



THE ENTERPRISE

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Vol. 147 No. 51 Website: www.theenterprise.net STUART, VIRGINIA WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023 USPS 523-500 \$1.00

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE SINCE 1876 | Dedicated to serving the communities of Patrick County



The Patrick County Board of Supervisors honored Clyde DeLoach, of the Blue Ridge District, and Denise Stirewalt, of the Peter's Creek District, for their years of service. Both of their terms end Dec. 31.

Opioid Abatement Authority awards more than \$470,000 to 10 localities

On December 4, 2023, a committee of the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) voted to award more than \$470,000 in grants to ten Virginia cities and counties for opioid abatement and remediation efforts.

Virginia every year for 18 years, and so we recommend communities have a road map in place for how it will use those funds to save lives," said Pillion.

Nine of the ten awards, including Patrick County, will support planning efforts for the recipient localities to identify community-specific needs, gaps, and possible solutions to the opioid crisis.

Five localities were provided planning grants of \$50,000 each: Botetourt, Patrick, and Warren Counties, and the cities of Colonial Heights and Salem. The counties of Prince Edward, Buckingham, and Cumberland were jointly provided a planning grant for \$50,000 that will be administered by Prince Edward. In each case the recipient localities committed to provide a ten percent match.

Sen. Todd Pillion, Chairman of the OAA, said, "we encourage localities to carefully evaluate how to best use their opioid settlement funds at the local level, and the OAA's planning grants are an important tool to help them do exactly that."

Loudoun County received a planning grant of \$200,000, to which it will add \$160,000 in its own funding for a total program valued at \$360,000. The Loudoun County effort includes not only a planning component but will also establish a county-wide opioid response program with a newly created admin-

Recipients are required as a condition of the grant to publish the resulting plan, and to use that plan to explain and justify future OAA grant applications. "We are talking about opioid settlements coming to

(See Opioid Abatement p. 3)

Healthcare Access Committee established

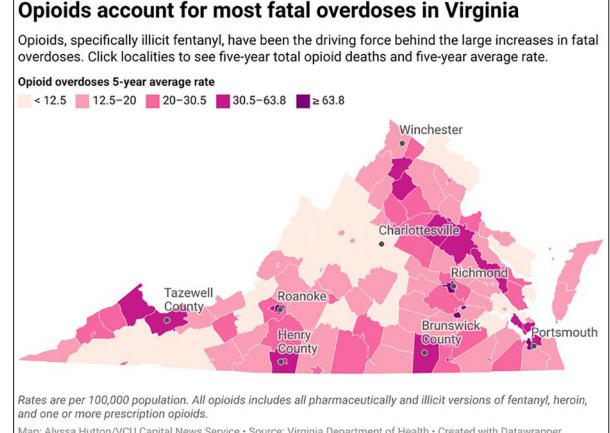
By Taylor Boyd
The Patrick County Board of Supervisors approved the creation of a Citizen's Healthcare Access Committee at its December 11 meeting. County Administrator Beth Simms said healthcare access is an area of opportunity for Patrick

County. "To my knowledge, we have one primary care physician. Not a lot of specialty care options, limited dentistry, even lacking in veterinary service," she said. "We can talk about it, leaders can talk about it, (See Healthcare Access p. 3)

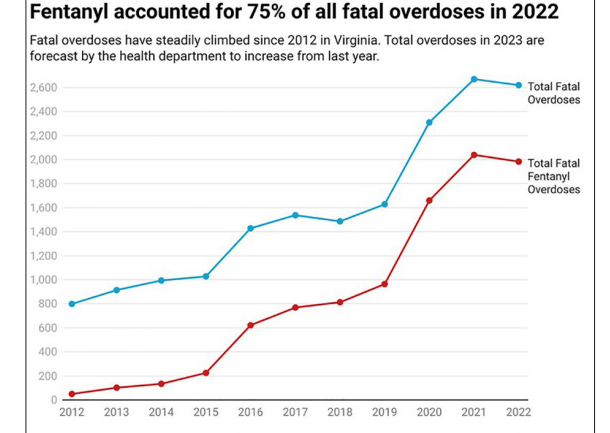
Will flood of settlement money help quell Virginia's opioid crisis?



Entrance to the McShin Foundation in Richmond, Virginia. (Photo by Alyssa Hutton/VCU CNS.)



Opioids, specifically illicit fentanyl, have been the driving force behind the large increases in fatal overdoses. (Infographic by Alyssa Hutton/VCU CNS.)



Fentanyl accounted for 75% of all fatal overdoses in 2022. (Infographic by Alyssa Hutton/VCU CNS.)

By Alyssa Hutton
Capital News Service
Fatal overdose rates remain high in Virginia, even as the state begins to spread opioid settlement money to state and local agencies to help tackle the epidemic. Death from drug overdoses, opioids and fentanyl in particular, has remained the dominant method of unnatural death in Virginia since 2013, according to the Virginia De-

partment of Health. Overdoses ticked slightly down last year, but the number is forecast to remain about the same or higher this year. The state's opioid epidemic was officially declared a public health emergency in 2016, and opioid-related deaths increased 274% between 2012 and 2022, according to VDH data. The number of all fatal overdoses had a slightly lower

spike in the same time period, at 228%. Overdose deaths from fentanyl had the biggest jump, increasing 3,866% in that same time. Richmond, Roanoke, Petersburg, Portsmouth and Hopewell cities had the highest rate of fatal opioid overdoses in 2022. Virginia ranks 27th in the country for drug-related death rates and

15th for number of overall deaths, according to 2021 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 'It was a point of desperation' Last year, Travis Williams realized that he felt miserable both on and off drugs. He lived mostly in isolation, going to work and coming home to use cocaine and heroin. (See Settlement Money p. 3)

Winners of annual contest announced

The winners of The Enterprise Creative Writing Contest are below. There are three winners in each of the categories represented, except for the fourth through seventh grade, with two students tied for second place. Thank you to all of our participating students. Prizes must be claimed by Jan. 31.

Winners
Pre-K - 3
First Place
Santa and the Naughty Boy
Tanner Whitt,
Meadows of Dan Elementary School
One day, an elf sneaked into someone's house with Santa. The elf sat on a shelf in the living room, admiring the beautiful Christmas tree full of colored lights blinking brightly. Santa was delivering presents to all the good boys and girls. On this Christmas Eve, the elf that sat on the shelf said, "I think this boy has been naughty." Santa re-

plied, "Ho! Ho! Ho! I think you are wrong! He has not been naughty." The elf looked at Santa with a puzzled look. Santa pulled out his long list from his toy bag and kept looking for that boy's name. He finally saw his name. The elf was right! The boy is on the naughty list. Santa thought for a few minutes. He decided to give him a present anyway because his name was on the very bottom of the list. Santa felt the boy tried to be a good boy. Santa and the elf had big hearts; full of love and giving. When the boy woke up and saw that Santa left him a present, he was so grateful. He learned a lesson from this. He became the best-behaved boy ever and set an example to all the other boys and girls.

Second Place
I Love Christmas
By Hunter Reynolds,
Blue Ridge Elementary School
(See Contest Winners p. 7)



Festival of Lights show underway at DeHart Park

There are only a few days left to visit the Festival of Lights show underway at DeHart Park in Stuart. The spectacular display, which opened on December 15, is captured in an aerial view. Organizers said this year marks the biggest and best light show yet, with more than 65 displays, and nearly 200 vehicles on opening night. The cost to drive through what organizers describe as a "magical Christmas wonderland," is \$10 per vehicle (cash only). Proceeds from the event will be used to renovate a park bathroom. The light show runs through December 23. It is open Sunday through Thursday from 6-8 p.m., or Friday and Saturday from 6-9 p.m., with live caroling and musical performances under the gazebo each night. Santa and Mrs. Claus will be on hand to greet visitors. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Hubbard, Hubbard 1 Productions)

Holiday deadlines, closing set

The Enterprise office in Stuart will close for the holidays at 5 p.m. on Friday, December 22. During this time, we will be available on a limited basis via email to submissions@theenter-

prise.net or dhall@theenterprise.net. The office will reopen on Tuesday, Jan. 2. Submission deadlines also have changed due to the holidays, since

both Christmas and New Year's Day fall on Mondays. Submissions for the weeks of Dec. 27 and Jan. 3 must be received by 5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 21, and

Thursday, Dec. 28, respectively. We wish you a bright holiday season with your loved ones and appreciate your support throughout the year.

Additional funding, waiver slots will enhance support for Virginians with Developmental Disabilities

Gov. Glenn Youngkin recently announced an additional \$300 million over the biennium to fund enough priority one waiver slots for every Virginian with a developmental disability on the waitlist today. There are currently over 3,400 Virginians on the priority one waiting list for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Developmental Disability (DD) waiver slots, meaning these individuals urgently need the services and supports offered by the waiver in a year or less.

Increasing waiver slots and reducing the waitlist has been a key priority in Governor Youngkin's transformational Right Help, Right Now plan and the administration continues to deliver on those commitments today. Earlier this year, Governor Youngkin signed a budget funding 500 new waiver slots, on top of the 600 new

slots that were approved in the FY 2024 budget by the General Assembly.

"One year ago, I promised to enhance our support for Virginians with developmental disabilities and their families," said Youngkin. "Today, I am proud to announce we are one step closer to the goal of providing enough priority one slots for everyone in urgent need of services by the end of my term. Through these improvements, we are giving Virginians with disabilities the supports and services they need to live their best lives in their communities."

"We've heard from Virginians and their families about the important difference a DD waiver can have in their life or the life of a loved one," said Secretary of Health and Human Resources John Littel. "Whether it be paying

for in-home care or the kind of assistive technology that can help an individual avoid living in a hospital, nursing home, or other institution, we know that these waivers can change lives."

Waivers can cover services such as medical care, employment support, assistance for community living, behavioral interventions, and other items like medical goods and assistive technology.

DD Waivers are administered jointly by the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS). Virginia has three waivers for individuals with a developmental disability: Building Independence for individuals 18 and older; Family & Individual Support; and Com-



Gov. Glenn Youngkin greets event guests at Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services in Richmond on December 13. (Office of the Governor.)

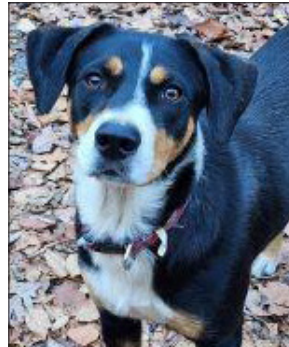
munity Living. There is a waiting list for these waivers, and the slots are assigned based on urgency of need. Local community services board (CSB) staff assesses each individual that meets the criteria for a waiver to establish their priority needs level of 1, 2, or 3 on the waitlist.

"We have been making plans through Right Help, Right Now to address the priority one waitlist, and we believe community providers will have the capacity to deliver services for this critical infusion of waiver slots," said DBHDS Commissioner Nelson Smith. "Waiting for urgently needed help on a long list is unacceptable - we are working hard to get

these families the help they desperately need."

Launched in December 2022, Governor Youngkin's Right Help, Right Now plan is a comprehensive approach to improving Virginia's behavioral health and developmental disability systems. The plan is built on six pillars, sets clear and achievable three-year goals, and includes immediate action to get people the "right help, right now." Addressing the priority one waitlist is a goal of Workstream Three, which seeks to expand the capacity of community services to better serve individuals with mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities.

Pets of the Week



Slate is a cool cat who just wants to be on your lap. He is FIV positive, so he needs to be with only other FIP positive cats and be a house cat. He has so much personality he would be great company and a clown to have around.

Call the Call the Patrick County Public Animal Shelter (PCPAS) at (276) 694-6259 for more information. To view other available pets, visit the shelter or check out its Facebook page. Adoption fees are \$10 and include spay/neuter and a rabies vaccination.

Clover Cat Rescue (CCR) has a dog now and then. This young female Aussie mix would love to find a home with not so many cats. Call the CCR for more information at (276) 694-3598

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Healthcare Access

(cont. from page 1)

citizens can talk about it, we can all talk about it.”

Simms said the county needs a concerted effort to talk to healthcare providers in the area and across Virginia, North Carolina, and state and federal representatives, Patrick & Henry Community College (P&H-CC), and those in the healthcare field.

She said the approval of the committee’s creation would just give her a greenlight to start working on it.

“What I would do is draft some basic language of what this is, who would serve on this committee, and so forth. And then, of course, I would bring that back to the board again for approval before we start work,” she said.

Simms said this committee would show a unified front between the county, possibly the Town of Stuart, county schools, industry leaders, people who work in healthcare, and everyone else.

“Every citizen of Patrick County is vested in and needs healthcare. We’re hoping that this approach could lead to some movement in that area,” she said.

Simms said she would try to have a draft of the committee to the board by its next meeting.

Brandon Simmons, of the Dan River District, said he thought the committee is a good idea.

In an email on Friday, Simms said the board will be filling vacant committee seats in the new year. To indi-

cate interest or willingness to serve, complete the online form at <https://www.co.patrick.va.us/formcenter/general-forms-4/citizen-committee-interest-form-51>.

In other matters, the board:

*Recognized Clyde DeLoach and Denise Stirewalt for their four years of service on the board.

*Approved the November 20 meeting minutes.

*Approved the bills, claims, and appropriations.

*Approved the amendment to the school’s fiscal year 2023-2024 budget.

*Heard the county administrator’s report.

*Heard reports from the supervisors.

*Heard from Kurt Bozenmayer about solar energy.

*Heard from Cabell Hayward about Appalachian Power (AEP).

*Approved American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) requests, as presented.

*Approved Roger Beasley, Bruce Mosley, Charles Cauley, and Larry Cowley to four-year terms on the Board of Building Appeals.

*Approved the comprehensive financial analysis services provided by Davenport & Company.

*Accepted the Memorandum of Agreement between the county and the Patrick County Economic Development Authority (EDA).

*Heard an update on the Business Development Center from EDA Director Patrick Cooper.

Opioid Abatement

(cont. from page 1)

istrator overseeing a county opioid task force.

In addition to the planning grants, the OAA announced an individual grant award to the City of Manassas to hire a harm reduction specialist within the local Department of Social Services. Under this program the city will provide outreach and support to individuals affected by opioid misuse, their families, community members, local agencies, health-

care providers, and stakeholders. Through community engagement and educational programs, the project aims to reach a significant portion of the city’s population. The OAA also approved a request from Manassas for renewal of this project for next fiscal year.

The OAA began accepting Fiscal Year 2024-2025 grant applications in October, and all applications must be submitted by April 1, 2024. During this timeframe cer-

tain types of grants can be awarded on a rolling basis, but most of the grants will be awarded after the application cycle has ended.

Virginia expects to receive a total of approximately \$1.1 billion from litigation against manufacturers, distributors, and pharmacies that were alleged to have contributed to the opioid crisis. Payments from these settlements and bankruptcies began in 2022 and are expected to conclude by

2041.

The OAA was established by the General Assembly in 2021 to oversee the distribution of 55% of Virginia’s total settlement funds. Of the remainder, 30% is distributed directly to cities and counties, and the remaining 15% to the commonwealth. The use of funds is restricted by court orders and state statute, with the restrictions aiming for the funds to be used for opioid abatement efforts.

Settlement Money

(cont. from page 1)

“It was a point of desperation where nothing was working no more,” Williams said. “Didn’t wanna go forward, didn’t wanna go back.”

He threw away all the drugs he had, including methadone, but said he didn’t experience withdrawal, which he credits to God.

“I don’t want to kill myself, but I don’t want to live like this no more,” Williams said about the pivotal moment.

He has been sober for almost a year. He works with his best friend Jesse Wysocki, who he said he used to shoot heroin with, but now they’re both in recovery and helping others.

Wysocki is the chief operating officer at the McShin Foundation, a community recovery organization in Richmond with 16 recovery homes.

The recovery program is 28 days long and available for anyone with substance use disorder, Wysocki said.

McShin does not offer detox or clinical services, although they help connect people with those programs.

McShin pairs people with a recovery coach. Wysocki, like most of the staff, are peer recovery specialists who have faced addiction. Peer recovery specialists are considered mentors and motivators to those struggling with addiction and go through a certification program by the Virginia Certification Board.

Wysocki says a recovery coach with experience helps in one’s personal recovery and also to support others.

“Whether I was in prison, jail, different treatment centers, so I know a lot of the behaviors that are associated with it,” Wysocki said. “So I’m able to help identify that, it helps me better assist who’s here trying to get services.”

For Williams, things came full circle when he was asked to work with McShin’s intensive program. That’s because of his first experience there in 2019. His then-recovery attempt ended with a relapse, and multiple doses of the medicine naloxone to reverse what could have been a fatal overdose — as it was for the friend he used with that night.

“I let my guard down and my disease started working with me,” Wil-

liams said. “If I just do a little bit, I’ll feel good.”

That fatal overdose triggered changes at McShin, Williams said. And he served a two and a half year stint in jail for violating his charges.

When Williams eventually returned to McShin, he agreed to work at the intensive housing program because he felt he had unfinished business.

“Just a little bit that I’ve learned, through that I can give it back ... I find that like very fulfilling,” Williams said.

Williams is now a part of the McShin team that helps with the reentry transition from prison or jail.

3 in 4 overdoses from fentanyl
Fentanyl overdoses were over 75% of fatal overdoses in 2022 in Virginia.

This year’s number of fentanyl-related deaths is already over 1,000 and is expected to surpass last year’s number, according to VDH data. Cocaine and methamphetamine-related fatal overdoses have spiked in recent years in Virginia, due to being more commonly mixed with fentanyl.

Sgt. Kevin Wilson has been with the Virginia Beach Police Department for 18 years. He started with the narcotics unit of the special investigations department in 2010.

Wilson began to see the rise in opioid-use, specifically heroin, followed by the rise of fentanyl, not long after he started work with the narcotics unit.

“The majority of stuff we get contains part if not all fentanyl,” Wilson said.

Most illegal sellers and distributors aren’t chemists, so they’ll add a very potent substance such as fentanyl, Wilson said. That means a person’s normal dose could be more potent, which drives an increase in overdoses. People might not know what they are getting.

“The overall strategy would be to go after the highest level source of supply so we can cut the head off the snake,” Wilson said.

The industry is constantly evolving, he said, which presents challenges.

“Once you take somebody off the street another person’s gonna take their place,” Wilson said.

Wilson has notified many families

that they’ve lost a loved one to an overdose.

“They want closure for themselves, for their loved one,” he said. “So being able to backtrack and go and find who sold them the drugs that caused them to die and then bring closure for the families is probably the most satisfying.”

Virginia’s response to epidemic

Prescription opioid overdoses began to drop in 2015, with a significant recent decrease. Opioid manufacturers, wholesale distributors and pharmacies have been sued for their contributions to the opioid epidemic through overprescribing, deceptive marketing and dispensing.

The Virginia General Assembly established the Opioid Abatement Authority in 2021. The OAA provides funds for efforts that educate, treat and support recovery for people addicted to opioids, according to Anthony McDowell, executive director of the OAA.

Virginia’s estimated share of settlement money from the pharmaceutical industry is approximately \$1.1 billion, as of September, according to a press release from state Attorney General Jason Miyares.

Grant applications for cities and counties began in January and the OAA approved over \$23 million in June. This money is in the process of being transferred to its recipients, according to McDowell.

Localities requested OAA funding for a range of different tactics, according to McDowell.

“The cities and counties take stock of what the needs are at the community level and envision what it would take to address those needs and submit that in the form of a grant application to the OAA,” McDowell said.

