustainable practices. Whether your holiday season reduces energy use, repurposes products, or reconsiders the way it uses disposable products, a few steps can make sure your holidays are a sustainable celebration.

Hold onto the memories of today - forever.



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Amy Reeves Photography







Project Warm *Meets* Project Paragould

Project Paragould and Project Warm are teaming up to provide coats for those in need in Greene County.

Project Warm, a non-profit founded by Bethany Davis, seeks to distribute coats to those in need by tying cold weather garments to trees and light poles so they are easily accessible to those who might need them. Launched in Jonesboro, the organization is excited to collaborate with Project Paragould in the “Enchanting

Nights” series to expand the programs’ reach.

On December 10th from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., gently used/new heavy coats, scarves, beanies, mittens and gloves, will be collected at Centennial Park in Downtown Paragould. Community members are also invited to write a note for coat recipients during the outdoor event.

Stop by to donate a coat or write a note to

help Project Warm spread positivity and warmth through the city of Paragould.

“In our town we cross paths with so many on a daily basis,” said Nate Archibald with Project Paragould. “Take this simple opportunity to make sure your ‘neighbor’ has a warm coat this winter.”

Coats will be distributed on December 20th. Learn more about Project Warm in the January 2020 issue of Premiere Magazine.





Coat Drop-off

December 10th

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Tradition of Treating



Senior Center cook, Theresa Bearden-Townsend, loves to spoil the B.E.E.S.

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

It's easy to understand why the Senior B.E.E.S. love and appreciate Theresa Bearden-Townsend. Cooking is in Theresa's job description, but everything else she does to go above and beyond makes Theresa a treasured gem for all who experience her generosity and creativity.

"One of the things that is so special about Theresa," B.E.E.S. Director Carol Fleszar shared, "is that she is so thoughtful."

Because different visitors have different dietary needs, catering to them all could be a chore, but for Theresa it's just part of taking care of others and she does it in a way that makes sure each individual is thought of. If they can't have a certain item or even simply don't like something, Theresa takes note and makes sure to provide alternatives. It's the care and attentiveness to these details that others appreciate, and it's also what Theresa loves most: the day-to-day interactions with those she aims to please.

"She asks people what they think, and when they tell her she tries to add or take away and make it better for everyone. She always tries to adjust," Carol said. "She makes each person feel like she's cooking just for them. She really does."



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Cooking and serving has become a family affair for Theresa, who first tended to her love for preparing food after watching her grandma. These days, Theresa's sons and grandkids have each spent time at the Senior B.E.E.S. center helping prepare food for special occasions, serve and clean up.

"All of my grandchildren have been here at one time or another," Theresa said with a smile.

One Fourth of July, Theresa's sons came and brought a BBQ grill to prepare grilled chicken, corn on the cob and baked beans ... a true celebration of the summer holiday.

Cooking and serving seem to be a family tradition for Theresa and her kids, to be sure, but another tradition created especially for the B.E.E.S. family includes Theresa's tasty and creative treats for the holidays.

One year the Halloween goody featured a crazy bark, and for Easter one Spring a tasty orange cookie with a special glaze. This past Halloween, cupcakes and spooky themed add-ons rolled out on a decorated cart.

"Theresa is so thoughtful and creative and a good cook," Thelma Stanfill said in a comment on a Senior B.E.E.S. Facebook post featuring Theresa's latest goodie masterpiece for Halloween.

All of the Senior B.E.E.S. can likely tell you of Theresa's kindness and her delicious food. Her position allows her to combine her love for taking care of people and cooking into one special treat.



Happy Holidays from Chateau on the Ridge!



Thank you for your cooperation and care during these trying times.



When times change, so do we. Residents at Chateau on the Ridge enjoy frequent video visits with loved ones through Face-time, Zoom, and Skype.



During a time when hands-on activities aren't always feasible, Chateau residents enjoy the 'feet-on' option of playing a tune on our foot piano.

Window visits with cherished friends and family members are our favorite times of the day!



Residents and staff have been busy sewing masks for all! A talented Chateau resident stitched and embroidered this one by hand, using fabric from an old flour sack.

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Love Bears All Things

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT

An act of love designed to help little ones through difficult times hasn't been canceled, it's just been put on "paws."

Frances York of Paragould has been one of the leaders of a group of women from 7th & Mueller Church of Christ who donate their time and sewing skills to produce stuffed bears, which they have then donated to entities like Arkansas Methodist Medical Center and the local police department in hopes they will share them with young people to help ease the fears of traumatic situations.

"It started with the Ladies Class that met on Tuesdays at the church," Frances said. "We started making them to give away and I think it was the Auxiliary at the hospital that was handing them out. Six



or seven of the Senior women do it. Over a period of time, some had to quit due to health reasons. It died down, then started up again for a number of years. I took some up there to the hospital in about the spring but haven't taken any since.

"We moved, and that has taken a lot of time," she said, explaining the temporary pause in the project, "and others had to leave us for various reasons. I am going to start back up. I like to do it through the winter; I have nothing to do and it helps pass the time. I have one volunteer already and I think I can get more to get us going again."

When the ladies assemble to produce the bears, each has her particular assignment. Calico fabric is either purchased or donated and patterns cut out for assembly. From

there, some paint, some stuff, some stitch, but it all comes together -- just as the ladies do -- to produce something worthwhile. A sticker sewn on the back proclaims, "Love Bears All Things," then provides the 7th & Mueller name and phone number.

"We met about once a month at the church," Frances said. "I painted most of the faces. One woman who helped me paint had to stop because she had arthritis in both hands. So I cut out the patterns and painted the faces and someone else would put on the labels and some others would stuff. Everyone had their own thing they did, which makes it a lot easier when you're only doing one part. To do a whole bear by yourself takes a long time. You have the front and the back and the ribbon and the stuffing. It all comes together from a group effort. I can make four bears out of



3/4 of a yard of material.

"It was maybe 20 years ago when we started making them; we've done thousands. A lot were cartoon characters and a lot of them were softball or baseball or Cardinals stuff. We tried to think of what kids would like."

That's the goal of the entire project: to make something that will provide comfort to a child, maybe even elicit a smile, and hopefully take their minds off whatever they're going through at the time. Police officers have been known to pull one out and hand it to a youngster at the scene of a wreck and hospital workers have relied on the bears to help assuage the fears of little ones facing a needle.

"We've heard all kinds of good stories over the years," Frances said. "We had a little girl from our church who had to have some blood work done like on a Sunday afternoon at the hospital. Her mother said she just cried and cried and they tried to stick her at least three times. They gave her a bear and it was Peppa Pig, her favorite, and she hushed right up and they took her blood and she didn't even know when they did it."

For Frances, the work connected to project is more like a hobby than a chore. She sewed her first dress when she was 10 and says she's "painted for a number of years. It's all something I enjoy, so it's not really work. And the bears mean so much to the little ones. I gave my great-grandson at Cape Girardeau one when he was very young and he's 3 now and he still sleeps with it all the time. It's a good thing we're doing."

Merry Christmas!

May your loved ones know the joy of independence,
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Honors With Ornaments

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Someone, somewhere, is grateful for the good you do in the world. The ornaments crafted by the Honors with Ornament Project send that message to first responders around Northeast Arkansas and beyond.

Home Instead Senior Care staff, caregivers, and seniors began making ornaments for area first responders in 2017. Three years later, despite COVID, director of the project Lynissa Davis hopes to send out 1,500 ornaments this year. Numbers are restricted for the “ornament parties,” masks are worn, and the ornaments will sit for two weeks prior to delivery out of an abundance of caution, but one way or another, Lynissa and her helpers are determined to let the ornament recipients know they appreciated.

This year the operation garnered over 45,000 beads to build the ornaments.