The OAA also approved in August just under \$11 million in funding for state agencies, including executive branch agencies, judicial offices and universities. Programs include clinical research, prevention and education, treatment, recovery and more. Approximately \$2 million is earmarked for media and education campaigns.

The VDH will receive the highest allotment at \$2.9 million for its four programs. The bulk of funding will go toward increasing access to naloxone, the generic form of Narcan, which can be used to reverse

opioid overdoses. One million dollars will support harm reduction programs. The department will also hire three new “opioid specialists” for each health district.

The Virginia Department of Corrections will receive \$1.25 million for programs such as hiring six social workers and creating an educational video. VADOC will also launch a pilot program to test the effectiveness of medicine used to treat moderate opioid use. The selected participants will use an injectable buprenorphine extended-release medication instead of suboxone.

Parental substance use is one of the reasons children are removed from their home. There was an increase of these cases from 2010-2019, according to the Virginia Department of Social Services. It’s common for family or friends to assume guardianship when a child is removed from the home. These guardians receive support through a kinship navigator program.

The DSS was given \$205,500 to expand five kinship navigator programs, for the second half of 2024.

“As far as efforts that are being funded by the authority, it’s too soon to be able to take stock of the results yet,” McDowell said.

A locality’s use of settlement money depends on where the lawsuit originated, if they were a part of the lawsuit and whether the funds are being distributed directly from the settlement or from the OAA.

The OAA was recently nationally awarded for its settlement allocation efforts.

The state has made it easier since 2016 to procure naloxone over the counter without a prescription. The state also has a program to train people to recognize an opioid overdose and administer naloxone.

Patients cannot be prescribed more than a seven-day supply of controlled substances containing opioids, unless under certain conditions, due to a state law passed in 2017.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University’s Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia.

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A Christmas Hearing

Field Hearing on the Biden Administration's Effects on Santa's Toy Delivery

House Energy and Commerce Committee Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chair Morgan Griffith (R-VA) today announced a field hearing on how the Biden



Morgan Griffith

Representative

Administration's green agenda has affected Santa and Rudolph's delivery of toys on December 22, 2023. The hearing will include a host of witnesses who are involved in the toy making and delivery process.

"The Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee has been committed to examining the implementation of government programs and whether they have been successful," said Chair Griffith. "This includes the new policies and regulations resulting from the Biden Administration's rush to green energy and its consequences on not only Santa's preparation for Christmas, but his journey around the world delivering gifts with Rudolph. I look forward to learning more from our witnesses during what I'm sure will be an exciting and informative hearing."

Chair Griffith will be particularly interested in learning more about:

Have there been any delays in getting materials to the North Pole via fossil fuel driven planes, trains, and automobiles, and therefore, in toy assembly at Santa's workshop, given the restrictions on coal and oil by the Administration?

How will Santa be able to deliver the toys to all of the little girls and boys once he is forced to purchase an electric sleigh, given reindeer will soon be banned as they are known producers of methane?

Chair Griffith worries the cold weather and distance Santa must travel to deliver toys might significantly delay his overnight delivery as an electric sleigh is estimated to only get 150 miles in arctic conditions and at the equator and 300 miles in between, coupled with a 1.5 hour charging time for the battery.

How will Mrs. Claus continue to make her famous Christmas cookies once gas ovens are officially outlawed by the Administration? Further, Chair Griffith worries that some families won't be able to make cookies for Santa's visit if all of the Biden energy policies are put into place.

Subcommittee hearing titled "An Examination of the Biden Administration's Green Policies and Their Effects on Santa's Toy Delivery."

WHAT: A field hearing to discuss how the Biden Administration's green energy agenda has affected Santa and Rudolph's delivery of toys

DATE: Friday, December 22, 2023

TIME: 8:00 PM ET

LOCATION: The North Pole

Alternative location: Santa's Official Post Office in Rovaniemi, Fin-

land

*For those last-minute package wrappers, red tape will be made available by the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services

WITNESSES:

Mrs. Clause, Wife, Santa Claus Bernard, Head Elf, Santa's Workshop

Rudolph, Lead Reindeer, Santa's Sleigh (until electric sleighs are mandated)

Chair Griffith would like to note:

Santa Claus is unable to be with us for this hearing as he is busy ensuring that everything will be ready for Christmas. He would like us to share that, despite protests by the left, he will in fact be delivering Red Ryder BB guns to all the good children who request one, but warns them "not to shoot their eye out."

All members of the Energy and Commerce Committee are welcome to attend. The hearing will be open to the public and press and will be live streamed online.

The Birth of Jesus

While it is fun to joke about the absurd consequences of Biden's green energy policies, the reason for the Christmas season, for Christians like me, is the birth of Jesus Christ.

Two thousand years ago, when a young woman, Mary, and her husband, Joseph, were turned away from an inn, Mary was forced to give birth to a baby in a manger. That baby, Jesus, was born by immaculate conception. And as the son of God, Jesus was sent to Earth to save his people from their sins.

Jesus shared God's message of forgiveness and grace to mankind. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16)."

Though not everyone celebrates Christmas and the birth of Jesus, the message of this season rings true through all communities and faiths. That message of forgiveness and grace, love and hope, is something I think we should all be reminded of a bit more frequently.

I wish everyone, whether you celebrate Christmas or not, peace during this holiday season.

And to echo Clement Moore in "Twas the Night Before Christmas: "Happy Christmas to All and to All a Good Night."

If you have questions, concerns, or comments, call my Abingdon office at (276) 525-1405, my Christiansburg office at (540) 381-5671, my Washington office at (202) 225-3861, or via email at www.morgan-griffith.house.gov.

Dates announced for Alcohol Education and Prevention Grant Applications

In an effort to eliminate underage and high-risk drinking, the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority (ABC) will begin accepting applications for the 2024-2025 Alcohol Education and Prevention Grant program on Jan. 1.

This is the ninth year Virginia ABC is offering grants to support alcohol education and prevention programs and projects across the commonwealth.

Since 2013, Virginia ABC has awarded an average of \$80,000 each year through its grant program to Virginia organizations working to prevent underage and high-risk drinking. Organizations are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 each to support evidence-based programs that have a long-lasting impact and encourage partnerships between organizations. Community coalitions, law enforcement, nonprofits, schools, government entities, colleges and universities, faith-based organizations and prevention-related groups

are encouraged to apply. Proposed projects must address prevention in one or more of the following focus areas:

- underage drinking
- providing or serving alcohol to youth
- high-risk drinking

"We strive to support and work collaboratively with organizations that share our mission to strengthen the commonwealth through public safety and education," said Katie Crumble, director of Virginia ABC Community Health and Engagement.

Applications are available online, with a convenient online platform for submission. Virginia ABC has provided an application guide to assist applicants and provide more information about the program. This grant application guide and the grant application are at www.abc.virginia.gov/education/grants.

Applications are due by 5 p.m. on March 1, 2024.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Most Important Decision in Your Life

(Bible)

The world is changing so rapidly that I hardly know it anymore. America is reeling from crisis to crisis; crime, drug addiction, broken homes, pornography, abortion, immorality, debt, and a perverse LGBTQ agenda pushed upon the American people by the current administration. We are naive to what is happening in our own country.

What is wrong? God is warning us that judgment is going to fall upon us unless we as a nation repent and turn to Him. "What can you as an individual do? If you are a Christian, pray daily for our leaders and our country. If you are not a Christian, becoming a Christian is the most important decision you will ever make.

We have all done, thought, or said bad things, which the Bible calls sin. The Bible says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The result of sin is death, spiritual separation from God (Romans 6:23).

But there is good news. Christ died for our sins. He was buried and raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Jesus is the only way to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6)

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your

heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:9-10)

You cannot earn salvation through your good works. You are saved by God's grace when you have faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

To be saved, you must (1) admit that you are a sinner, (2) believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on the cross for your sins and was raised from the dead, (3) confess your sins and ask His forgiveness and then (4) turn away from your sins.

Then what is next? Join a Bible believing church. Read your Bible every day. Pray every day, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Develop relationships with people who can help you spiritually. Be baptized. Being baptized is not what saves you. It is a step of obedience where you publicly declare your faith in Christ and your commitment to him.

Jesus is the reason for the season. The only reason.

Pray for our country.

William Salser, Stuart

World Rules-Based Order Under Duress

Since WWII the United States and allied countries have developed and implemented a "rules-based international order" in the world, which has kept world civilization safe from destruction.

But the world order is now being threatened by Xi Jinping of China who claims sovereignty over the South China Sea, threatens to attack Taiwan, is conducting genocide against Uighur Muslims, imprisoned many dissidents and started a COVID pandemic in the world.

Putin of Russia went to war against Georgia and is now attempting to conquer Ukraine in a bid to expand the Russian empire in Europe, and he has thoughts of occupying Poland and other European countries. He continues the dictatorship in Russia.

North Korea continues to threaten South Korea and the United States with nuclear war.

Iran sponsors terrorist groups in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza; and it threatens Israel with annihilation.

The United States must continue to support our allies against the forces of tyranny and evil through defense agreements to prevent the collapse of the "rules-based international order". A collapse could lead to a major war with many millions of people killed and the doubling of U.S. defense budgets.

Note: The information in this letter was derived from Alan W. Dowd's article in The American Legion Magazine of June 2023.

Donald Moskowitz, Londonderry NH

Special Olympics of Virginia for Patrick County receives a donation of \$2,510 in memory of Franklin (Frank) D. Lewis

Frank's passion was volunteering for Special Olympics in any and every aspect. He loved helping every child and adult in Special Olympics regardless of their ability or disability so they felt loved and whole, and did so for 43 years. Even his son, daughter, grandson and granddaughter followed in his footsteps over the years with Special Olympics. Despite his achievements, not only with Special Olympics, but in all he did, he remained humble.

To continue his mission, Special Olympics gave their approval to the family to do this fundraiser in his memory. This has never been

done before. It would have been so much easier to write a family check and be done with it, but the family felt they needed to do more in his memory and for Special Olympics. Rather than linger with the hole left in their hearts, they needed to celebrate who he was and what he did, and to do their very best to carry on his memory.

The family plans to make this an annual fundraiser for Patrick County. Each donor was personally thanked, but again a heartfelt thank you is extended to all for your generosity, love and support.

Barbara Lewis, Organizer



Letters to the Editor/Viewpoints Policy

The Enterprise welcomes letters to the editor and/or reader viewpoints of 500 words or less. Submissions may be edited for clarity, length, legal ramifications or general taste at the editor's discretion. We reserve the right to refuse to publish submitted letters for the same reasons. All letters must be signed by an individual and include community. Verifiable sources for information cited must be forwarded to the editor. Letters that do not meet these guidelines will not be considered for publication.

Disclaimer: Viewpoints and opinions expressed in letters selected for publication are the opinions of the writers, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Enterprise.

Patrick Pioneers

Thomas and John Gates

By Beverly Belcher Woody

For the next three weeks, we will take a look at the Gates family of Patrick County. While there are very few folks with the surname Gates in the county now, many locals can trace their ancestry back to the Gates brothers, Thomas and John, who moved here from Halifax County.

On October 20, 1827, Thomas Gates purchased 224 acres of land on the waters of Jack's Creek from James and Frances Chaney; this was the first deed for a Gates recorded in Patrick County Circuit Court. Thomas and John Gates must have moved here shortly after this land purchase because in 1830, the minutes of Jack's Creek Primitive Baptist Church lists Tom, William B, Martha, Lucy, and Judith Gates (From The Gates Family of Patrick County, Virginia by Carol Leonard Snow).

Thomas (1788-1870) and John Gates (1790-1835) married sisters, Sallie and Lucy Richardson. Thomas and Sallie had three children: John Wesley, Martha (Patsy), and Thomas Gates, Jr. I have not had any luck finding out anything about what happened to Thomas Jr. who was twenty years old in the 1850 census, after that, the trail gets cold.

John Wesley Gates married Iwanonna Ayers of Rock Castle on the 11th of October 1839 and became a very successful merchant in Ararat; they had seven children that we will learn more about next week.

Martha (Patsy) Gates married miller Gabriel DeHart Jr. of Rock Castle Creek and they had nine children: Sarah married Henry Tuggle Brammer; Stephen who married his cousin, Judith Gates; William married Louisa Texas Dillon; Henry Clay married Nancy Frances Dillon; Lucinda married Tazewell Perry Brammer; Green Washington married Louisa Ellen Ayers; John Wesley married America Ann Brammer; Martha Emmaline married Jesse Weaver; and Nathaniel Clayburn married Malinda Georgia Dillon.

Lucy already had a son, James W. Richardson, when she married John Gates (1790-1835). Lucy and John had three more children, William Benjamin "Billy" Gates, Judith, and Martha.

In 1834, John Gates signed a marriage bond in Patrick County Circuit Court for his stepson, James W. Richardson to marry Miss Sarah Bowling of Lone Ivy, the daughter of Gabriel Peyton Bowling and Elizabeth Tuggle Bowling.

John and Lucy's daughter, Judith, married her cousin, Stephen Hubbard DeHart in 1856. They had one son, Thomas before Judith died in 1858. John and Lucy's daughter, Martha, mar-

ried William McGhee in 1854. The couple had three children before Martha passed away in Floyd County in 1869.

John and Lucy's son Billy married Miss Zilpha Ingram of Franklin County, the daughter of James Ingram, Jr. and Elizabeth Hall Ingram. Billy was working as a hired hand on the Ingram farm where he met Zilpha, my 3x great aunt. Sixteen-year-old Zilpha and twenty-five-year-old Billy eloped to Surry County, North Carolina and got married. Billy and Zilpha set up housekeeping in Ararat where Billy became a much beloved Primitive Baptist Elder.

Billy Gates' grandson, Joseph Daniel Vaughn, wrote down his memories of his grandfather in 1957; Vaughn was 78 years old and was living in Salt Lake City, Utah... "William B. Gates was born in Patrick or Franklin County, Virginia in 1824. He lived about nine miles north of Mount Airy, North Carolina on the Willis Gap Road. His farm was on Owen or Cistern Creek and reached up to the Willis Gap Road at a point known as the High Knob. His wife, Zilpha Ingram's father, James Ingram deeded her 150 acres of land on Smith River near Franklin County, Virginia. They lived there in the early 1850's, then she sold it to her brothers William P. and Solomon Ingram about 1855. They then moved to Ararat, Patrick County, Virginia and bought 100 acres of land from John Eaton's executor, Martin Cloud, for \$112.00 at a sale. In 1857, he bought the Dodson place adjoining his land. This land was a tract of 150 acres. From Robert and his wife Ony Clark, he bought more land. He had in all over 380 acres. After his death, the land was divided amongst his children."

"Elder William B. Gates was a Primitive Baptist Minister. He was ordained to the Baptist ministry when he was a young man at Jacks Creek Meetinghouse near Smith River. My father, Daniel Sanders Vaughn, was reared in the same community as his Grandfather Gates. Grandfather always rode a horse in his travels. He was a small man, only 5'6" tall and about 145 pounds. He had dark hair, wore a beard, and died at the age of 72. He was buried on his farm by his wife's side and some others of his family. No tombstones mark their graves. The old home is gone now, but some of the buildings remain." (From The Gates Family of Patrick County, Virginia by Carol Leonard Snow).

Next week, we will take a look at Thomas and Sallie Richardson Gates' son, John Wesley Gates, a merchant and farmer in Ararat, Virginia. Woody may be reached at rockcastlecreek1@gmail.com or (276) 692-9626.



Statira Gates Noonkester, daughter of Billy and Zilpha Ingram Gates. (From Find a Grave)

Social Security Matters

By Russell Gloor, *National Social Security Advisor at the AMAC Foundation, the non-profit arm of the Association of Mature American Citizens*

Ask Rusty – I'm 65 and Working; Can I Collect Ex-spouse Benefits?

Dear Rusty: I turned 65 earlier this year, and I still work full time. I was divorced four years ago after 38 years of marriage, but my ex-husband has been collecting Social Security for at least 10 years now. Can I start collecting Social Security and still work full time? And can I collect my ex-husband's amount if it is more than mine (and what is the best way to achieve this)? When I went to my local SSA office, they said they had no way of knowing that. Signed: Working Divorcee

Dear Working Divorcee: Although you are eligible to claim Social Security at age 65, because you are working full time you may wish to wait a bit longer to do so. That's because Social Security has an "earnings test" which applies to anyone who collects benefits before full retirement age, and you have not yet reached yours.

The earnings test imposes a limit on how much you can earn before SS takes away some of your benefits. If you exceed the annual earnings limit (\$22,320 for 2024), Social Security will want back \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit and you will need to repay that, usually by having future benefits withheld. If you significantly exceed the limit, you may even be temporarily ineligible to receive SS benefits until you either

earn less or reach your full retirement age (FRA) of 66 years and 8 months. So, if your earnings from working will significantly exceed the annual earnings limit (which changes yearly), it's likely that your wisest move would be to wait longer to claim your Social Security. As a bonus for doing so, your monthly payment will have grown and will be higher when you claim later. The earnings test no longer applies after you reach FRA.

Regarding benefits from your ex-husband, you cannot collect his instead of yours. What you may be able to do, when you claim your own benefit, is to get an additional amount which brings your monthly payment up to 50% of his. In order for that to happen, you would need to satisfy the following criteria:

- You are not currently married.
- The personal benefit you are entitled to at your FRA must be less than 50% of your ex-husband's FRA entitlement.

If the above are true, when you claim your own SS retirement benefit you will also get a "spousal boost" to bring your payment up to what you're entitled to as an ex-spouse. The amount of the spousal boost, if you claim Social Security at your FRA, will be the difference between half of his FRA entitlement and your FRA entitlement. If you claim your benefit before your FRA, not only will your own benefit be reduced for claiming early, but the amount of your spousal boost will also be reduced (benefits claimed before FRA are always reduced).

Whenever you decide to claim Social Security,

you will be automatically deemed to be filing for benefits from your ex-husband as well (you shouldn't need to apply separately). You've already satisfied the basic criteria of at least 10 years married to get benefits from an ex-spouse and, if you satisfy the above criteria as well, you will be entitled to a spousal boost when you claim. But your current earnings from working full time will likely affect your eligibility to collect Social Security benefits at this time, so waiting until your full retirement age to claim may be your best choice.

If you will only slightly exceed the annual earnings limit you can consider claiming earlier, as long as you are comfortable with receiving a permanently reduced amount, and the prospect of not getting benefits for a number of months if you exceed the earnings limit (the number of months you will go without benefits depends on how much you exceed the limit by).

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadviser@amacfoundation.org.

The Secret to Winter Exercise You Need to Know - Part 3

Habits. It's all about habits.

A book that I highly recommend is Charles Duhigg's *The Power of Habit*. In it, he explains how you can autopilot behaviors to make them easy. I don't have time to explain the whole process, but I will go over the rationale for why habits are so powerful.

About 40% of what we do is totally habit-driven. Think about your morning routine. Wake up, go to the bathroom, brush teeth, make coffee, check email. You do these without thinking, instinctively. Actually, if you do them out of order, you might find yourself stopping in your tracks because you feel like something is wrong.

The great thing about habits is that they require little willpower or effort. You just do them. Everyone has good habits as well as bad ones. The important thing to remember is that you are the one who developed both types of habits. As a result, you can break the bad habits, and also

build new good habits.

Building a new habit can take up to six weeks, in which time you will have to expend some willpower until it gets set. Once it gets set – take a breath of relief – you're on autopilot.

The key features of a habit are the cue (reminder or trigger) and the reward, with the actual habit stuck in the middle. For example, my cue to exercise is finishing with devotion. I wake up, read my Bible, and then go exercise. That's my morning ritual. It was hard at first but now is a habit as implicit as brushing my teeth. My reward for exercising is how I feel for the rest of the day. When I miss exercise, I don't feel as sharp as I do on the days that I do exercise. I also don't sleep as well on an exercise-less night.

For others, it could be something like this: Finish work, head home, stop at the gym for a workout, then go home for a light dinner. Or maybe this: eat a light lunch, walk for the remainder

of your lunch break, then go back to work. The beauty of this is that you get to shape your own habits!

You have to enjoy it.

This actually should be first, but I put it last for a reason. This is so involved with #1 – finding your "why" – that I thought it needed some space away from it. This has everything to do with what you do, more than why you do it. But often what you do for exercise is related to someone else's why or who told you to do it.

There are many examples. Maybe you run because someone told you you should. Unfortunately, you hated running in the past and hate it still. I love running, but it's not for everyone. (On a side note, I used to hate running until I had this one really exhausting good run with a friend of mine). Trust me, this exercise program will

(See Winter Exercise p. A12)



Pictured are president Lottie Gammons, Roger Gammons, Winston Procter, Clayton Cole, Buster Cawdrey, Rachel White, vice president.



Several military veterans were honored by the Red Bank Ruritan Club on November 14.

Club honors veterans

The Red Bank Ruritan Club honored its military veterans on November 14, with gift certificates.

The Red Bank Ruritan Club honored its military veterans on November 14, with gift certificates.

Donations being collected for cat rescue

A donation box to benefit Clover Cat Rescue is set up in The Hatteras Pearl on Main Street in Stuart.

Cat food, litter, litter boxes, scoopers, towels, and live traps are needed. But more than anything, adopters are needed. If you can't make it to the shop and still

want to donate, you can do so on their website or Facebook page. With each donation, you'll get a chance to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 gift certificate to use at The Hatteras Pearl. This runs through the end of December, with a winner will be announced after.

Hundreds of students recognized for academic excellence



Ferrum College announced 304 full-time students were recognized for their academic excellence during fall semester 2023.

The 121 full-time students named to the President's List earned a semester GPA of 4.0 and the 183 full-time students named to the Dean's List earned a semester GPA of at least 3.4.

"We are incredibly proud of each student who earned these academic achievements," said College President Dr. Mirta Martin. "Fall semester 2023 will be forever demarcated by this bright moment celebrating their dedication to their academic journey.

"Due to their unwavering determination and relentless pursuit of excellence, they have conquered the challenges that lay before them, proving that hard work and perseverance are the keys to success. We celebrate with these students and are Panther Proud of each Ferrum College student's achievements this semester," she said.

To view the Ferrum College Fall 2023 President's and Dean's Lists, visit

<https://www.ferrum.edu/blog/304-ferrum-college-students-achieve-academic-success-during-fall-2023-semester/>

Martin among students honored at banquet



Hunter Martin was among those student athletes on the Cross Country to be honored at the fall banquet. Pictured (l-r) are Coach Eli Roberson, Cougar Award- Xavier Torres, MVP-Hunter Martin, Cougar Award-Mackenzie Williams, MVP-Sadie Martin.

Patrick County native wins Pole Vault



David Lee Williams won the Liberty High School Open on December 2 with a jump of 13 feet 6 inches and more recently won the Holiday Classic at JDL FastTrack in Winston Salem on December 16 with a jump of 14 feet.

Williams is a native of Patrick County and attends high school at North Stokes. The vault of 14 feet places him 4th in North Carolina and in the top 50 of the nation for the indoor season so far.

Sports Briefs

By Ashlee Mullis
Martinez Tejada Named to All State

Patrick County Football Player Reyli Martinez Tejada was named to the 2023 All State 2nd Team as a Kicker this year. Martinez Tejada went 16-17 on PAT's and 6-7 on field goals with his longest kick from 42 yards.

Varsity Lady Cougars Split the Week

The Varsity Lady Cougars fell to Staunton River 26-36, Monday, December 11. Aniya Penn had 7 points, 1 rebound, and 1 assist. Kimora Wimbush had 5 points, 3 rebounds, and 1 steal. Allanah Mitchell had 4 points, 1 rebound, 1 assist, and 2 steals. Friday, December 15, they hosted Dan River, taking a huge 56-11 win over the Lady Wildcats. Mitchell had 11 points, 2 rebounds, and 3 steals. Lilli Cobler had 11 points, 3 rebounds, 2 assists, and 2 steals. Lilly Hazelwood had 10 points, 6 rebounds, 3 assists, 2 steals, and 4 blocks. Kendra Worley had 8 points, 2 assists, and 5 steals.

JV Lady Cougars Lose to Staunton River

The JV Lady Cougars traveled to Staunton River, Monday, December 11, taking a 34-17 loss. Martina Hubbard had 7 points, 4 rebounds, and 3 steals. Lacey Sutphin had 4 points and 2 rebounds. Novella Nester had 3 rebounds and 2 points. Gracen Conner had 3 rebounds, 2 steals, and 2 points. Chloe Hubbard led the defense with 6 rebounds as well as 2 steals and 2 points. Meredith Wood had 4 rebounds.

"It took a while for the ladies to start playing. We got behind in the 1st quarter and it put us in a tight spot. They put up good shots but couldn't get much to fall. They really worked hard that 4th quarter

scoring 10 of the points. I am proud that they didn't give up and played the whole game with great attitudes," said Coach Grace Helms.

JV Cougars Fall to Carroll

Tuesday, December 12, the JV Lady Cougars traveled to Carroll County, losing 44-22. Carroll jumped out to a lead, but the Lady Cougars shifted defenses and held the Cavaliers to only 5 points in both the second and 3rd quarters. Lauren Hazelwood led the team with 10 points. Martina Hubbard had 3 rebounds and 4 points. Meredith Wood had 3 rebounds and 2 points. Gracen Conner had 4 rebounds and 2 points. Chloe Hubbard had 9 rebounds and 2 points. Novella Nester and Aubreigh Large each added 3 rebounds each.

"These ladies have had 3 consecutive games. My girls are tired. I am hopeful they get some rest and have a great practice gearing up for our next game," said Coach Grace Helms.

JV Lady Cougars End Week with Win

After two losses on the week, the JV Girls won a close game against Dan River, 26-23. Gracen Conner led the way for the Cougars with 7 rebounds, 6 steals, and 8 points. Martina Hubbard added 5 steals, 3 rebounds, and 7 points. Chloe Hubbard had 8 rebounds, 5 steals, and 3 points. Aubreigh Large had 3 rebounds, 4 steals, and 2 points. Skye Ayers had 2 steals and 2 points.

"If we would have hit our layups," said Coach Grace Helms, "the game wouldn't have been close. The girls are tired and have earned a day to rest. I am proud that they didn't give up. Dan River was leading in the 1st quarter and 2nd quarter. We tied it up in the 3rd, then took the lead. Dan River came back. The ladies continued to play great defense but not have many shots fall."



Contest Winners

(cont. from page 1)

I love Christmas because I get to spend time with my family and friends. My most favorite thing is that my whole school is out for Christmas! My mom, my dad, my sister, and I will sing with my karaoke machine. I love Christmas!

Third Place

A Deer Eating Apples

By Arianna Whitt,

Meadows of Dan Elementary School

There was a deer in my backyard eating apples. When I looked outside, it just kept standing there. I went outside to try to pet it, but it ran away. Then he came back. It was Rudolph because he had a red nose. He ate all the apples because none were on the ground.

Grades 4-7

First Place

Jack's Log

By Bailey Walker,

Homeschool student

One night changed the world, the night now known as the "Night Bright as Day." The whole earth fell in one night, and that is about all we know. We are still down here in this "town" that our ancestors made, thinking that something like that night might happen again. We have food and water, but we also have boulder brutes that attack us whenever they can, and one of them killed a friend of mine. You might not know what a boulder brute is, so let me tell you. They are big and ugly as . . . um never mind. They look like big boulders until they attack, then they shoot out their arms and legs that look like rocks stuck together with big gaps here and there. Now I'll tell you a little about me. I like cats, dogs, and motorbikes, and I have started training to go out and explore the world above! I have been wanting to go ever since I was a little kid, but now I'm 13 so I can start training! No one has been to the surface in 100 years, and I'm kind of nervous about going. I have no clue what to expect. That's what training is for I guess, so wish me luck!

Since the Night Bright as Day

Year-253 Month-10 Day-22

As Jack finished writing in his journal there was a knock at the door, and without waiting, his friend and fellow trainee Bill Bowen stepped into the room.

"Hey Jack," said Bill, "what are you up to?"

"Oh nothing much," Jack replied, "what's up with you?"

"Oh nothing," said Bill slyly, "just being on time for our first day of training. I heard that, just today, ten out of the thirty kids will be eliminated and sent home!"

"No kidding?" Jack said a little nervously.

"Yup," Bill replied. "The four Deciders are coming to watch and choose the ten that will be sent home."

"Whoa."

The Deciders were four elected rulers who made decisions for the Underlands. It was a big deal that they were coming to the trainees' first day of real training. Jack started to feel sweat forming and running down his armpits.

The two friends entered the training zone near a large dome towards the middle of the underlands with the apple, peach, walnut, pecan, and pineapple trees. Jack and Bill signed in at the desk outside the main door to the training zone. As they entered, they heard a buzz of conversation and quickly joined in.

"I wonder what kind of test the Deciders have planned for us?" Bill asked.

"It doesn't matter what they throw at us, we can handle anything! You and I trained on the simulator and got high enough scores to get here just like everyone else!"

"Yeah," replied Bill, "we got this."

Just then the speakers stopped the low hum of music that was playing, and the lights dimmed. A figure emerged, clad in a dark robe with a black mask that hid his or her face, as well as any features that would define them.

"Greetings trainees from across the Underlands!" The Decider boomed through the speakers. "You are all here because you passed our simulated trials with high scores that trump the average teenager, and that is why you are here! You all possess skills that are far great-

er than that of any of the other entrants in the trials." Everyone cheered, and it took several minutes to calm everyone down. When at last everyone was quiet the Decider continued. "I will now assign teams to go into the training simulator."

Small cards with numbers were handed out to everyone. Jack's card had the number three, and Bill's card had the number one. Someone else cried, "I'm five, man! I'm five." Jack waved to Bill and walked to a large door marked with a glowing three.

Jack entered the training simulator with five others, and as the last one closed the door a voice came over the speakers. The voice said, "Alright, now that you are all in your group, introductions are in order, so please tell the others in your group what your names are. Then, when you are ready, press the button on the wall to the left of the door."

The group looked at each other, and one by one, told their names to everyone else. Bob Right, Jill Washer, Jack Thatcher, Will Workmen, Walker Hope, and Lopez Stoll.

"Well," said Walker, "shall we push the magic button and start the simulator?" Jill scoffed distastefully, and Bob sighed. Then Lopez walked up and pushed the button. Instantly the room transformed around them into a large armory and a voice called, "Welcome trainees to the armory. Here you will pick out your gear and weapons for your training sessions! So please look around, and pick the weapons and gear that best suit you and your team!"

Lopez walked right up to a huge high tech warhammer and picked it up. "Oh yeah!" cried Lopez, "this is sweet!" He swung the hammer experimentally. "Yeah," he said more softly, "I really like this."

Jill found a large gun, picked it up, and smiled, being the only girl in the group she was determined to make a good impression on her team. Bob armed himself with thermal, electro, and gas grenades, as well as a fully automatic rifle. He grinned at his weapons. Walker found a very sharp, strong, and high tech sword and high tech daggers. Will took a fully automatic rifle, some thermal grenades, and a high tech dagger. That left Jack. He knew what he was good at, so he armed himself with a high tech dagger, a semi-automatic pistol, thermal grenades, and dual grappling hook gun. When everyone was ready, they made their way to get their suits. The suits were full body and air tight. When the trainees put them on they found that there were more aspects of the suit they had not yet found out about, and so they were talked through how to use them by the voice over the speakers. There was a flip out chainsaw and a flip up camera on the right glove and a scanner on the left glove.

When everyone had suited up they pushed another button in the back of the armory and the scenery changed around them again. This time the scenery changed to a field of dead grass with an old, rusted, and broken tank flipped on its side.

"What was that?" Will asked.

"What was what," Bob said, "I don't—" He got no further. A sharp hiss cut through the air as a very large snake head rose up from a hole in the tank. Seeing them it leapt into the air hissing as it did so, and spread wide three sets of wings that flapped. The snake began twisting and coiling and hissing and . . . moving closer. Walker was the first to recover, and yelling at the others to move, dashed forward to face the on-coming beast.

"That's a winged viper!" Bob yelled in terror. He ran the opposite way that Walker had run and disappeared.

"Bob has been eliminated," a robotic voice said calmly. Meanwhile, Walker fought bravely but was giving ground to the viper. Jill snapped out of her daze next, raising her gun and taking a shot at the viper, hitting it in its belly and causing the viper to let out a furious cry. Jack snapped out of his stupor along with the others and attacked the viper. Lopez took a swing at the winged viper with his massive war

hammer that it easily dogged. He growled in frustration.

Jack took advantage of the snake's momentary distraction through a thermal grenade that exploded right beside the snake and sent it slamming into the ground. Walker stepped forward to deliver a killing blow with his blade, but the snake reacted too fast for Walker, and the snake, biting him, rose steadily into the air as Walker administered one of the two poison cures that had appeared in his pockets. Will stepped up and started throwing thermal grenades. He had wasted three, the snake avoiding them with remarkable ease, when he gave that up and started shooting at the snake along with Jill. But Jack knew that they would never bring the viper down that way.

He knew a way to beat this kind of enemy, and so he pulled out his dual grappling hook guns. He aimed at the winged viper as it dogged a furious barrage from Jill and Will. He pulled the trigger and the sharp forked clamp shot forth like a bullet with a loud bang! The clamp sunk deep into the vipers under belly with a sickening thud. Jack clicked a button on the grappling hook, and the chain started to reel in. A second shot from his other grappling hook hit the snake just below the head and served to pull the viper down faster. When it was in reach, Walker sliced the viper's head off. As he did this the snake disintegrated into code. "Congratulations!" boomed the robotic voice, "you five have completed the challenge!"

After that the "field" they were standing in and the "weapons" that they were holding disappeared into code, and they were back in the room with the button and the glowing three on the door. After exiting the simulator, they found Bob sitting on a bench. Upon seeing them he stood up and smiled sadly. "Sorry guys" he said dejectedly. "I was just so terrified, and I really screwed up. I know I won't make it, but I hope you'll forgive me." As he said this, tears sprung to his eyes, and he tried to hide them.

Walker walked up to Bob and patted him on the shoulder. "Come on, old chap," he said, "don't cry. I forgive you. I know how scary it is when you're just thrown into something like that."

"Really?" Bob sniffled slightly.

"Yes, really." Walker replied. "Now come with me, and I'll help you pack your stuff."

"Thank you," Bob said, regaining control. And with that they walked off.

Later that day Jack met up with Bill in their dorms, and both were glad that the other wasn't packing.

"How's it going?" Bill asked.

"Oh, fine," replied Jack.

"So how was the winged wiper? Did you pee your pants again?"

"Not that tough and no way," Jack replied evenly. The two grinned at each other and at the easy sense of humor they shared. While they were talking Walker escorted Bob back to his room that he shared with a guy named Husten. Husten had also been eliminated and was glad to know at least he wasn't alone. Walker, true to his word, helped them pack up and move out, and soon the two friends were waving goodbye to Walker as they boarded a single track train. After meal time in the cafeteria, the trainees headed to their respective dorms and got some sleep because they all knew that the next day would be harder.

The trainees rose at the crack of dawn to loud trumpets over the speakers in their rooms. "Trainees!" a Decider boomed, with a hint of a southern accent. Whichever Decider was talking, it was not the one that had talked to them yesterday. "Wake up, get some breakfast, and head to simulator number one!"

Jack sat up groggy, and Bill just groaned and rolled over. "Well no use putting it off," Jack said wearily and got out of bed. Bill followed suit soon after, and they got dressed in their respective bathrooms.

When they entered the cafeteria they found that the breakfast that they were to have was made up of the rations that would be given to them if and when they went to the world above. Bill groaned again and said, "I was really hoping to get some pancakes."

"How about some dried beef, canned fruit, and stale bread instead?" Jack chuckled. Then the two friends walked up to the cafeteria counter and got their food. They sat down at a table with some other guys and talked amongst themselves.

At exactly 7:00 all of the trainees were in the simulator and the button was pushed. The trainees were teleported into the same armory as before, and all of them selected the weapons that they were accustomed to using. When everyone had put on their suits and collected their weapons, they were split into four groups of five when they were suddenly teleported into the arena that had been chosen for the simulation. Jack, Walker, and Will found themselves in the same group along with two others, Mehoy and Jullie. They found themselves on a long road that stretched into the fake horizon.

The voice of a Decider came over their radio. "Trainees," the Decider said calmly, "your goal is simple. Just survive, and kill as many monsters as you can. You have eight hours until a helicopter will come down in the simulation to pick up survivors. Good luck!" And with that the Decider was gone, and monsters started appearing everywhere!

Will and Walker charged a huge boulder brute while Jack, Mehoy, and Jullie fought another winged viper. Walker swung his sword while Jack aimed his dual grappling hooks. Will clicked the homing button on his dagger while Mehoy threw an explosive heat-seeking throwing star. As their battle raged, another one was also getting under way as the group with Bill and Jill fearlessly fought a pine beast, a huge monster of a thing that had four long, thick legs reaching ten feet that ended in a point, with a large body and a T-Rex like head. Two trainees (Ventur and Wurt) had already fallen to this formidable foe, but still Bill, Jill, and Tot, the other trainee in their group, fought the pine beast. While these two battles were raging, another group, which included Lopez, was being massacred by three winged vipers. "I need help over here!" Wick yelled as he wildly swung a small gatling gun trying to shoot a winged viper.

"So do I!" Gabe hollered as another winged viper spun around menacingly just out of reach of his electrified mace. BAM!

"Got one" Lopez yelled and went over to Gabe with his viper just as the other one eliminated Wick.

Jack and Mehoy finished off the snake, and after overcoming her initial shock, Jullie proved to be a very good shot with her electric crossbow that shot bomb arrows. The bolder brute never stood a chance. Now with the immediate danger taken care of the group could survey the surrounding area.

"Look over there, it's a town!" Jullie shouted.

"Yes indeed it is," agreed Walker. "Shall we check it out, or do you wish to stay here and fight more monsters?" Walker asked Will who was adjusting a dial on his flip out saw.

"I say we go," was his answer. When they got there they saw what was the battlefield of group four with one dead winged viper, two wounded winged vipers and five eliminated trainees. They saw the already eliminated trainees and beasts by the glowing markers that floated above where they fell. One was Lopez. "Well, let's deal with the flying garbage and figure out what to do next," Will said, and he stepped forward to intercept the nearest winged viper.

While the trainees were in the simulator, Bob, who returned home but had kept in touch with Walker, found out some strange news that he felt he needed to share. But Bob never got to share anything with Walker or anyone else, because he didn't hear the stepping of feet or the drawing of a blade.

The battle with the pine beast continued for what seemed like hours but could have just been seconds. Jill fired her gun over and over again, Bill threw grenades of all kinds and shot the thing with his dueling pistols, and Tot continued to shoot his triple barreled flame-

(See Contest Winners p. A11)

Inpatient Dialysis available at TCRH

Twin County Regional Healthcare (TCRH) announced today that patients who need inpatient hospital care along with dialysis for short-term or long-term kidney disease can now receive the care they need at Twin County Regional Healthcare.