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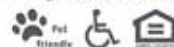
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"We make ornaments to give to first responders in thanks for their service. We branched out some last year and honored some officers in Southern Illinois, where I moved here from. But the last two years we have honored JPD, JFD, Bay police and fire departments," Lynissa elaborated to explain where the hundreds of ornaments go. "Last year we added Benton and West City, Illinois, police departments, Poinsett County Sheriff's Department, Craighead County Sheriff's Department, Greene County Sheriff's Department, Arkansas State Troopers out of Jonesboro, Harrisburg Fire Department, Paragould Fire Department, Emerson's Ambulance Service, and a few of Medic One Ambulance crews that happened to be working on Christmas Eve. This year we are adding all of Medic One Ambulance Service, Trumann Police and Fire departments, and ASU Police Department here in Arkansas. We are also adding departments in Southern Illinois as well. Christopher PD and FD, DuQuoin PD and FD, Pinckneyville PD and FD, Perry County Sheriff's Department and Illinois State Police out of DuQuoin, Illinois."

Many volunteers help provide the supplies or funds to buy the supplies, and Lynissa even began a small business to help fundraise for the project.

"This is something that has become near and dear to my heart," Lynissa shared. "We are all so grateful for the police and fire departments as well as ambulance services that take care of our communities and our clients here at Home Instead."

It likely means a lot to those who receive the ornaments, but it also means a great deal to those who participate in making them.

"It means a lot," said Vickie Nichols, a two-time volunteer with the Honors with Ornament Project. "They're helping other people, we're able to do something good for them. We all need to be cheered up sometimes. It's a small way to show we all care."




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- Between the Dashes - Billie Haynes



Remembering Billie Haynes and the impact she had on the Senior B.E.E.S. Bean Bag Baseball Team



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The Senior B.E.E.S. Baseball Team reps its new shirts honoring their late, beloved coach.

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Billie Haynes loved bean bag baseball, and the Senior B.E.E.S. Stingers – who she coached to winning a state championship – loved Billie Haynes.

“She had such a way of making people want to do good and please her, and make her happy,” Director Carol Fleszar said of the late Billie.

For nearly as long as Carol has been working at the Senior Center, ten years, she said Billie coached the team and in the early days there were only a handful of participants.

These days, when things are “normal” anyway, forty or more participants are often involved.

“It is just a lot of fun,” Carol said. “There

are so many reasons why it’s a good thing, – it’s exercise and gets them up and moving – but the camaraderie is absolutely amazing. They have so much fun together. It is one of the hottest things we have going at the center.”

Carol said the success is in large part to Billie and the energy she brought to the game.

“She loved beanbag baseball. She was a great coach. She was encouraging. But they knew she meant business,” Carol shared with a chuckle. “They all had so much respect for her.”

In 2018, Billie’s leadership resulted in a first runner-up title at the state tournament. In 2019, the team took home the first-place trophy and though Billie was unable to

make it for medical reasons, the team called her up on the phone so she could listen in. The proud team took the coach the trophy upon its return.

In honor of its coach, the Senior B.E.E.S. Bean Bag team members recently paid tribute to their leader with shirts to wear in loving memory.

“Billie, you will always remain in our hearts,” the B.E.E.S. shared with the picture of the bean bag team on their shirts on Facebook.



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Experience the World Jonesboro Travel

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

What's the benefit of using a travel company versus planning the trip? Well, if you ask anyone who's used Jonesboro Travel Company to book their vacation, they can likely give you a whole slew of good reasons: It doesn't cost extra, all the details are sorted for you, there's always someone available to help if something does go wrong – no matter what time it is – not to mention the people who begin to feel like family.

"We are so fortunate – we have such great, loyal clients," said Larinda Rainwater, co-owner and travel consultant. Loyal clients are the result of good business, and it's easy to see why clients return again and again to Jonesboro Travel when wanderlust bites. "We treat our clients like family. I would say eighty percent are repeat clients,"

said Amy Cantin, also co-owner and travel consultant. "We treat them like extended family. This business is all about relationships."

Larinda and Amy both love to travel, and this love combined with their love for people is the fuel behind their business. Both have been in the industry for twenty years, giving them the knowledge and experience to create specially curated trips for each client. The co-owners opened the doors of their own business five years ago, and they say the support has been overwhelming.

The business caters to all kinds of trips: leisure travel, destination weddings, honeymoons and group trips. Group trips actually make up the bulk of the business,

and despite the setbacks of 2020, the lineup for 2021 is stacked with a few international trips and many more local destinations, too. With safety, of course, in mind, travel is likely about to blow up again as many are itching to get out of the house and out of town.

Every group trip always has an escort from the Jonesboro Travel office and with all the intricate details of the trip planned for you, it's easy to understand why curated trips are very popular with the customers, and senior citizens even more so. A complete itinerary is especially beneficial for older clients who don't want to deal with organizing, mapping, driving, etc.

"Lots of people like to do the group tours for the interaction with other people,"



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Larinda shared. “Another reason is you don’t have to do anything but show up with your bag packed and ready to go.” After this doozy of a year, Amy and Larinda are ready to get back to what they love: helping their clients adventure. And after all the hard work they’ve done for their clients, it’s a safe bet their customers are ready to get back to hanging out with Jonesboro Travel, too.

“We love what we do,” the duo said, and echoed one another. They shared much of their day, in more normal times, is spent visiting with their clients who drop by for this or that reason. Halfway through this wild year, missing their friends, they made posters, packed some goody bags, loaded into their car and drove by their customers’ homes for some socially distanced chats.

“They were just beyond tickled to see us,” Amy said, the memory tickling her. The year has certainly been a challenge, but the bonds forged on adventure are strong. Larinda and Amy are eager to get back to doing what they do best: helping people explore the world.



Larinda Rainwater and Amy Cantin



Either Larinda or Amy, or someone from their office, accompanies every group trip to ensure it goes smoothly.

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PYP Volunteers With Senior B.E.E.S.



Wilma Orr accepts her RC Cola and Moon Pie from PYP Volunteer Shae Nunn



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On September 25, Paragould Young Professionals volunteered to help pass out "extras" at the Senior B.E.E.S. drive-through lunch line. Moon Pies and Royal Crown Colas stirred up nostalgia for many.

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Caring Transitions

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Caring Transitions operates at more than 250 locations. The franchise provides professional services in every major market, and its recent expansion to Northeast Arkansas is locally owned by Tara and Mark Piatt.

“We moved to Paragould in 1998 and fell in love with the community,” said Tara. “I joined the Paragould Newcomers Club right away and became their newsletter editor and social director. I felt right at home and settled in, raising our three kids here. I loved meeting their friends and their friends’ parents through school activities and sports. Now that we’re empty-nesters, we wanted to stay here and maybe bring something to Paragould that wasn’t already available.”

Caring Transitions provides solutions for each and every customer by helping families relocate seniors and assist with all of the details involved. They take the concerns away from downsizing and “rightsizing” – a Caring Transitions method of helping seniors prepare for their new living space while releasing all that must be left behind.

Franchising through Caring Transitions means the business shares the expert knowledge and long-standing history of an established brand while keeping local families and customers at the forefront of their priorities.

Caring Transitions understands how difficult it can be to get an older adult moved into a smaller, more manageable home. By helping relocate, professionals can help move seniors to a community or simply to a setup the family has deemed will be better. They help declutter, organize, rightsize, pack and unpack.

“We’ve always loved going to estate sales, auctions and yard sales. We’ve



found a lot of treasures in our area and, while we kept many of them, we’ve also loved seeing what they’re worth to other people,” Mark shared. “Earlier this year, we lost my step-dad and had to help my mom downsize their house. Knowing now what an ordeal that can be, we saw a need to help others going through this transition back home in Arkansas. I found the Caring Transitions service and wanted to work with them here.”

When it comes to releasing/ liquidating/ getting rid of personal property, Caring Transitions understands one size doesn’t fit all. Since they are more than just the nation’s largest estate sale company, they also provide online auctions, cleanouts, private sales and help with donations and junk removal.

The team hopes, in an unregulated field, to help ensure families are taking the best possible next step for their loved ones. Caring Transitions wants families to know their home and possessions are in good hands. Every office is fully bonded and insured, industry certified and all W2 employees are background checked to protect clients.