Prior to TCRH offering this much needed service, patients would have to be transferred to another facility. This created additional cost and an inconvenience to the patient as well as their family who would need to travel to be with their family member.

"We are happy to offer this service to our inpatients and give them the opportunity to stay at our hospital while receiving treatments for their other medical needs," said Sudandra Ratnasamy, chief executive officer of Twin County Regional Healthcare. "We work closely

with our hospital interdisciplinary teams to provide the highest quality and safest care to our patients. We feel this inpatient program will be well received by our patients and their families."

"The inpatient dialysis treatments will be administered at the bedside anywhere in the hospital," said William Alley, Chief Nursing Officer at Wythe County Community Hospital. "We are using telehealth with a registered nurse and nephrologist. Patients must already have the required catheter inserted by their interventional radiologist or nephrologist to receive inpatient dialysis at TCRH. We work with the patient's kidney doctor during this time so that when the patient is released from the hospital, they can resume their treatments on an outpatient basis as they did prior to being admitted."

Youth can apply for 2023 State Fair exhibitor scholarships

The State Fair of Virginia is pleased to announce the 2023 applied scholarship program. Applications are being accepted through Jan. 24, 2023.

Youth who exhibited beef cattle, sheep, meat goats or swine in the Youth Livestock Show at the 2023 State Fair are eligible to apply for 22 scholarships totaling \$36,090.64. Of those 22 scholarships, seven are open to all youth who participated in the 2023 livestock shows or 2023 non-livestock youth competitions. They include a \$1,000 scholarship from the Gatewood Holland Stoneman Endowment, a \$1,000 Farm Credit Scholarship and five \$2,000 youth development scholarship opportunities.

The 15 scholarships for 2023 livestock exhibitors will be offered in three age groups: Juniors (9-12); Intermediate (13-15); and Seniors (16 and older). Groups are based on exhibitors' ages as of Sept. 30, 2023.

Funds allocated for the scholarships represent a portion of the proceeds from the ninth annual Youth Livestock Sale of Champions auction, held Sept. 30; the annual

Black Tie & Boots Gala, held Sept. 22; and general donations to the scholarship program.

Details and applications can be found in the "Scholarship" section of the fair's website at StateFairVa.org. Applications must be completed electronically and received by 5 p.m. on Jan. 24, 2024.

Since 2013, the State Fair has awarded 2,069 scholarships and has given over \$732,500 to support youth education. The fair offers youth more than \$100,000 each year in scholarship funds through 4-H, FFA and vocational competitions and specific equine, fine arts and horticulture competitions.

The 2024 State Fair of Virginia will run from Sept. 27 through Oct. 6. Information is available at StateFairVa.org.

The State Fair is held each fall at its permanent home at The Meadow Event Park in Caroline County and attracts 250,000 fairgoers. The event celebrates the best of Virginia's past, present and future through scholarship initiatives, creative programming and a focus on the commonwealth's agriculture and natural resources industries.

Regena Micheline Shough

Mrs. Regena Micheline Shough, age 72 of Stuart, passed away Friday, December 15, 2023, at Blue Ridge Therapy Connection. She was born in Patrick County on May 28, 1951, to the late James Roosevelt Odell and Carlene Holt Justice. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by a son, Tim Shough; and her stepfather, Jimmie Justice.

Regena worked for 36 years with Patrick County Social Services. She was an active member of Patrick Springs Pentecostal Holiness Church. She

served 20 years as church treasurer, directed the children's bell choir, assisted in VBS, and many other activities. She enjoyed helping others and volunteered with Mountain Valley Hospice. She enjoyed her friends, her family, shopping, crafts, and card making.

Surviving is her loving husband, James Shough; one daughter and son-in-law, Kelly and Todd Burton; two grandchildren, Anna, and Noah Burton; two brothers and a sister-in-law, Jimmy and Marcella Odell, Ken

Justice; and several nieces and nephews.

A graveside service will be held Tuesday, December 19, 2023, at 12:00 PM at Patrick Memorial Gardens with Rev. Jim Churchwell officiating. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Mountain Valley Hospice, 240 Commonwealth Blvd West, Unit 602B, Martinsville, VA 24112 or to Patrick Springs Pentecostal Holiness Church, P.O. Box 55, Patrick Springs, VA 24133. Online condolences may be sent to www.moodyfuneralservices.com.

Patrick County Farm Bureau recognized at State Level



Patrick County Farm Bureau receives award at the 2023 Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention. Pictured left to right are Lissie Lockard, administrative assistant of the Virginia Farm Bureau Federation; Wayne Pryor, president, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation; Jonathan Wood, president, Patrick County Farm Bureau and Mark Dawson, director of membership, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation.

Patrick County Farm Bureau received recognition for the 2023 Agriculture Demonstration Day. Virginia Farm Bureau awarded Patrick County second place in their County Awards of Excellence contest. "Patrick competed against 87 other County Farm Bureau across the State", stated Mark Dawson, Director of Membership, Virginia Farm Bureau Federation. This award comes with a \$1,500 cash prize, recognition in the Farm Bureau News magazine and special recognition at the 2023 Virginia Farm Bureau annual convention.

The Patrick County Farm Bureau, in cooperation with several other organizations, developed and

implemented an Ag Demo Day. A special programming emphasis was placed on farm safety and highway safety related to farm equipment. Safety topics include power take-off, roadway safety, roll-over protection, and securing loads. Demonstrations included goat milk soap, zero turn mower, hay bale drop, and PTO entanglement. A tractor skills competition was open to guests with prizes including a wood stove, farm gate, and ratchet straps.

The event was aimed at farm

and highway safety. Farmers and the public were reminded of standard operating procedures to keep them safe around farm equipment. Virginia State Police officers and a representative from the Department of Health and Safety at Virginia Tech, provided valuable lectures and materials to the audience. The dangers posed by power take offs (PTOs), loaders, unstable loads, and moving farm equipment on public roads was highlighted.

Planning partners for the event were Virginia Cooperative Extension, Department of Health and Safety at Virginia Tech, and the Patrick County Rotary Club. The event also featured production agriculturists, farm equipment dealers, and farm supply stores. A portion of the event was dedicated to children's activities with Spencer Penn Center providing entertainment like, corn hole, pig train, grain pool, photo opportunities, hay bale decorating, and fake cow milking.

Patrick County Farm Bureau is planning a similar event for the Spring of 2024. The event will be held at Rotary Field in Stuart and open to the public.

(Submitted by Sandra W. Heath, Patrick County Farm Bureau Board Member Volunteer)



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Deadline for submittal of proposals is on or before 4:30 p.m. on January 12, 2024.

Minority- and/or female-owned businesses and local Franklin and Patrick County businesses are encouraged to apply. STEP, Inc. is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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BWW# VA-367533-1
TRUSTEE'S SALE OF 41 NEW HOPE ROAD, STUART, VA 24171. In execution of a certain Deed of Trust dated June 9, 2016, in the original principal amount of \$149,737.00 recorded in the Clerk's Office, Circuit Court for Patrick County, Virginia as Instrument No. 160000875. The undersigned Substitute Trustee will offer for sale at public auction in the front of the Circuit Court building for Patrick County, 101 West Blue Ridge Street, Stuart, Virginia, or any such temporary alternative Circuit County location designated by the Judges of the Circuit Court, on February 12, 2024, at 12:00 PM, the property described in said Deed of Trust, located at the above address, and more particularly described as follows: ALL THAT CERTAIN TRACT OR PARCEL OF LAND LYING AND BEING IN THE SMITH RIVER MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT OF PATRICK COUNTY, VIRGINIA, BEING MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS, TO-WIT: CONTAINING 5.9529 ACRES, AS SHOWN ON PLAT OF SURVEY ENTITLED "WAYNE SCOTT AND ANITA SCOTT," PREPARED BY JENNINGS L. BOLT, LS, DATED AUGUST 26, 1996, AND RECORDED IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF PATRICK COUNTY, VIRGINIA, IN PLAT CABINET 1, SLIDE 122 C. TERMS OF SALE: ALL CASH. A bidder's deposit often percent (10%) of the sale price or ten percent (10%) of the original principal balance of the subject Deed of Trust, whichever is lower, in the form of cash or certified funds payable to the Substitute Trustee must be present at the time of the sale. The balance of the purchase price will be due within fifteen (15) days of sale, otherwise Purchaser's deposit may be forfeited to Trustee. Time is of the essence. If the sale is set aside for any reason, the Purchaser at the sale shall be entitled to a return of the deposit paid. The Purchaser may, if provided by the terms of the Trustee's Memorandum of Foreclosure Sale, be entitled to a \$50 cancellation fee from the Substitute Trustee, but shall have no further recourse against the Mortgagor, the Mortgagee or the Mortgagee's attorney. A form copy of the Trustee's memorandum of foreclosure sale and contract to purchase real property is available for viewing at www.bwwsales.com. Additional terms, if any, to be announced at the sale and the Purchaser may be given the option to execute the contract of sale electronically. This is a communication from a debt collector and any information obtained will be used for that purpose. The sale is subject to seller confirmation. Substitute Trustee: Equity Trustees, LLC, 8100 Three Chopt Road, Suite 240, Richmond, VA 23229. For more information contact: BWW Law Group, LLC, attorneys for Equity Trustees, LLC, 6003 Executive Blvd, Suite 101, Rockville, MD 20852, 301-961-6555, website: www.bwwsales.com. VA-367533-1.

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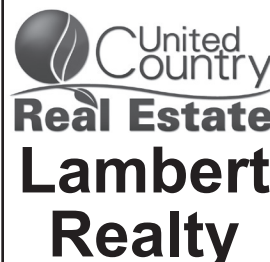
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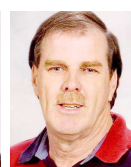


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Contest Winners

(cont. from page 7)

thrower at the pine beast, but it never died. Eventually they were forced to run. The beast chased them throughout the small burnt forest that they had found themselves in, and Jill was falling behind. Having the biggest weapon out of the group made her stamina deplete all the faster, and eventually she fell utterly exhausted to her knees. Before Bill or Tot could do anything the beast eliminated her.

"No!" Bill yelled as he ran. The duo burst from the trees and stopped dead in their tracks as they saw a sleeping winged viper. But stopping was a mistake, for the pine beast was on them almost as soon as they stopped, and Tot was eliminated right there. Bill dogged the beast only to be eliminated by the winged viper's fangs.

After finishing off the winged vipers, team one stood alone with no clue where anyone else was. Will joined the others who left the simulation. Jack, Jullie, Walker, and Mehoy stood in a house waiting for any sign that the simulation was almost over.

Eight hours passed in the house, and there was still no sign of anyone else. When the helicopter landed, team one boarded, and left alone.

Once outside, team one and Will were greeted with boisterous applause by every trainee who was eliminated. After the applause died away the trainees said goodbye to everyone waiting to leave, while those who were staying rejoiced and hugged each other.

Back in Jack and Bill's dorm room the two friends were catching up on what had happened to them in the simulator. Jack described fighting the boulder brute and winged viper while Bill described holding off, and then running from, the pine beast. "You made it pretty far from that beast in the simulator." Jack remarked.

"You did a nice job taking care of those monsters too, you know." Bill replied.

The next day the trainees knew it would be the hardest challenge yet because tomorrow they would become cadets, and their training would be complete.

The morning started like the previous with the Decider waking them up for a bland breakfast, but then they got an announcement over the intercom. "Trainees report to the platform in the auditorium to become a cadet!" The ten trainees filed on to the stage to receive their cadet badges.

Walker Hope, Melek Guyfown, Jack Thatcher, Jullie Milton, Will Workmen, Kalub Hoptown, Tomas Waymaker, Jewel Mitskewer, Bill Bowen, and Mehoy Jackson. These are the names of the ten cadets. Now they face their most daunting task. Going to the world above.

Second Place - TIE

A Tale of Birds and Snow

By Hannah Phillips,
Meadows of Dan Elementary School

Paige stared upward towards the seemingly never ending winter sky, she was trying to spot any form of life other than her and her brother.

"Don't you find it weird how we're the only things that move for miles around?" she asked absentmindedly.

"No, this forest has been empty for years," her older brother, Paul, said.

"Come on!" Paige said as she scooped up some snow and threw it at her brother.

"Stop! You're going to ruin my jacket!" he said. Their dad had recently given Paul his old high school jacket from 1989. It has the high school's name, Havensville High School, printed in bold bubble letters around a basketball. It used to be a rich blue, but after years of wear the color had faded.

"Fine," Paige said as she dropped the snowball she was molding in her hands.

She stared behind them at the endless white snow painting that colored the ground. It was untouched except for her and her brother's footprints. She took the small charm out of her pocket and stared at it for a while. The charm was a pretty little thing, a small purple-ish crystal hung from a string with beads threaded through it.

Paige and Paul had been instructed to hang the charm in one of the bare birch trees around them. Their family had been making the charms for years and hanging them in these trees. The charms do absolutely nothing, but it's tradition, and everyone in their family honored tradition. She put the charm back in her pocket.

"Hey!" Paige called over to her brother "I think I found a good one, would you help me?" she asked as she motioned to one of the trees.

"Coming," Paul responded as he walked over. Paige was already trying to scurry up the trunk to reach the first branch. Paul helped her up the tree and she grabbed a branch, pulling herself onto it. She climbed higher and higher into the tree, looking for a branch to tie the charm on. When Paige reached the top, she felt the chilly calm breeze ruffle her hair. She carefully took the small charm out of her pocket. Her hands reached in front of her, tying the charm on a small twig.

Paige looked below her at the forest and at the tall white trunks reaching up to her. She never had a real fear of heights. In fact, heights excited and intrigued her. There was a flash of darkness to the left of her. Her head turned to see a flock of pitch black birds flying downward. She thought this was weird, because she would've seen the birds before, but she hadn't.

Her head turned downward to see where the

birds were flying to. They were flying very oddly, spiraling downward towards something. No, someone. Paige's heart quickened as she saw what looked to be a person being chased down by birds. The scene made no sense to her, a person being chased down by birds? It sounded like something out of a fairytale. She hurriedly climbed down the tree, jumping the rest of the way when she neared the bottom.

"I see someone!" Paige yelled to Paul who whipped his head around to her. "Someone's over there!" she yelled as she pointed to the person she saw. She started to run, not even looking back to see if her brother was following her. Her eyes trained on the dark smudge of the person as the birds rained down from the sky. As the person was overwhelmed with the onslaught of feathered creatures, they fell to the snow-covered ground. Soon all that was visible were the birds. Paige didn't think for a second what would happen to her. If the birds attacked a full-grown person, driving them to the ground, what would they do when she showed up? She didn't know and she didn't care. She just kept on putting one foot in front of the other.

When Paige neared the crowd of birds, she looked down at the snow that was stained crimson. She ran faster as the birds kept circling the person, leaving only a blur of dark feathers.

A shiver went down my spine as my grandma finished the story. "Please, grandma, please!" I say, "Do I really have to go to bed?" I ask.

"Yes sweetie, now good night," my grandma said as she stood up. I knew I was getting too old for fairytales, but I absolutely loved it whenever my grandma sat down before I went to bed and told me stories. Besides, the stories she told me weren't little kid tales. I hear that the original fairy tales were very dark. Like how in Little Red Riding Hood, the lumberjack had ripped open the belly of the wolf to rescue Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. My grandma's stories are like that.

I turned off the lamp and covered my head with my blanket. I could hear my grandma's footsteps softly echo as she left my room, closing the door behind her. My grandma was an avid explorer at heart. She always loves to take photos and make up stories of the places she's visited. I love to listen to them.

My grandma had just come back from one of her many trips to a local mountain. Each time she returned from that same mountain, she returned with a story. My head swirls with the possibilities of what might happen next in the tale. Crows attacking someone? I think about how ridiculous it sounds, but it is the kind of story I enjoy. I slowly fall into the oblivion of a dreamless sleep.

I awake to the sound of breakfast being made and sunlight shining right on my face. I sleepily cover my eyes with my hands, blocking out the sun.

"Time to wake up, sweetie," my mother says as she fully opens the curtains to my windows. She leaves without saying a word.

I get out of bed and get myself dressed. A sweet smell of pancakes wafted through the air as I walked toward the staircase. I step into the bathroom, washing my face and hands before I go to breakfast. The stairs produce a dull thud as I descend. I step into the sunlit kitchen. My sister is seated at the table looking at her phone. My mom is making pancakes on the stove nearby. I walk to my chair, sitting down.

"Where's grandma?" I asked my mom. My eyes gaze around the kitchen, looking one last time to try to spot my grandma.

"She had to leave, June bug," my mother said, turning to me.

"Why?" I say, flabbergasted. Grandma had just gotten back from the mountains. I dramatically fell against the table. I stare up at my sister, she looks back.

"Have you ever heard of birds attacking people?" I asked Amber, my sister.

"What?"

"Birds. Attacking people?"

"No."

"Well of course you haven't! You never listen to fairy tales!" I slam my hands against the table, pushing myself upward.

Amber was holding something in her left hand. I look down at it. It's a little charm with a purple crystal at the end. The rest is strung with beads. My eyes widened as I realized where I've heard about it before. I snatched it.

"Hey!" says Amber as she almost drops the phone she's holding in her right hand.

I look at Amber intensely.

"Where did you get this?" I ask.

"Grandma, she gave it to me before she left."

I gasp, then I go to a long rant of grandma's story. Amber looks at me with mild curiosity the entire time.

"Actually, I know a place that matches that forest," she states when I'm done. "Really?" I say with excitement. I can hear our mother call that the pancakes are ready behind us.

My sister puts her phone away then leans toward me.

"I think we should go there..." she says as she grabs the charm out of my hand "...and tie this on one of the branches," she motions her head toward the charm. "The forest is on the other side of Jerry's farm, real close. We could go there and come back in less than thirty minutes. Tall, white, leafless birch trees for miles around, just

(See Contest Winners p. A14)



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Meetings

Thursday, Dec. 21
The Economic Development Authority of Patrick County will have a Special Meeting at 11 a.m. in the Second Floor Conference Room of the Patrick County Administration Building.

Wednesday, Jan. 24
The Patrick County Economic Development Authority (EDA) will meet at 6 p.m. in the second-floor conference room of the Patrick County Administration Building.

Events

Sunday, Dec. 24
Woolwine Methodist Church will hold a Christmas Eve service starting at 11 p.m.

Thursday, January 11
The Patrick County Recreation Department is offering a free Tai Chi Flow for Seniors program on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3-4 p.m. in the Hooker Building, Rotary Field, Stuart. No experience needed, just wear comfort-

able clothing and sneakers to try this gentle, standing exercise for twelve weeks to improve your balance, coordination, and core strength. There is no registration for the program. Classes start on Thursday, January 11. Call the Park Office at (276) 694-3917 for more information.

Ongoing

The Coffee Break Café hosts live music on Tuesdays from 9 to 11 a.m. Bring an instrument, or just come and listen.

The Patrick County Library hosts Story Time with Ms. Sam at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesdays, with books, songs, finger plays, and more. For more information, call (276) 694-3352.

The Patrick County Library will hold the LEGO Club with Ms. Sam on Mondays from 4:30-5:30 p.m. This program is mainly intended for school age children. For more information, call the library at (276) 694-3352.

The Patrick County Quilters' Sit-N-Sew is held on Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

at Quilted Colors. For more information, call 276-694-3020 or email patrickcountyquilters@gmail.com.

The Ararat Ruritan Club will hold Rook games every Monday night from 6:30-8 p.m.

The Patrick County Veterans Memorial Honor Guard meets the first Tuesday of every month at the American Legion Post 105 at 7 p.m. Interested veterans are welcome to attend.

Introduction to Zen Meditation and Zen Buddhism at the Blue Ridge Regional Library Stuart site, 1:30-2:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays.

Messianic Bible Study, Fridays from 6-7:30 p.m. at The Honey Pot, 106 N. Main St., Stuart (across from The Coffee Break). Call (276) 694-2356 for more information.

Last Tuesday of each month, Golden Oldies, Open Jam at Willis Gap Community Center, 144 The Hollow Road, Ararat, with 50s, 60s, 70s Rock and Roll. Doors open at 6 p.m. Music gets underway at 7. Food is available.

Winter Exercise - Part 3

(cont. from page 5)

not last. Or maybe you play tennis with a group of guys, but don't really like the group of guys. This is mental torture. Or you might join a gym, but hate lifting weights or the grind of going to the gym, showering in a public shower, having to change clothes twice, and rushing off to work or back home. This, too, will not last.

- If you like to run, run.
- If you like biking, bike.
- If you like walking, walk.
- If you like rock climbing, climb away.
- If you like softball, tennis, pickleball, whatever, great!
- If you like Cross Fit, weight lifting, etc., go for

it. You get the point, right? I like the Nike ad that says, "Just do it." It doesn't matter if you're good at it - it only matters if you enjoy it. If you enjoy it, you'll keep doing it. If you keep doing it, you'll see changes and reap the benefits of exercise.

In summary, you need to find your personal motivation to exercise. It has to be worth doing, otherwise, you'll drop it like a hot potato for something more important or at least more enjoyable. You need to schedule a "meeting" with yourself to exercise. Put in the initial effort to make it a habit, and then you'll find it easy to keep it going. Finally, pick something you like

and not what others tell you to do. Make sure it's something you look forward to doing, something that you miss if you don't get to do it.

If you can line all these secrets up then people will ask you what your secret was in your transformation to a more fit, healthy, and happy you. Good luck and here is the only seasonal-specific secret I'll give you: if it's cold outside, dress warmly.

(Submitted by Betty Dean. Written by Harvey Hahn, MD, FACC. Used by permission from www.lifeandhealth.org. Courtesy of LifeSpring - Resources for Hope and Healing Stuart, VA)



Milestone Anniversary

Richard J. and Marie T. Woods, of Stuart, will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, also called the diamond anniversary. Mr. and Mrs. Woods were married on December 23, 1963 on a snowy day in Vesta, Virginia by Elder Bennie Clifton. Sixty years of being together. So many memories and experi-

ences with friends and family, there is no doubt you are a diamond pair. What a remarkable achievement for you both! May God continue to bless the love in your hearts and your life together with an ever-deepening faith. Continue celebrating and we wish you all the best on this special day, love your family and friends.

Application deadline for assistance approaches

Specialty crop growers are reminded that assistance is available for producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification through the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program. Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2023 expenses through Jan. 31, 2024.

The FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses pertaining to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2023. FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing its certification, as well as a portion of related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation, meet the definition of a small business or very small business, and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2023 certification.

- Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:
- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
 - Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
 - Food safety certification.

- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.
- Training

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at farmers.gov/food-safety.

The FSCSC application period for 2023 closes Jan. 31, 2024. FSA will issue payments after the application period closes. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means.

Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist. Visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

AITC Book of the Year explores crops and greenhouse gardening

Children across the commonwealth will examine greenhouse gardening and discover the unique qualities of popular fruits and vegetables during Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom's 2024 Agriculture Literacy Week.

For Virginia AITC's annual volunteer reading event March 18-22, the organization has selected Logan's Greenhouse by JaNay Brown-Wood as its 2024 Book of the Year.

Cheerfully illustrated by Samara Hardy, the book follows Logan, a young boy who uses a wheelchair and accessible gardening tools, as he organizes a playdate at his greenhouse for his friends. Throughout the book, readers use visual clues to learn all about the unique characteristics of the fruits and vegetables Logan grows in his greenhouse.

"We were looking for an inclusive and interactive story about growing food," explained Tammy Maxey, Virginia AITC executive director. "Everything but one crop featured in the book is grown in Virginia. It's a good opportunity for students to see and relate to something they may be able to grow here."

The book even features a winter carrot soup recipe for young readers and adults to make and enjoy together.

Agriculture Literacy Week is AITC's largest educational event of the year, with thousands of volunteers reading to children in classrooms, libraries and virtually across Virginia. Now in its 13th year, the program combines fun and education to help teach youth about the importance of agriculture, farming and the sources of their food and fiber.

Copies of Logan's Greenhouse are available

for purchase at \$14 each from Virginia AITC. A book order form is located on the Virginia AITC website, virginia.agclassroom.org.

In addition to the book, orders will include free supplementary resources to expand school and at-home learning. These include seeds for children to plant, volunteer reading tips, coloring pages and other free activities.

Volunteers are encouraged to read Logan's Greenhouse to children in pre-K through third grade. Virginia AITC also will share highlights on its social media platforms throughout the week.

During 2023's reading event, more than 1,000

volunteers read I Love Strawberries! by Shannon Anderson to about 60,000 children throughout Virginia.

Agriculture Literacy Week participants include county Farm Bureau volunteers; Farm Bureau Women's Leadership and Young Farmers committee members; FFA and 4-H members; partners from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and other state agencies; and members of other agricultural organizations and businesses. Colonial Farm Credit, Farm Credit of the Virginias and Southern States Cooperative Inc. have been supporters as well.

VDOT Virginia Department of Transportation

Route 8 (Salem Highway) and Route 836 (Ashby Drive) Intersection Improvements Patrick County

Find out about a project to improve safety at the intersection of Route 8 (Salem Highway) and Route 836 (Ashby Drive) in Patrick County. The project entails adding a left turn lane from northbound Route 8 onto Route 836 and improving sight distance at this intersection.

Review the project information and National Environmental Policy Act document in the form of a Programmatic Categorical Exclusion at VDOT's Salem District Office located at 731 Harrison Avenue in Salem, 540-387-5353 1-800-FOR-ROAD, or TTY/TDD 711. Please call ahead to ensure the availability of appropriate personnel to answer your questions.

If your concerns cannot be satisfied, VDOT is willing to hold a public hearing. You may request that a public hearing be held by sending a written request to Ankur Patel, Virginia Department of Transportation, 731 Harrison Avenue, Salem, VA 24153 on or prior to **December 22, 2023**. If a request for a public hearing is received, notice of date, time and place of the hearing will be posted.

VDOT ensures nondiscrimination and equal employment in all programs and activities in accordance with Title VI and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. If you need special assistance for persons with disabilities or limited English proficiency, contact Ankur Patel at the phone numbers listed above.

UPC 119451
State Project: 0008-070-723, M501, P101, R201
Federal Project: STP-070-2(036)
From: 0.093 miles south of Route 836 (Ashby Drive)
End: 0.146 miles north of Route 836 (Ashby Drive)

Arrests Reported

The Patrick County Sheriff's Office reported the following:

*Dillon James Gustafson, 23, of Martinsville, was charged Nov. 29 with grand larceny. Deputy J. Fain was the arresting officer.

*Jesse Wayne Harris, 33, of Bassett, was charged Dec. 5 with probation violation. Henry County made the arrest for Patrick County.

*Joseph Eugene Dodd, 28, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 5 with fail to appear. Sgt. E.J. Litz was the arresting officer.

*Daniel Shields Reynolds, 39, of Bassett, was charged Dec. 7 with one count each drive while intoxicated, second offense, and reckless driving. Senior

Trooper J.N. Mabe was the arresting officer.

*Gary Wade Amos, Jr., 45, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 7 with two counts of probation violation. Deputy C.L. Adkins made the arrest for Henry County.

*Ashley Nicole Bowman, 29, of Bassett, was charged Dec. 7 with violate conditions of release/pretrial. Deputy R. Haynes made the arrest for Henry County.

*Jessica Sutphin Smith, 41, of Madison, N.C., was charged Dec. 7 with probation violation. Sgt. C. Frick was the arresting officer.

*Jimmy Stanley, 53, of Patrick Springs, was charged Dec. 7 with probation violation. Sgt. C. Frick was the arresting officer.

*Elizabeth Goins, 25, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 7 with assault. Sgt. B. Webb was the arresting officer.

*Daniel Shields Reynolds, 39, of Bassett, was charged Dec. 8 with one count each attempted 1st degree murder and arson. Lt. D.L. Foley was the arresting officer.

*Catrina Lynette Knight, 44, of Sandy Ridge, N.C., was charged Dec. Dec. 8 with one count each assault and batter on law enforcement officer and assault and batter.

Deputy J.G. Pickrel was the arresting officer.

*David Travis Walker, 22, of Patrick Springs, was charged Dec. 10 with one count each assault, 3rd + offense, burglary, and use of a firearm in the commission of felony. Inv. F.M. Hubbard was the arresting officer.

*Zachary James Denny, 27, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 11 with monument damage. Sgt. C. Frick was the arresting officer.

*Michael David Knox, 44, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 11 with disable fire suppression equipment. Sgt. C. Frick was the arresting officer.

*Keith Douglas Shaver, 68, of Meadows of Dan, was charged Dec. 11 with one count each sexual abuse, aggravated sexual battery, and object sexual pen. Inv. Tennille E. Jessup was the arresting officer.

*Britany Neace, 27, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 12 with fail to appear. Deputy J.C. Fortner was the arresting officer.

*David Travis Walker, 22, of Patrick Springs, was charged Dec. 12 with violation of protective order. Inv. F.M. Hubbard was the arresting officer.

*Charles Robert Becker, 55, of Stuart, was charged Dec. 13 with threaten to bomb/burn. Deputy M.R. Hodges was the arresting officer.

Festive facts about oft-misunderstood fruitcake



Certain sights and sounds are ingrained in the holiday season, from twinkling lights to carols piping over retailers' sound systems. Amid the shelves of holiday wares and delicacies, fruitcake makes its annual appearance.

Fruitcake, sometimes referred to as plum cake or Christmas cake, can be prepared in various ways. However, a dense bundt-type cake dotted with dried, candied fruit and often soaked in rum or brandy has become the standard. Loathed or loved, seldom anything in between, fruitcake is typically mocked as the ultimate regift. But just like Charlie Brown's scant Christmas tree, which was initially mocked, it's time to see fruitcake in a new light. Consider these fruitcake fun facts.

The texture of fruitcake can vary from cake-like to more of a sweet bread like brioche. Italians dig into panettone, Germans delight with stollen and Jamaicans serve black cake.

The first fruitcakes weren't eaten. According to historians, fruitcakes were initially made by ancient Egyptians, who tucked the desserts into the tombs with their dead so a sweet treat could be enjoyed in the afterlife.

Fruitcake gained popularity as military rations, as everyone from Roman soldiers to Crusaders found fruitcake provided a diverse array of nutrients and an energy boost in battle. Fruitcake also stores well, which can be beneficial for military personnel in battle.

Fruitcake seemingly is indestructible. While it likely cannot last forever, Tastemade says if a fruitcake is kept in an airtight container and stored in a dark, cool place, it could be reheated years

after being baked. Starch crystals and dried fruit in the cake will release stored water when warmed, rehydrating the cake.

Historical accounts indicate Romans were among the first people to eat fruitcake, which they might have enjoyed as early as 100 A.D. A version called "satura" was made by mixing stale bread with pine nuts, pomegranate seeds, raisins, and then soaking it in a barley mash and an alcoholic beverage brewed from honey.

Fruitcake became a popular dish to serve at British royals' weddings. Queen Victoria, Princess Diana and Prince William served fruitcake at their receptions.

The Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. has a fruitcake on display. It traveled into space on Apollo 11 in 1969, but was never eaten.

Seth Greenberg, who worked in his family's New York City bakery, attests that fruitcake is delicious when made with the right ingredients. The neon-colored, dry and overly sweet fruit that many bakers use is the problem with poor cakes. But proper ingredients like brandy, glace cherries, apricots, figs, and dates can make for a delicious fruitcake.

The average fruitcake weighs between two and three pounds. However, the heaviest fruitcake on record, according to "The Guinness Book of World Records," came in at 9,596 pounds. Despite the hefty weight of this cake, it's only around 92 to 160 calories per serving.

Regardless of its unfavorable reputation, fruitcake remains an unwavering holiday tradition. The website Serious Eats reports that more than two million fruitcakes are sold each year.

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The columnists' views appearing on this page do not necessarily reflect the editorial position of *The Enterprise*.

Super Crossword

Answers

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Contest Winners

(cont. from page 11)

like in the story," she says with a smile.

"That alright?" Amber calls over to our mom, who has been listening in.

"Sure! Just be sure to get your chores done!" she calls back.

"Come on!" Amber says excitedly jumping up from her seat.

"Eat your breakfast first!" our mother says.

My sister had turned sixteen a few months ago, so she drove. I stared out the window at the dirt road as the car moved along.

"Here," my sister says under her breath as she parks in the grass. I step out of the car and look up at the trees. Leafless, bare, birch trees. Exactly like in the story.

"Come on!" I say excitedly, dancing on the balls of my feet.

"Coming, coming," she says. I skip excitedly into the woods. My boots crunch on the fresh snow as I enter the forest. A soft breeze ruffles my hair as I continue. I look behind me to see Amber as she follows me.

We walked for a while. I think of why grandma might've left and when she would be coming back. Mainly, I also think of what will happen in the story she was telling me. Would this connect to other stories? Or will it be an entirely new adventure? I also think of what the characters, Paige and Paul, might look like. I love to sketch the characters from stories without pictures. This way, I can decide what they look like.

"When do you think we should tie the charm on one of the branches?" Amber says from behind me. I look around.

"How 'bout right now?" I say.

"Sure," she says. She helps me up one of the nearby trees.

I look up as I climb, charm in hand. Then I make the mistake of looking down. My heart drops as I gaze downward.

"Hey," I call down to Amber, "I think I'm going to tie it right here then come down," my voice rattles as I call. I don't hear a response, but I don't think much of it. I quickly tie the charm on one of the branches then climb down.

When I reach the bottom, my head is spinning. I lean against the tree, trying to gather my wits. I look around, expecting to see Amber, but I don't. My heart begins to beat as I frantically look around. I dash to the other side of the tree. My sister is nowhere to be seen.

Midnight-black birds fly past me. I turn. Two people standing over someone, birds surrounding us. I look at the hoodie one of them wears. The words Havensville High School are embroidered around a basketball. It's Paige and Paul.

Dreaming for a Christmas Vacation

By Raina Newsome,
Woolwine Elementary School

I want to go to somewhere warm and sunny this winter. I closed my eyes and imagined myself in Florida laying on the warm sandy beach. I smelled the salty air all around me. Then, I woke up in my room and it was Christmas Eve.

I went downstairs to get breakfast and I felt miserable. My mom came downstairs too; she was happy and excited for Christmas. I asked her if I could go on vacation and she said, "No, but you can help me make Christmas dinner." I mumbled, "I guess so." I made Christmas dinner with mom all day long! I dreamed that night of me being on vacation. I woke up on a Florida beach just like the one I had imagined.

I was so relieved! First, I went to the ice cream shop. It was yummy. I got mint chocolate chip. Next, I went to find seashells. I found a pretty one that looked like a spiral. Then, I went to lay in the warm sand. The warm sand felt good on my back. The water came and touched my toes. It felt like I was in a dream world. I was so happy and excited for the next I was going to do. I thought, should I go swimming in the ocean or should I go beach shopping next?

Then, something strange happened. I fell asleep. I dreamed of a person telling me to go back home. Suddenly, I woke up. But when I stood up, I looked around and all the people at the beach were gone. There was a tiny gold light next to the sea grass. I walked slowly toward the light. When I got there, I walked through it.

I woke up in my bed. I ran down the stairs to tell my mom what just happened. She did not believe me. I walked over to the Christmas tree and saw a gift that says, "Christmas Magic." I tell my mom what the gift tags says and she walks over to see it. The words "From Santa," appear on the tag. "Where did Christmas magic go?" I say, "It was just there." Then, I open the gift and I see two golden tickets that remind me of the light I walked through yesterday. The tickets read "Free Trip to a Florida Beach!" I

was so happy that my dream was going to come true and now Christmas is my favorite holiday.

Third Place

Christmas Wish
By Paisley Shuff,
Woolwine Elementary School

Imagine moving away from the only home you've ever known, and around Christmas time, nonetheless! At least here, I can feel the cool of the snow. In fact, I can feel the marshmallow snow seeping through my knitted gloves, and I can smell the salt on all the nearby roads. There are Christmas trees everywhere, and even the park I'm in now has a brightly lit tree, each ornament placed meticulously on it. How fun it would be to decorate for a living! However, I plan on being the greatest poet since Homer. I jump at almost any chance to share my poems.

My little sister haphazardly stacks a mound of snow, and upon closer inspection, I realize she's wearing one of my pairs of jeans. "Gina!" I grumble, "You're up to seventy-five dollars now!" Every time she steals something of mine, I add five dollars of debt to my mental bank for her.

She's stolen fifteen things in the last six days. Also, I'm positive she'll never actually pay me, but it makes me feel a bit better to know I'm doing something about her petty theft. Gina ignores me and continues on with her monstrous mound.

"Noel," my mom calls from across the wintery park. I glide to her, careful to avoid slippery ice patches.

"Yes?" When I reach her, I feel colder than a snowman, but I love the chills. Back in Mississippi, it rarely ever snowed, and the frost gives me incomparable exhilaration.

"Would you like to read an original poem at your school's Christmas P.T.O.?" Mrs. Alora just asked me, since she heard how much you love poems." Mom's face shows pure joy, probably because this is a great opportunity, but I hesitate.

I barely know any of the people at my new school! What if they don't like the poem, and I'm known as the weird poem girl from now on? Or what if I mess up and everyone laughs? In spite of my tentativeness to accept, I respond to my encouraging mom, "Sure."

Mom texts something, presumably to Mrs. Alora, who made the offer, and then gives me a huge thumbs up.

As I trek back to the other side of the park, Gina spots my worried face, so I explain to her what I'm doing at the P.T.O.

"You'll do fine," she tells me. "Just write from experience. And make it fun, too, to catch everyone's attention." She smiles, pleased with herself. "Thanks, Gina." I say with genuine surprise. "That's actually really good advice."

"You're welcome. And don't get your lips stuck in your braces!"

"Haha," I reply sarcastically.

When the day finally arrives, I feel like my heart might burst out of my chest with how hard it's pounding, like I stuck a thunderstorm in my ribcage. The stares from the audience and the stress of being the first performance definitely don't help. Regardless, I take a deep breath, lift my chin, and recite my poem.

We moved to a new state In the Christmas season.

Come on people,
This should be treason!

A few laughs erupt from the audience, and I feel as if this might turn out okay.

At least it's pretty
And actually snowing.
And the softest breeze
Is gracefully blowing.

I hear murmurs of agreement from the audience.

How will I adjust
To my brand new school?
And just days before the break,
What will I do?
My Christmas wish is that
The school will be kind,
And although I'm new,
They won't mind.
I wish that I'll
Make friends before the break

And see them in church

On Christmas Day.

I wish that when

The lights go down,

The Christmas spirit

Is still around.

Despite the short length of my poem and slight tremble in my voice, I feel proud of what I've done. Apparently, the audience likes it too because they reward me with a loud, whole hearted applause.

I glance at my sister and smirk, as if to say, "Ha! My lips didn't get stuck in my braces!"

Realization washes over me like a tsunami. You know what? Maybe my Christmas wish has been staring me in the face the whole time. What I've wanted the most is a great Christmas and a greater friend. My sister is my best friend, and there certainly is no closer friendship. With this new revelation, how couldn't I have an extraordinary Christmas?