With over a decade of experience, Caring Transitions continues to lead this “baby boomer” growth industry by continually developing new services and technology (such as its digital in-home estimates and NEW online auction site, called CT Bids).

If you think Caring Transitions might be the right choice for you and your family, every project begins with a free, no-obligation in-home consultation. Since sometimes families are not sure what to keep or get rid of, Caring Transitions urges calls before discarding anything. As industry experts, they know what really has value in today’s changing resale market.

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- Dangers associated with Medication
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Dealing With Stuff

BY RICHARD BRUMMETT



Not always a popular discussion, but an important one, is what one should do with parents' belongings once they have passed away.

Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, are currently between the ages of 56 and 74 years old (71.6 million people in the United States) and must address realistically whether they should store, sell or give away things Mom and Dad held on to for decades.

Marlita Stuart of Jonesboro is one who recently had to deal with the process following the October death of her mother, Ruth Woodside of Paragould. Mrs. Woodside lived to be 99 years old and had resided in the same house for 70 years, accumulating a lot of things -- not to mention lots of memories -- for her children to contend with.

Fortunately for Marlita and her two brothers, their mother had taken care efficiently all of the legal matters; but piles and boxes and rooms full of things still had to be disposed of, and the chore is never an easy one for the children.

"I spent a lot of time with her at the very end," Marlita said, "and I would come over and look around and I knew it would be a chore, a really big job. But I didn't really begin to process it until she had actually passed. I didn't feel comfortable taking stuff out of her home while she was still here; I didn't want to invade her personal space. Years ago she had picked out certain things to go to certain people, but all the rest we had to do something with."



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Experts offer various ways to deal with the left over belongings of loved ones, but the one thing they all agree on is the necessity of having a plan at the very outset. When possible, they suggest, take your time.

Emotions will definitely be piqued one way or another -- happy or sad -- and one needs time to address them. Asking for help instead of tackling the issues alone is a good suggestion, along with making piles named Keep, Sell or Give Away for various items. Even a Not Sure pile is a possibility.

"We didn't take our time," Marlita said of her personal situation, "because a younger brother lives out of town and we needed to get it done before he had to go back. We basically did it over a two-week period. There were just so many books and dishes and clothes and things Mom realized she needed to downsize but she just couldn't because she wasn't physically able. I'm so glad I had two brothers and a sister-in-law to step up and help. They did a remarkable job getting it all done and ready to sell.

"That's one thing I would tell people our age to start doing now, is to downsize.

Doing this really opened all our eyes to go home and start doing that. Definitely, I would say to you as a child, you need to take note and not save all that stuff you know you will never use again and then your kids won't have to deal with it when the time comes."

Again, experts say decluttering your home now has benefits like boosting your mood and relieving stress, improving your sleep, creating more space, reducing dust and allergies, and making the final downsizing less overwhelming for your loved ones.

The biggest question regarding a house is, keep it or sell it?

As in Marlita's case, she and her siblings have homes of their own so their mother's is not needed and has been put on the market, but it also is the place where their lives were formed.

"The house means something," she said, "but we all have our separate lives. Even without the house, we still have our memories."

Thankfully, Mrs. Woodside took care of some important steps years ago, making

the transition for her children simpler.

"While she was still of sound mind," Marlita said, "she signed ownership of the house over to all three of us kids. That way, we didn't have to worry about whose name it was going to be in.

"She also put all three of our names on her bank account so we could write checks for her. At the end, she was unable to so we could legally do that for her. And she named an executor of her estate. Since Michael is the oldest, we all said to name him. Those three things she did really helped us out."

Parting with possessions can be a difficult and heartbreaking proposition, but in the long run pays off for all concerned.

"Mom still had tons of stuff but it was kind of fun looking through it," Marlita admitted. "We were just glad the important legal stuff was already taken care of so we didn't have to make many real tough decisions. Mom took care of us there."

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Caring for Seniors this Holiday Season

Under the best of circumstances, holidays can be a difficult time for seniors, especially those who are shut-ins. Holidays during a pandemic magnify that challenge.