My expression changes to a smile, a real, ear to ear grin. My Christmas wish came true.

Grades 8-12

First Place
Lessons in Celebration
By Maria Turner

The intimidatingly large house on the street corner was noisy with maids and chefs arranging rooms and meals for Christmas. Packages were dropped on the floor, and pots were loudly moved about the kitchen until a frustrated voice echoed throughout the house, "Can anyone do a job quietly?"

The house immediately silenced. Heads bowed down in self-preservation as the father of the family stomped out of his office, into the living room. "Laura, I'm going to town to pick up your order. Should I get anything else while I'm out?"

The woman squinted her eyes in focus, "That order should have the rest of the gifts for both our sides of the family. Just bring those home and the maids can wrap them."

Upstairs, the family's only child, Elizabeth, was getting ready for the Christmas party her schoolmate had invited her to. As she walked down the stairs, her mother, not looking up from her book, stopped her daughter in her tracks: "And where are you going?"

Elizabeth's heart dropped. "To the Larson family's Christmas party, mother."

"Ah, yes. I remember now." Without getting up, her mother dismissed her.


The Larsons' home was, as Elizabeth's father might describe, smothered in lights and decorations. There were reindeer statues on the roof, with Santa leaning over the chimney. Warm colored lights were hung on every surface. Gumdrop lights lit her way to the door. After ringing the doorbell, decorated as a gingerbread man, Elizabeth's schoolmate Catherine greeted her. With her surprised eyes, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Your parents must have spent all day yesterday decorating for this! Everything is so elaborate."

Catherine laughed at the girl's remark, "Eliza, you must be joking. We decorate for Christmas the day after Thanksgiving."

As Catherine invited her friend inside, Elizabeth found the entirety of the Larsons' house to be enthusiastically decorated. There were collections of wreaths, candy canes, angels, and nutcrackers in every nook and cranny of the house. Each Christmas tree in the house was decorated rather spontaneously with handmade, sentimental ornaments. While some probably found the house overbearingly festive, Elizabeth was enraptured with their level of celebration. At the Larson house, everything was different.

Elizabeth played along with Catherine's nonchalant attitude, pretending to be unsurprised by the Larsons' sense of festivities that was never apparent in her home. Every Christmas, her parents hosted a party for the extended family. They planned strategically where to put each wreath, ornament, flower arrangement, and string of lights. The chefs cooked the entire meal, cutting the turkey and serving the food.

(See Contest Winners p. A15)



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Contest Winners

(cont. from page 14)

Elizabeth usually spent Christmas dinner focused on the masterfully adorned but plain table decorations to avoid the passive aggressive comments spewed between her family members.

At this fateful Christmas Eve dinner, Catherine's mother cooked the turkey and her father cut it for everyone. Elizabeth braced herself for the backhanded comments on the decor during dinner, but every compliment was genuine. This family exuded their love for each other without pretense or underhandedness. Elizabeth never knew Christmas was meant to be a holiday of comfort and gratitude until she witnessed the Larson family gathered around the living room after dinner. While the children eagerly unwrapped their presents that were piled around the Christmas tree, the rest of the family shared entertaining anecdotes at the fireplace. None of Elizabeth's family Christmases had ever been as warmhearted and intimate as the Larsons' celebration.

When she arrived home to the sight of the white, cold lights lining her house, the maids decorating the Christmas trees with plain ornaments, and the chefs preparing the food for the next day, there was an overwhelming sense of emptiness that no child should feel on Christmas Eve.

She approached her parents in the sitting room, "Mother, have the maids wrapped those gifts you bought yet?"

Her parents looked at each other bewildered. The mother shook her head, "No, not quite. Why do you ask?"

"Well," Elizabeth began, almost embarrassed to ask, "I was hoping we could wrap them together."

As they gathered all the wrapping paper, tape, and scissors, Elizabeth and her parents tried to master the skill of gift-wrapping, something none of them had ever attempted before. After they got all the presents wrapped, Elizabeth suggested they pull out the old colored lights from the attic. That night, their home was transformed into an oasis of festivity.

Elizabeth and her parents, for the first time, eagerly awaited Christmas. Her mother and father were both raised to expect insults at the dinner table, decorate their house flawlessly, and never truly celebrate the holiday wholeheartedly. This Christmas, Elizabeth hoped, would be a turning point. Maybe they could begin cutting the turkey, decorating their Christmas tree in whatever manner they pleased, and being joyful for the holiday, whether that earned them another remark at the dinner table or not.

This Christmas, the usually intimidating house on the street corner would be filled with the beautiful nosiness of laughter and brightened by the joy the family found in unapologetic celebration.

Second Place

The Runner

By Jason Burks

Through fire and brimstone runs a messenger. His mission is to deliver an order to an artillery regiment set up about four kilometers away. His footprints in the mud as he pushes forwards. As the rain pours on the ground and bullets fly past, the paper he holds says. "Fire on the coordinates sector four, five, six, three, four, one" he came from a trapped armored division in the Italian mountains. They were under Austro-Hungarian threat as they pushed into the Italian front. His name is Angelo van Bianchi, and this is his story.

In the year 1917 on November 29th in the cold rainy weather my run began. My division was pinned in the Dinaric Alps, and we were under threat of capture. With limited supplies they sent me to make the run to the 31st Italian artillery regiment for help. I began my run at the strike of dusk in the dark. I moved through no man's land with my Mannlicher suddenly hearing a group of Austrians moving to me. I lay in the grass and sat watching the group walk pass. Next to a crate, I saw some bullet casings knowing they can be distant in a silent area. I grabbed them and kept moving into the beast's lair trench to trench I ran seeing a way through.

Then I dropped to the ground as an enemy was about five feet away from me. Pulling my field shovel as I crawl closer, I stand behind him. I swing the shovel one strike into the neck, blood all over my hands and coat. I shake my head telling myself "keep moving, ignore death" as I start to think of the dead man. Running through the trenches avoiding spotlights, patrols and traps it started to dawn on me "I could be shot and I'm the only chance for survival for the men trapped." Turning to my left, I see a village and I crawl to the edge of the hill I'm on. I slowly realize that the village is captured by the enemy. Moving to an ammo storage in the village I take my lighter and ignite a box of gunpowder and I run diving into a ditch. Boom an explosion distracted the village full of Austrians and I took the chance to run through the confused defenders.

Finally, I make it to the artillery regiment handing the commander the message. Minutes later, six huge guns fire the rain of death on the coordinates outlined on the note. The commander walks up to me handing me a message to rush back. I replied, "Thank you," turning to run back. Through the village and into the trenches evading bullet after bullet I run until I see three men shooting at a trench in the distance.

I raise my rifle aiming at the head of one of them, with a pull of the trigger his head is gone. The others turn but I'm ready to kill the second one and pull my Bodeo model and blast him dead. The final one I charge with a bayonet tearing through his flesh. I keep moving knowing if I don't, I will kill 255 soldiers and myself; the burning of my legs and arms push me forwards.

Seeing them my commander, I handed him the message and if God himself had told him we moved into full retreat pushing out of the trap undercover from the rain of shells from the 31st. With four kills under my name, I remember if it wasn't from my run, we would be dead taking my last round loading it into my rifle. I remember that one night like the back of my hand. My division called me the runner.

Third Place

The Miracle of Christmas

By Virginia Nations

"It's December 1st, Scarlett!" Thomas yells across the room to his still sleeping sister. "Only 24 days until Christmas!" Scarlett leaps out of bed and starts frantically searching their bedroom, Thomas watches in confusion. "What are you looking for?" he asks, while she rummages through her drawers. "This!" She pulls out a toy magazine from the bottom of her shirt drawer. "I know exactly what I want for Christmas!" She flips to a page where, circled in red crayon, was a big Barbie Dreamhouse. She points to the dollhouse. "This is what I want, and today I can finally show it to Mom and Dad!" Thomas' eyes light up. He points to a set of building blocks just above the dollhouse in the magazine. "That's what I want. Show them that too!" The children run excitedly down the stairs, magazine in hand. While racing down the steps, Thomas and Scarlett could hear their parents talking in the kitchen.

"It's December 1st George," Mary says in a sullen tone. "Only 24 days until Christmas." George sighed as he took his weary eyes off of the pile of bills on the counter, and looked up at Mary. "How are we going to pull this off? We barely have enough money for groceries, much less for presents for the kids!" He sank his head back down to the pile of bills in front of him. Mary pats him on the back, "We will figure something out. I wouldn't want to upset the kids by not getting them anything for Christmas." George nods, and Mary continues to stir the pot of stew on the stove. Thomas and Scarlett take a second to process what they just heard. "Did she just say something about no presents?" whispered Thomas. "I don't know," began Scarlett "I couldn't hear very well." Thomas suddenly gasps, "What if they're not getting us presents because we have been bad?" Scarlett looks back at Thomas, who looks like he's just seen a ghost. "Then I guess we will have to be on our best behavior!" she says as they come to the bottom of the steps.

The children enter the kitchen nonchalantly. "Hey Mom! What's for dinner?" Thomas asks, taking a seat at the counter. "Chicken stew, now would you be a doll and set the table for me?" Thomas nods and starts gathering some silverware. He signals Scarlett to pop the question. "Speaking of dolls," she says, "Can you get me one of these for Christmas?" She pulls out the magazine and hands it to her Mom. Thomas runs over and points at the building blocks, "I want this! I want this!" He jumps up and down. "Alright now, calm down, finish setting the table." Mary begins pouring the stew into bowls. "But the presents Mama, the presents!" The kids shout. Mary sighs and looks over to George, who is now staring at the prices of the toys. "We'll see," she says, placing the stew on the table. "Let's eat."

Later that night, while the kids were asleep, Mary and George come up with a plan to save enough money to buy gifts for their kids. "I can pick up a few extra shifts at the restaurant," Mary tells George. "I can try and work longer hours at work," he responds. "We can do this honey. I know it's going to be tough, but we can do it for the kids." George smiles at Mary. They eventually nod off to sleep, ready to start their plan in the morning. When they wake up, they get the children ready for school and themselves for work. "Well, I'm off to the machinery," says George, grabbing his hat and coat. "I'll be working until after dinner tonight, so save me a plate!" Mary gives him a nod as he walks out the door, she leaves for work as well. When she gets home, she fixes dinner for the family. When they sit down, Thomas doesn't say a word, staring at the empty chair across from him he starts to ask questions. "Where is Dad? Shouldn't he be home by now?" "He's working late today, he'll be home soon." She takes a bite of her food, hoping they don't ask any more questions. After a few weeks of both parents working longer hours and extra shifts, they had already come up with some extra money. It was more than enough for both presents!

On Sunday morning, as they got ready for church, the kids pointed out how the house felt colder than normal. "It's freezing in here!" Scarlett yells from the children's bedroom. "Just finish getting ready and come down here!" George yells back, aware of the sudden temperature change in their home. They arrive at church and walk inside. The pastor greets them with a welcoming smile as they sit down in the pews ready to listen to his sermon. "Today I'm going to remind you of the true meaning of Christmas," says the Pastor, opening his Bible. "Christmas isn't about gifts!" He shouts, "It is about celebrating the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ!" He

(See Contest Winners p. A16)

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Contest Winners

(cont. from page 15)

goes on to tell the story of Jesus' birth. The children begin to whisper to one another while he is talking. "I would be fine without gifts this year, it's not the true meaning of Christmas after all," Scarlett says. Thomas gives her a nod and says in response, "I really do want those building blocks, but Jesus' birth is what we should be worrying about! So, I could do without, but we don't have to worry about that. Mom and Dad are getting us presents."

They nod excitedly at each other. The Pastor finished his sermon, and they all went home. "George, why is it so cold in here?" Mary exclaims, shivering. "I don't know, let me go check out our heating unit." He walks outside in the cold to see what's going on, Mary wraps up in a blanket while she waits. George slowly walks back inside with a worried look on his face. "What's wrong honey?" Mary asks. "It's broken. We are going to have to replace it soon unless we want to freeze to death in this cold weather." Tears form in Mary's eyes, "So, the money we have saved up for the presents..." she pauses. George slowly shakes his head yes. "It's the only way we'll have enough to replace the unit." He picks up the telephone and calls someone to come do the replacement. "They said they can be here tomorrow afternoon." Mary, still upset, says, "But we won't have enough money

for presents." She fears what George's response will be. "They'll have to do without." They both take a seat on the bed to marinate on their situation.

The children get ready for bed upstairs, excited for Christmas that is coming in a few days. Mary and George tuck them into bed then proceed to get some rest for themselves. The next day, the people come and replace the heating unit just before Mary leaves for work. "You're all set ma'am!" says one of the workers. "We just need the money and we'll be on our way." Mary reluctantly hands them the money. Watching them take her savings for her kids felt like a punch to the gut. "Thank you," she says with a lump in her throat, and then she leaves for work.

A couple days later, it's Christmas Eve. Scarlett and Thomas are jumping around excitedly. "Alright kids, it's time for bed," Mary tells them. "Aw," they say in unison "But we can't sleep Mama, we are too excited!" says Scarlett, still jumping around the room. Mary playfully rolls her eyes and tries to catch the children. As they're running away, George comes up and grabs them making monster noises. The kids squall and giggle until they finally get tired out, George carries them to their bedroom. "Good night, sleep tight," he says, kissing them on the

forehead. "Sleep well!" Mary says, doing the same as George. The parents head back downstairs. They can't help but think of the disappointment to come from their children in the morning.

It is Christmas morning! Thomas and Scarlett run downstairs, bracing themselves for the happiness that they will experience when opening their presents. Mary and George are sitting on the couch. "Come sit over here," George pats the couch. "We need to talk to y'all." The kids sit next to their parents with confused looks on their little faces. "This might be upsetting to hear," Mary begins. "But we couldn't afford to get any presents this year," as a tear runs down her cheek. "We're sorry kids, with the heating unit messing up we just couldn't make it happen." The children look at each other, then back at their parents. "That's alright, no big deal," Scarlett says with a smile. "Yeah," Thomas adds. "That's not the real meaning of Christmas anyways!" Mary and George are very surprised. "You're not upset?" They ask, "I mean, sure I wanted the building blocks, but celebrating Jesus' birth is more important!" Thomas and Scarlett have satisfied, happy looks on their faces. The parents give them a big, long hug and decide to celebrate by reading the Christmas story out of the Bible.

More state funds could better help English learners, educators say

By Chloe Sutterfield
Capital News Service

The state needs to better fund the education of English language learners, despite recent budget increases, teachers in the field say.

Educators report that English learners have increased needs since the COVID-19 pandemic began, but there are not enough teachers or allocated funds, according to a Joint Legislative Audit and Commission review this year of Virginia's K-12 funding. The commission evaluates state agencies and writes policy analysis at the request of the state legislature.

The state Standards of Quality formula used to calculate staffing does not adequately account for higher needs students. It underestimates the number of second language teachers needed. The state's calculation of teachers needed was 47% of the number estimated as needed by workgroups that contributed to the JLARC report.

The state's ratio is one teacher per 50 English learner students. However, the average school division employed one English as a second language teacher for every 19.5 students. Workgroups still estimated that more teachers were needed.

One workgroup member described "excessively high caseloads" of over 100 English learner students per teacher, according to the JLARC report.

Virginia school divisions serve over 117,000 students whose primary language is not English, or about 10% of the student population, according to the Virginia Department of Education.

ESL program funding

State ESL funding has increased since 2019. The General Assembly appropriated \$106.86 million for ESL this fiscal year to support 20 instructional positions per 1,000 English learner students. Local school divisions provide a match, based on an ability-to-pay index.

There are a couple of factors that play into ESL program funding.

Laura Goren is the director of research and education policy at the Commonwealth Institute, a public policy advocacy group.

Virginia has struggled to fund education for a number of years, especially for English learner programs, Goren said.

"We have not made as much progress in increasing funding for English language learners,"

Goren said. "I think that's an area where Virginia needs to do a whole lot more and we haven't made the progress we need to make."

Local governments have to provide funding to make up for inadequate state support, Goren said.

"Some local governments are much more able to pick up the slack and fund the schools than other local governments."

English learners had the most significant drop in state achievement scores of any student groups measured for state reading, math and science tests in 2021, according to the Commonwealth Institute.

But, Virginia ESL proficiency rates had already dropped 11.3% for fourth grade learners from 2009 to 2017, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The state has just started to lift a cap on support positions that has been in place over a decade.

But advocates say that English learners require more funding per pupil. English learners need up to 2 to 2.5 times more funding than other students, according to a study cited in a VPM report last year.

Jo-el Cox is the VDOE coordinator for English learner instruction. She provides technical assistance to educators, supports state and federal programming initiatives, and relays information on how to best support ESL students.

VDOE offers multiple training opportunities for ESL teachers to learn how to work with their students. They also have tools that help students and their families.

"This year we created a course in Canvas where individuals can log in and learn about the program models," Cox said.

There are five U.S. Department of Education's Language Instruction Educational Program, or LIEP, program modules in Virginia: transitional bilingual, dual immersion, English language development, content with integrated support and newcomer programs.

ESL programs are still recovering from COVID-19, in terms of student growth and student gains, according to Cox.

"I think not having that face-to-face in-person interaction consistently during COVID in some of our school divisions, really didn't do anything to support their learning and further their learning," Cox said.

The importance of ESL programs

More people are coming to the U.S. from other countries, according to Sarah Modrak. She is an LIEP education specialist.

Immigrant naturalization dipped in 2020 with

borders and offices closed because of the pandemic. But since 2022, U.S. citizenship has increased by numbers not seen for more than a decade, according to Pew Research.

Modrak is also the supervisor for the Welcome Center at Tucker High School in Henrico County. The center helps ESL students register for school. Henrico County Public Schools has a variety of resources to support ESL students, Modrak said.

The Welcome Center was created to support students and their families through the transition to a new school.

"It's not easy for a family who has just arrived to kind of go through that registration process, to get all of the paperwork and documents that are required," Modrak said. "So it was a place where we could really spend more time in getting that process started as well."

The Welcome Center was impacted by COVID-19, according to Modrak. When everything moved online the center needed a new registration system so families had more options to get into schools.

Allyn Pritchard is a secondary lead LIEP teacher in Henrico. She teaches in multiple languages to cater to her students' primary language. Pritchard also helps teachers by assisting them with accommodations.

English learner programs look different now as a result of the pandemic, but not all of the changes have been negative. Schools are now able to connect with students and families in more convenient ways, according to Pritchard. She could not say if the changes have been easier or harder -- just different.

"I feel like there are more resources now than maybe we had before COVID to meet students where they are," Pritchard said. "The other thing is to be able to meet with families if we can't see families face to face."

ESL students want to learn, and it is important to have a variety of resources to support them in all aspects of their lives, Pritchard said.

"I definitely find there are more 'aha' moments," Pritchard said. "When students are learning English out of necessity, it's a great sense of accomplishment when a student comes in for the first time and they greet you before you greet them."

VCU InSight journalist Jason Tejada Molina contributed to this report.

Capital News Service is a program of Virginia Commonwealth University's Robertson School of Media and Culture. Students in the program provide state government coverage for a variety of media outlets in Virginia. VCU InSight is the capstone broadcast news program.

Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

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From China to Appalachia to perform concert in the Piedmont Arts galleries



From China to Appalachia, featuring Cathy Fink, Chao Tian, and Marcy Marxer, will perform in the Piedmont Arts galleries in January.