Those in nursing homes or assisted living environments may be unable to leave or have visitors. Those confined to their own homes may be at risk for contracting the virus if they attend a family gathering or have visitors. A COVID surge like the one our area is experiencing intensifies the need to protect this vulnerable population.

These holidays are sure to feel different for all of us, but especially for our seniors. Letting your senior know you miss being with them will ease their disappointment in being isolated. Here are some ideas for staying connected and bringing joy to precious elderly loved ones. With some extra effort on our part they can have a good holiday, despite the circumstances.



For Families:

1. Make arrangements for a group facetime visit with your loved one during the family holiday celebrations. If possible, deliver a plate so the senior can eat from home with you.
2. Write out your favorite memories and assemble them in a binder, box or jar. Your senior will love reading them, over and over. Or write notes, telling them what they mean to you.
3. Send or take simple decorations to brighten their personal space.
4. Use an online service and create a book of family photos for them to enjoy. Include older photos as well as newer ones.
5. Schedule a phone chain, assigning family members a specific day to call the shut-in.

6. Pool family resources and purchase your elder a tablet. Set it up with books to read and the ability to facetime with others.

7. Put together a gift basket of puzzles, word games, books, etc., to help loved ones pass the long days of winter.

8. Gather your immediate household and spend an evening caroling for shut-in senior members. Be careful to maintain safe distances (sing from the lawn) and wear masks.

For Churches and Other Groups:

1. Bombard your shut-in members with cards from their church/group family.


2. Create appreciation albums. Have members share how the senior has influenced them by their actions or examples. Assemble the notes in a binder.

3. Have children help you create encouraging poster boards for the senior to display.

4. Ask members to “adopt” a shut-in and commit to staying in contact with them during the holidays, especially if the senior has limited family in the area.

5. Purchase small packages of treats and practical items. Stuff them into a stocking and deliver to the senior’s doorstep or living facility. Add an apple or orange and some unshelled nuts to remind them of Christmases from their childhood. Local dollar stores have an amazing variety of inexpensive options.

Winter is typically a difficult time of year for many seniors. Loneliness, illnesses and depression seem to tag along with the season’s dark and gloomy days. The events of 2020, especially the impact of COVID-19 on their everyday lives, had many of them struggling in these areas long before winter arrived. Our efforts to share love and concern during the holidays will help a difficult year end on a bright note.



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Candy Yancy, Mona Coe and Taylor Fox

Arkansas Methodist Medical Clinic (AMMC) Home Health celebrated 50 years of community care in August, a birthday that also makes the organization the oldest hospital-based home health in Arkansas.

Home health services include skilled nursing, physical therapy and more to aid patients who are home-bound and cannot make it to the hospital. Home health professionals visit patients at least three times a week, and in some cases every day.

Unlike working in a hospital where everything is normal and expectations remain the same, home health nurses have to deal with uncontrolled environments when they enter a home. And variables can always change: weather, multiple patients, etc.

“Our nurses go in full force with whatever is dealt to them and they handle it remarkably well,” said Misty Marcus, AMMC Home Health Administrator.

To have a such a long-standing home health agency is quite an accomplishment.

Generations of Serving 50 Years of Home Health

BY LINDSEY SPENCER

Happy Holidays!

Visitor Center open 7 days a week!

Sunshine Manor is working through this crisis and we are still accepting new residents.

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Over the years, many have experienced the exceptional care of AMMC Home Health and it appears the desire to care for others is embedded deeply in each member. One such example is the story of Mona Coe.

Years ago, a patient on bed rest was about to have her baby. Candy Yancy, the clinical manager who has been with AMMC for 38 years, shared the story of Mona and said that today the young girl she helped care for has become a nurse and joined the AMMC staff. Her baby, Taylor Fox, is now grown and is also an RN.

"I just love it," Candy said, speaking of this particular success story and many more like it. "We get to care for people in their homes where they're most comfortable." The community-based hospital and organization is excited to continue serving Paragould and Northeast Arkansas.

"It's a remarkable accomplishment," said Misty. "The physicians and the community have been so supportive."

Here's to many more years of home health for those who need it.

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ENGAGEMENTS

Savannah Strickland and Alexander Berry

Savannah Strickland and Alexander Berry have announced their plans to be married on October 9, 2021, at Central Baptist Church in Jonesboro.

Savannah is the daughter of Dr. Gary and Lisa Strickland and Alexander is the son of Robert and Tamra Berry.

Photo by Hailey + Alan Photography



WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Alicia Bennett and Jonathan Padilla

Alicia Bennett and Jonathan Padilla were married on November 21, 2020, at The Crossing in Paragould.

Alicia is the daughter of Shari and Timothy Bennett. Jonathan is the son of Zenorina Parita.

Photo by Emilee Gill



BIRTHS

Huxten Barron Hollis

Proud parents Xylon and Balon Hollis of Paragould welcomed newborn, Huxten Barron Hollis, into the world on September 24, 2020.

Huxten was delivered at St. Bernards Medical Center, weighed 9 pounds, 10 ounces and measured 20 inches long.

Huxten is also welcomed by Chad Hale, Barrette and Kenny Howard, and Joel and Kelsey Hollis.

Photo by Whitney Vassar Photography





*Lindsey
&
Jackson*



Photos by Chase Eckley

It was a foggy – honestly pretty dreary – day in Ireland the day Jackson asked me to marry him. I simultaneously knew he would ask that day along the Cliffs of Moher and was surprised all the same.

It turned out to be a foggy, rainy day on the day we got married. Despite my hope for sunshine and the absolutely gorgeous weather leading up to wedding day (which got my hopes up), it turned out the weather didn't matter one bit.

We were supposed to get married back in May of 2020 – which by the way, was a gorgeous day, too – but COVID delayed our special day. By the time we walked down the aisle in October, we'd waited long enough and I was ready to celebrate

our love with many other people we love. We kept our distance (even more than usual during this pandemic) from people two weeks out from the wedding so we could feel more confident hugging those who were there to celebrate us. We and our guests wore masks much of the evening. And rain drizzled down all day long – until it cleared long enough to dance outside under the lights. It was perfect.

A dear friend of ours performed the ceremony. Flowers by Jackson's sister, Generations Floral Company, brought pure magic to our otherwise simple décor. My cousin, who has a voice like an angel, sang as first Jackson, then my daddy and I, walked down the aisle. I sang, too, making my way toward my groom, "I won't cry,

I won't cry, no I won't shed a tear, just as long as you stand, stand by me."

My grandmother made our cake, and the dessert table was filled in with treats from my favorite sweet shop, Something Sweet. A few beautiful pieces around the room from The Vintage Rental Depot put the perfect touches on our space. The day and the night felt like a dream, one you float through and when you wake up you're scrambling to hold on to the details.

Of one thing I am most sure: We have committed to walk this trail of life together. There will be ups and downs, sunshine and rain, but we're in it together and this lovely day was just one among many, many others.

2020 Kids' Events

December

December 7

Holiday Photo Booth

When: December 7
3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Where: Craighead County Jonesboro
Public Library

Info: libraryinjonesboro.org

December 3, 10 & 17

Carriage Rides

When: December 3, 10 and 17
at 10:00 a.m.

Where: Downtown Paragould

Info: Main Street Paragould
Facebook Page

Stay Tuned

As events continue to be rescheduled, canceled, and altered, please check Premiere's Facebook page for updates as we do our best to keep you informed!



Sisters Brayla, Scarlett and Brooklyn Adams were decked out in Christmas attire while spending the day with their grandparents. The girls -- ages 5, 1 and 2 -- are the daughters of Brandon and Shayla Adams of Paragould.

Stay Tuned

Then and Now



Old pictures next to their current day counterparts and stories that will step us back through history.

Christmas Coverage



We'll be covering parades and events all month long to highlight in the first issue of 2021.

New Premiere Website



We're launching a new website and we can't wait to share it with you!

On The Cover: Santa "Cause" (Steve Southard) & Chloe
Photo By: Amy Reeves Photography



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