Piedmont Arts' first event of the new year will be a unique concert with a live painting demonstration. From China to Appalachia, a traditional Appalachian and Chinese folk music trio, will perform in the galleries on Saturday, Jan. 13. There will be a reception before the concert at 6:30 p.m. and the concert will start at 7. Tickets are on sale for \$20 for general admission and \$10 for students at the museum and on PiedmontArts.org. The first act will be comprised of the band's original and beautiful folk arrangements and the second act will feature an improvised piece of music to accompany a live painting demonstration by Z.L. Feng, a Chinese-born and Virginia-based watercolor painter whose works are currently on display in the Piedmont Arts galleries.

GRAMMY Award-winning American roots artists Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer join with Chinese classical hammered dulcimer player Chao Tian in a show that combines music from China to Appalachia and beyond. Instrumentation includes yangqin (Chinese hammered dulcimer), gourd banjo, five-string banjo, ukulele, guitars, dumbek, cello-banjo and mandolin.

The group's repertoire includes traditional Chinese and Appalachian music as well as contemporary and traditional music from around the world. Unusual

combinations explore new arrangements to old music, such as "Dark Eyes." Ukulele, yangqin and guitar create a new pallet for this Russian folk song turned jazz manouche tune. Cathy and Marcy join Chao in singing a Chinese lullaby, "Nani Wan" and Chao easily adds her love of American old-time music to fiddle tunes and songs. From China to Appalachia was borne of a friendship and mutual love of musical exploration experienced in jam sessions that inspired a show speaking to the power of music to connect cultures.

In addition to their performance at Piedmont Arts, From China to Appalachia will be in residency at Piedmont Arts on Friday, Jan. 12, teaching workshops for local high school students. Part workshop, part masterclass, the school programs will give a brief introduction to the instruments the band uses and their backgrounds. The band will demonstrate their musical traditions separately and then come back together to show how they fuse their eclectic instruments and ideas for both arranged and improvised music.

Z.L. Feng, the artist who will be featured in the musical program, currently has an exhibit up at Piedmont Arts. Feng grew up in Shanghai, China, where he began painting at age seven. Before coming to the U.S. in 1986, he received his BFA from Shanghai Teacher's University. He



Watercolor painter Z.L. Feng will create a new ethereal landscape during the concert.

completed an MFA at Radford University in 1989 and went on to teach there for more than 30 years. Feng's watercolors and illustrations have been exhibited in juried shows around the world. An artist-signature member of the American Watercolor Society, the National Watercolor Society and the Pastel Society of

America, Feng has won more than 200 national and international awards and has been recognized at numerous watercolor exhibitions. The exhibit will close following the performance on Jan. 13, so the concert will be the last chance to see his ethereal watercolor landscapes in the Piedmont Arts galleries.

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Broker/Auctioneer
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PCHS Poinsettia Sale Successful



Some of the poinsettias offered for sale at PCHS. (All pictures are compliments of Eli Roberson.)

By Gabrielle Walker

The annual poinsettia sale by horticulture students at Patrick County High School (PCHS) was a hit again this year.

"We've nearly sold all our plants this year, which was earlier than expected," teacher Eli Roberson said. The poinsettia sale typically brings in around \$4,000. The funds are used to buy new equipment, plants, seeds, and planting material needed to produce plants, as well as to support the program overall.

Roberson, in his second year at PCHS, teaches horticulture, turf management, landscaping, and greenhouse plant productions.

In addition to plant sales, students participate in caring for athletic fields on campus and contributing to landscape projects on campus and around the community.

As part of the state's Career and Technical Education initiative, PCHS students are able to take various vocational courses. These courses offer training for trade careers and life skills, such as horticulture, culinary arts, and technology.

According to the Virginia Department of Education website, work-based learning includes "...job shadowing, service learning, mentorship, externship, school-based enterprise, internship, entrepreneurship, clinical experience, cooperative education, youth registered apprenticeship, registered apprenticeship, and supervised agricultural experience, along with opportunities for students to earn (graduation credits.)"

If they take two courses the student is considered a completor in that particular career path.

There are several different pathways students can choose. Hundreds of Patrick County students have graduated with one or more Career and Technical Education credentials.

PCHS horticulture students get hands-on experience planting, growing, and selling plants in the fall and spring. The poinsettia sale this fall has gone by quickly. The next big sale for the horticulture students is in the spring. Items for sale include hanging flower baskets, Boston ferns, bedding annuals, geraniums, and common garden vegetables, such as cucumber, squash, and tomatoes.

The students are involved in all aspects of the sale. They plant, market the items, complete business transactions, participate in customer service, and make flower arrangements. Roberson tries to

do as little as possible, serving instead as a supervisor.

Whether poinsettias or spring flowers, plants are available for sale until the greenhouse is empty or the end of the semester. In the spring, the sale begins before Mother's Day, but opening dates change due to weather.

Everything is grown in the greenhouse, and the Spring Sale operates more like a garden center. Although sometimes Roberson and students will sell items at a community event, that's a rare occurrence. To buy plants, customers must visit the school. The hours are typically 9 a.m. to 2p.m.

For more information, call the PCHS greenhouse at (276) 694-6453, email Roberson at eli.roberson@patrick.k12.va.us, or go to Facebook.com/PatrickCountyHighSchool.



This holiday season, celebrants can consider these tips as they look for the perfect Christmas tree.

Tips to pick the perfect Christmas tree

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

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

- Measure the area where the tree will be placed. A large tree can be awe-inspiring, but also can stick out like a sore thumb if it takes up too much space. There should be enough room around the tree for families and their guests to sit around it. The home interior experts at Better Homes & Gardens recommend leaving a minimum of six inches between the top of the tree and the ceiling. If a tree topper will be added, make sure the top of the tree is at least 12 inches from the ceiling. Measure the area before leaving to buy a tree so it can fit nicely into the room and the surrounding decor.
- Try the shake test. Anyone who has purchased a fresh-cut Christmas

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

- Pick a tree with a symmetrical look. Trees are living things, so it's unlikely that buyers will find a perfectly symmetrical tree. However, a tree that's misshapen or already has some sagging branches won't make for an awe-inspiring addition to a home decor scheme.
- Find the trunk (if you can). A trunk that's visible through the branches indicates the tree does not have dense branches, which will be necessary if homeowners want to dress the tree with ornaments. If it's hard to find the trunk because of all the thick branches and green needles, then the tree is likely pretty healthy.
- Test the needles. The home improvement experts at Lowes note that needles should be flexible but still snap when bent sharply. Avoid trees with needles that are already losing their color and can easily be pulled off.

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

Fun books to read to children this holiday season



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

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

- 'The Polar Express,' by Chris Van Allsburg: The beloved tale is the story of a young boy who boards a mysterious train bound for the North Pole.
- 'The Littlest Elf,' by Brandi Dougherty: Part of a series, this story focuses on a tiny elf named Oliver and a series of misadventures as he navigates his way through Santa's workshop.
- 'Olive, the Other Reindeer,' by Vivian Walsh: Olive is no ordinary reindeer. In fact, Olive is a dog who heads to the North Pole believing she is a reindeer. Her decision to join Santa's team ultimately benefits the big man and his trusty reindeer.
- 'The Miracle of the First Poinsettia: A Mexican Christmas Story,' by Joanne Oppenheim: A little girl named Juanita is the star of this retelling of a traditional Mexican tale with a valuable lesson.
- 'Gingerbread Mouse: A Christmas Holiday Book for Kids,' by Katy

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

- 'A Night in Santa's Great Big Bag,' by Kristin Kladstrup: Santa saves the day in this tale starring a young boy's favorite stuffed animal, whose excitement for Christmas compels him to climb into Santa's big bag of presents on Christmas Eve.
- 'Santa Claus and the Three Bears,' by Maria Modugno: This twist on the popular tale 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' finds three unsuspecting bears encountering a familiar fellow in a red suit upon returning home after a nighttime walk.
- 'Twas the Night Before Christmas: Edited by Santa Claus for the Benefit of Children of the 21st Century,' by Clement C. Moore: Parents will appreciate this updated version of the popular tale that, among other things, has removed the reference to Santa smoking.
- 'How the Grinch Stole Christmas!' by Dr. Seuss: Children can join generations of fans that came before them as they hear the redemption story of the Grinch who was once determined to ruin Christmas for the happy people of Who-ville.
- 'The Nutcracker,' by the New York City Ballet: The classic story is retold based on famed choreographer George Balanchine's production.

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

Creative Writing Contest

Each year, youngsters participate in our annual Creative Writing Contest. The hardest part for us is selecting the winners, three in each of the categories represented. All of the entries we received this year, as every year, are well-written and creative. Our Honorable Mention entries are below and on the pages that follow. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

Kindergarten

CHRISTMAS

Christ
Heaven
Reindeer
Inn
Santa
Tree
Mary
Angel
Star
Hattie Griffin,
Woolwine Elementary School



My Day

One day, I saw Santa hiding behind a tree. He danced around the tree singing "Jingle Bells." He took me to the North Pole. I saw some elves and hugged them. We played snowballs. Santa left and I saw him climb up on the roof. He fell down the chimney. Then the parents woke up and Santa disappeared. Santa took me home.

Liam Whitt,
Meadows of Dan Elementary School



First Grade

Blue Ridge Elementary School

If Santa got stuck I would help Santa get out. I would get a ladder and tug him out of the chimney. I would bring Santa home.

Saki Hill

If Santa got stuck in a chimney his reindeer will help him because they will work as a team. The reindeer will pull Santa's let and he'll get out of the chimney and go through the door because they will work together.

Raegan Hunger

If Santa got stuck, I will pull him out of the chimney. Then I will hug him.

Tyler Pardue

If Santa got stuck the elves will help him. They will pull him up.

Izabella Jeffries

If Santa got stuck I would get a rope. I will pull him out.

Delilah Craft

If Santa got stuck I would get a ladder and throw it down. Santa would get out.

Beau Frazier

If Santa got stuck I would push him. Cupid and Rudolph would pull him out.

Blakeley Atkins

If Santa got stuck he would say, "Ho! Ho! Ho! I would go down the chimney and help him get out.

River Goad

If Santa got stuck I would push him out. I would throw a rope to him and he will catch it. I would pull the rope and he would come out.

Ashlyn Jones

If Santa got stuck I will help him get out of the chimney.

Harley Bartley

If Santa got stuck I would push and push. The reindeer would drop down a rope. He would get out of the chimney.

Hudson Bowman

If Santa got stuck he would need help. I would get my dog to help and I would get my mom to help. We will push and pull. He will get out and give us gifts.

Montgomery Barker

If Santa got stuck he is magic and the elves will save him. They will pull him out to save him.

Landon Frye

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he will holler for his reindeer. Then his bottom will get hot from the fire. The reindeer will throw a gallon of water down the chimney. He slides right out.

Brantley Adkins

If I were an elf, I would make toys for girls. I would help. Santa would be happy with me. I would feed the reindeer!

Adalyne Bowman

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he would call the reindeer.

Delilah Clayton

If I were an elf, I would give out presents.

Ariel Crews

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he will call for the reindeer to help him out of the chimney. Then they pull him out.

Fallon Culler

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he will yell for the reindeer. Reindeer will fly to get the elves.

Charli Engle

If I were an elf, I would hug Santa. I would eat cookies with him.

Elias Goins

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, Santa would use his magic. He would fly out.

Caleb Lawson

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he would drop the presents. Then he would drop the candy canes. Then he would call for the reindeer.

Allie Marshall

If I were an elf, I will make cookies. They will be sweet. They will have sugar in them.

Mallory McMillian,

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, he would yell out.

Cheyenne Noonkester,

If I were an elf, I would feed the reindeer candy canes before Santa's sleigh goes.

Finley Wilson,

If I were an elf, I would make

toys. I would feed the reindeer sugar cookies.

Ariana Hernandez,

If Santa got stuck in the chimney, his reindeer will go to the North Pole. They will get the elves. Santa will get saved.

Logan Niten,

Woolwine Elementary School

Christmas is Special

I like the way Santa comes and leaves presents, and I like the way the moon shines on Christmas Eve and how all the stars shine bright. Most of all, I love the baby who was born on Christmas Day and grew to be strong and save us. That baby was Jesus. I love Jesus. Happy Birthday Jesus!

Elly Griffin

CHRISTMAS

Christ is born and the reason we celebrate.

Happy is for the faces we see around the tree.

Rejoice for school is out.

I am excited to see what Santa is all about.

Santa will come and visit me, I hope he places a tablet under my tree.

Time will feel as if it's slow, but years later, I will know just how fast time goes.

Making cookies the night before, so Santa can eat them.

A snack for the reindeer will be left out too.

Silent the night will be, but Santa will find me!

Karoline Sawyer

Second Grade

"My Favorite Time of Year"

Christmas is my favorite time of year. Me and mom decorate the house and put up our Christmas tree and decorate it. Christmas day is my favorite because it is Jesus' birthday. Jesus came to earth as a baby and then He grew up and died on the Cross for our sins. Christmas is not all about the presents you get or the presents you give. It is all about Jesus.

Eli Young,
Trinity Christian School



Third Grade

Blue Ridge Elementary School

Snow

You get presents from your mom and dad. You get lots of snow. You can have a snowball fight. You can make snow angels for hours. Your mom can make hot chocolate. You can decorate your Christmas tree.

Joel Rios

At Christmas

We get presents on Christmas.
We give presents on Christmas.
We get to play in the snow.
Then we warm up by the fire.
Christmas is the best!

Bo Arnett

Why I Like Christmas

I love Christmas, because I get to go to my Nana's house to eat. I like it because you get presents. I like it because you celebrate Jesus' birthday. I like it because I get to open presents before I eat breakfast. I like it because I get to play with the new toys I get. That's why I like Christmas.

Jase Bowman

All About Christmas

Christmas is so much fun. I love Christmas, because you get presents and gifts. Your stockings are full of Christmas joy. You can go sledding, spend time with your family, but the most important thing of all is having fun and sharing love.

Lydia Clement

Christmas Joy!

Christmas is when joy comes around town! You can decorate a tree, put a star on top, put the ornaments on, and you cannot forget the lights! But best of all Christmas brings my family together!

Marlee Dailey

Christmas Love

I love Christmas because it is a good day to celebrate Jesus' birthday. Santa Claus' elves help him get the presents ready. I love Christmas the best because you get presents and love from your parents.

Chloe East

Christmas & Santa

I love Christmas because I get presents. It's even Jesus's birth-

day. Santa Claus is coming to town with his reindeer. When you are asleep Santa Claus comes down the chimney and gets to eat your cookies and drink you milk. I can't wait to see what Santa brings me on Christmas!

Grayson Guynn

A Christmas Poem

Stars are shining,
Birds are crying,
Santa's coming.
My elves are here,
May the fun come near,
As the reindeer lead Santa here.
Christmas is here!
Fun, fun, fun, unwrapping presents around the tree.

You will get a cold chill,
At the end of the day warm with hot cocoa,

And also some praise to Jesus saying "Happy Birthday."

Kara Hiatt

Christmas Is the Best Holiday

Christmas is the best holiday! You get free presents. You get to decorate. You get time off from school. I love Christmas and it is the best!

Elijah Ledbetter

Christmas Is the Best

I think Christmas is the best time! You get presents and candy too. At Christmas you drink hot chocolate. You eat food and clean the house. You get presents and it is a good family day!

Mason Pack

I Love Christmas

I love Christmas because I get presents. It's also Jesus' birthday on the 25th of December. I love Christmas because of Christmas breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Santa is coming to town in a few days. Santa is always watching. In a few days from now Santa is coming down the chimney on Christmas Eve and bringing presents. I love Christmas!

Mason Rodriguez

Christmas Time is the Best!

Christmas time is the best! You get presents from all the rest. Christmas is a holiday to celebrate,

You can eat all the food on your plate.

Third Grade

(cont. from page B2)

Christmas has snow,
Which makes me glow.
Put on your Christmas vest,
Christmas time is the best!
Ian Roman

Christmas Gifts

On Christmas I wake up and open gifts. The gifts are all over the place. They are in the bathroom, kitchen, stairs, and probably even outside. After I eat breakfast, I play with all my new toys. My Nana helps me set up my new toys. If there is snow I play outside and when I come back in I play with my gifts more.

Kasen Rupert

What I Think About Christmas

I love Christmas! I think Christmas is about Jesus. It is so amazing to see all the lights and inflatables. One of my favorite experiences is going to get a Christmas tree. On Christmas Eve we decorate the tree and all gather around to sing and pray. We sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. I love to play in the snow and when I go inside I get hot cocoa. Then I go back outside, because playing in the snow is so much fun. My brother and I have snowball fights. Christmas is a beautiful time of year.

Landree Simmons

What Happens at Christmas

On Christmas I get to spend time with my family. Christmas is when I get to decorate the Christmas tree. And when Santa comes.... He will eat your cookies and drink your milk. Santa will leave you presents if you are on the good list but not if you are on the naughty list. The next morning, it is time to open presents with your family. Christ-

Fourth Grade

Woolwine Elementary School

A Christmas Surprise

It was almost Christmas. There were still three days before Christmas. But it had already started snowing here. And I had already made my present list to put it under the tree. My parents also told me they had a surprise for me but I had to wait until Christmas day. Yesterday, we put up our tree and decorated it. It looked so pretty, it was sparkling. I have a feeling that this Christmas is going to be the best one yet. I had already set everything up, but I double checked and I was only missing one thing: the cookies. I thought that my mom had put them out on the table for Santa. I asked my mom if she had moved them. But she didn't know what I was talking about. It turns out that she forgot all about the cookies. So, I offer to help make the cookies.

Making the cookies was so much fun!

After that I went outside to help my dad with the Christmas lights outside. It took a lot of time to do but it was perfect. The lights were bright and beautiful. We had to go inside because it was getting dark. I went inside to take a shower and brush my teeth. I was about to go to bed when I heard my parents talking on the phone. I couldn't really hear what they were saying but I think it had something to do with my surprise. I got into my cozy bed and immediately fell asleep. But I could not sleep since it was almost Christmas.

The next morning was full of fun stuff to do. I went into the kitchen to make myself some cereal. After I finished my cereal, I washed my bowl and ran outside to play in the snow. I had such a fun time outside when I first went skiing. Then I made a snow angel in the snow. Finally, I made a snowcat that looked like this cat that runs around my neighborhood. I came back inside because it was getting dark. To end off my day, my family and I watched a Christmas movie and ate popcorn. I got ready for bed. I felt very tired.

mas is very exciting!
Brooklyn Stanley

Christmas Presents

I think Christmas is the best holiday because you get presents. It is really fun when the presents are surprises. You get to decorate your tree and house and wrap the presents. The presents are the best!

Tommy Venable

My Christmas

On Christmas my family comes to my house to open presents and eat food. It's cold at Christmas time and sometimes it even snows. We have 5 Christmas trees at my house with presents under them. Clothes and toys are some of the presents I get. I have the best time ever at my Christmas. My family is the world's best family!

Elijah Voisey

Snowman

My favorite things about Christmas are snowmen. I love to build them and then punch them down.

Chloee Bowles

My Family

I love Christmas because I spend time with my family. We go camping. We drink hot chocolate, go sledding, and open presents! We watch tv and eat a whole lot.

Blaze Engle

Christmas Story

My favorite things about Christmas are setting up the Christmas tree, opening presents, and signing with people and family.

Bentley Harrell

My Favorite Christmas

I woke up and it was Christmas Eve morning and ran outside to check on my snowcat that I built yesterday. But when I went to check it, it was destroyed. So, I decided to spend the rest of my day building it again. First, I rolled snow into three big snowballs. Then I stacked them up and added ears, a tail and a mouth. After that, I went inside for decorations to decorate my snowcat. It was really cold so I had to go inside. I drank hot chocolate. After I drank my chocolate, it was already time to go to bed.

I'm so excited because today I get to find out what my surprise is and because it is Christmas. As soon as I went downstairs, my parents told me to put on a blindfold. I was excited but nervous at the same time. When I took off my blindfold, I saw my... GRANDPARENTS!!! I ran to give them a hug. I had missed them so much. After that we did everything together. We played board games, watched Christmas movies, and played in the snow. We also baked a cake and opened Christmas presents I had already gotten for them. To end off the night we ate a piece of cake.

I am so grateful to have my grandparents with me today. This shows spending time with each other matters. Hope all families have this same experience for Christmas.

Monce Ortega

Christmas Love

"I can't wait for Christmas!" exclaimed Mark.

"All you care about is presents." May told him. "And how are you even excited? Mom and Dad are not home from Paris, and we're stuck with the babysitter. They're probably not going to make it home." May shouted.

"How would you know? Don't you have any faith?" Mark asked.

"They have done this for the past three years. What do you expect? Christmas is not even important!" May said.

As May was sprinting up to her room, their babysitter told them to do their homework. May was in the sixth grade and Mark was in the fourth grade. Because their parents weren't with May and Mark most of the time, they

could get out of hand. They both liked school but they both got in trouble a lot. May would usually help Mark with his homework, but she was so frustrated with him she slammed the bedroom door in his face and told him to leave.

Talan Hernandez

For Christmas

For Christmas, I play in the snow and drink hot chocolate. I like spending all that time with my family! Decorating is fun for me. I enjoy visiting people we know. Vacation from school is nice too.

Brian Herrera

Things About Christmas

What I like about Christmas is spending time with my family, celebrating Jesus' birthday, opening presents, and spending time with friends.

Adam Marshall

Christmas

I like to eat my food. I like to open presents, spend time with family, and celebrate God's birthday.

Hines McMillian

Christmas Is a Time

Christmas is a time to worship God and have fun with one another. You might get an iPad or a phone. It is fun to see your elf. I love Christmas. Have a good holiday!

Brody Meredith

My Favorite Things About Christmas

I love making snowballs and throwing them at each other. Snowmen are so fun. I made a snowman named George and a snow angel. It is so fun! Sledding is my favorite.

Lakota Morris

Merry Christmas

My favorite things for Christmas are family, opening presents, food, it is Jesus' birthday, and playing in the snow.

May was so mad she said she wanted a new life. A couple of minutes later she fell asleep.

Just moments after she angrily fell asleep, kids were waking her up telling her to clean. She had no idea what was going on. The kids handed her a mop, acting like they knew her, but she didn't know them. May always does as told, so she started to clean. She finished cleaning and went to look for Mark. As she was walking, she found no Christmas decorations and no Mark.

May trekked into a cluttered hallway, and she curiously peeked into a door on the right. She found a man and a woman talking to a rude woman.

"So, you've come to this orphanage to adopt whom?" the rude woman with the astonishing accent interrogated. She glanced over at the door and saw that May was spying through the crack. She grabbed May's arm and sent her to a room to talk with her privately. She was grabbing May's arm so hard, she almost cried.

May told the lady that she was very confused that she fell asleep and just woke up in some weird place. She couldn't find her little brother. The lady took her out of the room and sent May where the rest of the kids were. Afterward, the lady went back to the waiting couple in the adoption center.

May ended up in a cafeteria with the noise of kids arguing in anger. All the kids started throwing mashed potatoes and green beans all over, and they made her clean it up. After she was finished, she searched every nook and cranny for Mark. Still, her search ended with devastatingly no results.

She ran back into her room crying, tears running down her face nonstop. She plopped onto the bed, thinking about Mark, and hoping nothing bad happened to him. Seconds later, she fell asleep. She woke up, back in

her own home, realizing her parents just got back from Christmas shopping in Paris! May jogged into the living room and gave her parents a big hug, seeing that Mark was there too. She apologized to Mark, saying she'd love Christmas forever, and she would." I will never shut you out again Mark. I just got frustrated, and I learned Christmas is so important." "It's getting late, go to bed so Santa can come!" said Mom.

May and Mark went to bed. Both woke up to a beautiful Christmas tree that was surrounded by presents. With a lot of love, and a little Christmas, everyone feels better!

Charlee Shuff

Christmas Day

We eat breakfast, then we open presents. After that, we play in the snow for a long time. Then, we eat supper and cake. We spend time with our family while drinking hot chocolate.

What do you do for Christmas?

Madison Pack

My Favorite Things

These are my favorite things about Christmas. I like when you get presents. I enjoy decorating the tree. We eat fried chicken and ice cream. My favorite thing about Christmas is spending time with my family.

Julius Reeder

My favorite things to do at Christmas are to build a snowman, spend time with my family, open presents, and sing a song. I like to sled down a big, snowy hill, and then have hot cocoa and cookies. I will be going to a party where I will eat and play.

I am going to swing when I get home because my favorite thing to do is swing. After that, I am going to play in the snow, play with a snowball, make snow angels, and bury myself in water.

Today I will set up my tree with Papa because he is coming today. We will eat pizza and talk. He will leave and we will finish the tree.

On Christmas Eve, I always open one gift. One Christmas, I am going to be the first person to wake up. I am so happy to open presents for Christmas. I want a lot of stuff, but I will only get half of my Christmas. I will get the other half of stuff, then I will play in the snow and yell, "Yippee!" The next day, Christmas is over.

Arabella Noonkester

The Christmas Snow Monster

On every Christmas Season, a snow monster would come out searching for children. Each and every night there were no children in sight because they all were scared of the snow monster. Little did anyone know, the snow monster just wanted friends because he was lonely.

One day, just before Christmas, a new girl moved into one of the houses. The snow monster always watched her from his cave, afraid she would run if he came closer. But one evening, he saw the girl outside sitting by herself. He slowly came up to her to see if she would run away after noticing that he was a "snow monster."

"Aren't you going to make fun of me and run away just like everybody else does?" the girl monster asked. "Well, why should I treat you any different. I believe you should treat people how you want to be treated," the little girl explained.

The monster said. "You know what you're right. You really should treat people how you want to be treated."

"Well, do you want to be friends with me now?" asked the girl.

"Yes, I'd love to," replied the monster excitedly. The girl gradually introduced the "snow monster" to others in the neighborhood and all enjoyed their special friendships.

Joel Shaffer

Fifth Grade

Woolwine Elementary School

Ukulele Santa

One Christmas Eve my parents surprised me with a trip to the beach so we could be close to my family. While we were at the airport, I was wondering if Santa would even come since it was not the usual place I was. As I was on the plane all I could think about was Santa.

Finally, when we got there we had to get a terrible rental car. I was very disappointed. I thought for sure this would be the worst Christmas. When we got to the house, I was very surprised to see that it was decorated. As I thought things were bad, they started to get better.

That night all I could think about was Santa and if he was going to come. As I started to fall asleep, I heard stomping on the roof all I could think about was Santa and my present. Then I decided to go down stairs. I saw presents as I peeked around the corner a little more than I had seen Santa. All of a sudden, I heard a voice that said come over here so I did. As I turned the corner, I heard something else: it was a ukulele playing music.

When I turned, Santa was playing the ukulele. Santa was singing a song when he saw me, he stopped playing. Then he started talking to me he said I know you love presents and so do I but there are more meanings to Christmas than presents. I asked what was it? He replied Jesus. Jesus is the biggest part of Christmas. We celebrate Christmas because of him. I replied "Can you tell me more?" He said yes, we celebrate Christmas for the day Jesus Christ was born. We sat there for hours as we talked. Until he said it was time for him to go to spread the word to the other kids around the world.

The next morning, I woke up and told my family what had happened that night. But nobody believed me. They thought it was nonsense, but I knew it was true. I was happy that he told me the true meaning of Christmas.

Aubree Bowman

One Big Snow!

It was a cold winter evening, only a day before Christmas! When Gabe and his family needed to go to the store to get things for their big feast, they have every Christmas before opening presents. So, they got in their car and went to the quick market that was a few minutes away from their house. Once they got everything, they were on their way back home, but when they were about halfway back to the house Gabe suddenly shouted "LOOK IT'S SNOWING!" Then his dad said "It sure is Gabe, looks like it's already got up to about 5 inches I don't know how we didn't notice!"

Once they had gotten home, they had to start on the ham since the store freezer had completely frozen it over and it took a long time to cook. Once the ham had thawed and his mom was ready to put it in

the oven, she looked out the kitchen window and saw that the snow had already made it about 2 feet up in only a few hours! So, his dad told Gabe and his sister Hanna to go play in it before it got taller than them and laughed but little did he know, that it would be taller than him by the next day!

Once the ham they were cooking was about halfway done Gabe's mom had to set a timer because she had to get up early in the morning to get the ham out of the oven. So, everyone went to bed. But when Gabe's mom got up to get the ham out of the oven she couldn't see out the window for some reason so she thought it was just some frost from the cold night before but when she got closer she saw that it was all white and immediately knew it was snow!

She went to go get the rest of the family so they could see. Once Gabe was up and looking, he said "Hey what's all that white stuff on the window and why will it not come off?" Next Hanna came to look and she then said "What happened to the window, I can't see out of it?" Once Gabe and Hanna's dad was up, he went to look and to no surprise he asked why he couldn't see out of the window. When everyone was done their mom finally told them what she thought it was and when she said "I think it might be snow," everyone replied "No way!" But the person who really didn't believe her was Gabe and Hanna's dad so he went to open the door and when he did a big pile of snow fell onto him! He then said "Well, maybe it is snow."

That was the most snow anyone had ever seen there. When they were finally done getting up all the snow that had fallen and their dad was nice and warm again, they decided they should call some family from another county to see if they had gotten even near that much snow. First, they called their aunt who lived about an hour away to see how much snow they had gotten. When their aunt said she had only gotten about a foot of snow they were in shock. Since they had all of that snow. How could someone who only lived an hour away have like 20 times less snow than them, they wondered.

After they had called everyone the most anyone said they got was 4 feet but that was nothing compared to what they had. Since no one had something close to what they decided to call their neighbor who was one of their close friends to see if it was all just a big prank. When their neighbor said they had just as much they were in shock that it was the most snow anyone had ever seen. Even their further away relatives didn't believe it!

Blake Miles

The Elf

It was Christmas day. I went downstairs into the basement and the wood stack had fallen over, so I went upstairs to tell my dad. My parents' bed was just a mattress on the floor. The frame was gone. Dad was not awake yet so I went into the kitchen and all of the food was on the floor. The elf on the

shelf was in the ice cream bucket.

The next day when I woke up there was snow on the ground and my bike was covered. The elf was on my sled. I went outside and picked him up and put him on top of the heater. When I came back in, the couch was flipped over. My brother Braxton and I went out to play in the snow. When we got outside there were baseballs everywhere in the yard and my dog's toys were in the snow too.

A few days later on my dad's birthday we decided to take him out to eat. When we got into the car it did not start and the elf was in the trunk with a wrench next to him. Realizing we would be eating at home; we got out of the car and went into the house. It didn't take long to realize my bed had been flipped upside down, but the elf was in the car. Had he teleported from my car to my bedroom? I can't believe my eyes! He was sitting on the ceiling fan.

A few days later when we took our tree and decorations down the elf was not happy. He started running across the house knocking things over left and right. Then he ran out the door into the 27-degree weather. I yelled "Get back here elf!" but, he kept running and running and running through the snow without a struggle. When I finally caught him, he squirmed and tried to get away but I held him tight. When we put him in his box he jumped out and started to run again. But this time he hid under the bed and I could not reach him so I grabbed a broom and swept him up. When he calmed down we put him in his box and he said "I will be back next year," to which I replied, "we will see." The lesson I learned is to never trust your elf on the shelf.

Christian Rakes

Turning Loneliness Into Joyful Times

Once upon a time, in a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains, lived a kind-hearted, Christian little girl named Ruth. Christmas was just a few days away so the town was full of excitement and decorated with twinkling lights and beautiful decorations. Ruth's heart was filled with joy because Christmas was her favorite holiday. This year however Ruth noticed that someone was missing from the cheerful celebration—the elderly widow Ms. Thomas. Ms. Thomas rarely celebrated anymore because she was sad and alone.

Ruth was determined to spread the joy of Christmas so she set out on a mission. Ruth called her friends and asked them to come help her make Christmas cards and bake cookies. After several hours of baking and crafting Ruth and her friends went to Ms. Thomas' house to deliver the basket of goodies. Their hearts were filled with joy as they approached her house.

When Ruth and her friends arrived, they found Ms. Thomas sitting alone at her fireplace looking sad and lonely. Ruth and her friends gave her the basket

of goodies and watched her face light up with happiness. They all sat around by the fireplace and told stories about Christmas. Ms. Thomas's home was filled with joy and laughter.

It was starting to get dark, and Ruth noticed something covered in the corner of her living room. They questioned Ms. Thomas about what was under the sheet. With a twinkle in her eye, Ms. Thomas told Ruth and her friends about the piano that had been covered for many years and how she used to love to play for everyone that came to her home. Ms. Thomas as told the kids about how much she missed those days but could not play anymore because she had arthritis.

Ruth was determined to bring joy to Ms. Thomas's house so she gathered her friends by the piano. They all started singing Christmas songs. They brought so much happiness to Ms. Thomas that you could see tears of joy in her eyes. She was so moved by their beautiful singing and happiness that they brought into her home, that she went over to the piano and started playing. Her beautiful music and the children's singing brought love and happiness back to Ms. Thomas's home.

Ruth realized it wasn't just about the presents and decorations it was about happiness shared with others and turning loneliness into joyful times. As they looked outside and watched the snowflakes fall, Ruth, her friends, and Ms. Thomas was all beaming with joy far more than any gift could bring them.

Natalie Worley

The Winter Wonders?

Once upon a time there was a girl (and that girl was me), she loved Christmas and so did her family. They would always decorate their whole house for Christmas. But Christmas Eve wasn't normal this year? The house wasn't decorated, presents weren't under the tree, "what is going on?" the town pleaded and the neighbors were worried.

The whole town was a wreck, but then they looked at the house blankly, it was like nobody was home. So, the neighbor contacted the family, they were on a Christmas vacation! This led the neighborhood to come up with a plan.

They ran to the store as fast as they could to get as many Christmas decorations as they could. And then neighbors remembered there was a spare key under the rock on the front porch.

So, then they opened the door and got to decorating. By the end of the night, they had finished decorating the house. It was like a whole light show! The next day came around and they did their last rounds of decorating.

And the town saw the house and were amazed by the creativity the neighborhood put into it. The family arrived back at their house and they smiled with happiness. They looked in such joy at how much their town cared about them.

Hayden Perrigo



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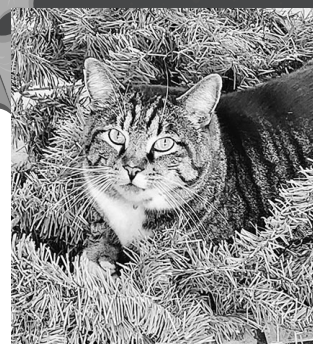
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Sixth Grade

Woolwine Elementary School

Winter Time

Winter time,
Winter time,
The air feels so fine.
I wear my jacket all the time.
Stay at home,
Won't see a teacher, Spend all day
in PJ's,
To watch a double feature.
Winter time, Winter time,
Best time of the year.
Winter time brings all the cheer.
Holden Perez

The Naughty Nutcracker

On a very snowy day in a winter wonderland in the North Pole, a naughty Nutcracker made a huge plan to ruin Christmas. His first plan was to take all the Christmas gifts, and his second was to take a sledgehammer to the candy canes and break them all in half.

The Nutcracker thought he was very clever, but he didn't realize that Santa Claus was always watching from his magical sleigh up in the sky. Santa saw everything that the naughty Nutcracker was up to and quickly took action.

Santa sent his best elves to stop the naughty Nutcracker and his evil plans. The elves were able to catch the Nutcracker in the act and put a stop to his mischief. The Nutcracker was taken back to Santa's workshop, where he was given a stern talking to. Santa explained that Christmas was a time for giving, not taking. The Nutcracker felt ashamed and realized the error of his way.

In the end, the Nutcracker apologized to the elves and helped them make more toys for all the good little boys and girls. Christmas was saved, and everyone was happy again.

Isaiah Bocock

The Evil Elf

There once was an evil elf named Fred,

He was the shelf type but full of dread.

He came to be with the living,
Around every Thanksgiving.
He would dump the flowers,
And make sugar towers.
Taking the lights off the tree,
Filled him with glee.

We can't wait for Christmas,
So Fred will leave.
Until next year,
Oh, dreaded be!
Nelson Flint

A Naughty Christmas Cat

One Christmas Eve all the reindeer were grieving because Rudolph had gone missing and the forecast called for a foggy Christmas. They had gone searching for Rudolph and looked in all of his favorite places, but he wasn't there. While searching for him they came across a cat with a red nose just as bright as Rudolph's nose so they took her home and they decided to name her Hope. Hope was very skittish, but eventually, she warmed up to the reindeer enough to show them her secret. She could fly! The reindeer were astonished. Because of that very trick, they made the decision to make the tiny kitten lead their sleigh that night, and so the reindeer showed

Santa the kitten. When they arrived at his office, Santa was fidgeting around and very stressed that he wouldn't be able to deliver gifts this year. But after seeing Hope he brightened up and Santa said, "Will you lead my sleigh tonight, Hope?"

Hope replied with a joyful "Meow!" On Christmas Day the reindeer got Hope prepared for a long flight. They taught her how to fly efficiently while keeping most of her energy. Later that day when they were packing Santa's sack with presents, Hope decided to be mischievous by stealing a few presents without anyone noticing. That night they had prepared to deliver presents, but something was off. Hope and the sack of presents were missing!

In a fit of panic, both the reindeer and Santa ran to search for them, but before they got a chance, Rudolph appeared holding Hope in his mouth as she gripped the sack of presents tightly with her claws. Once Santa saw the naughty cat, he picked up a present box and slid the cat inside so she couldn't cause any more ruckus. After attaching Rudolph to the sleigh, they went from town to town eating milk and cookies and reading letters. One letter from a little girl asked for a pet cat, so Santa granted her wish and put Hope under her tree. Every Christmas Santa visits that specific house just to give Hope a bag of coal. Hope uses the coal to play with and it is a gift in her point of view.

Kaitlyn Gunter

Christmas Ham

Ham is a spider that a kid found in the woods. Ham doesn't like her new home. It is a week before Christmas and she is lost in the Christmas tree surrounded by lights and ornaments, and all she knows is that if she doesn't get out in time she will be thrown away with the decor. She falls asleep and before she knows it, she has six days left. She wakes up and falls down and finds herself on the floor. She hides under the TV stand. She made it out of the Christmas tree but she is still lost in all the decor. Luckily, she sees an exit near the end of the garland maze. She takes a right and then a left. She makes it out, but she is still not done yet!

The smell of gingerbread is so tempting that she runs toward the dining room table in a trance. She gets to the top of the table and takes a bite of a pumpkin roll. It tastes like magic and wonder. She walks into the kitchen and roams around for a while. Then she sees Taco the Pigeon in the window. He flies down and lands on the floor. He swoops up Ham and flies away into the woods. Ham is rescued! They build houses next to each other. and are great friends forevermore.

Sophie Via

The Best Present Ever

On a very cold day it was finally Christmas Eve. I was so ready for it to be Christmas. When I woke up, I sat down by the warm fire and warmed up because it was very cold and I couldn't feel my toes. They felt like blocks of ice. I was still wondering what I was going to get for Christmas. I've always wanted an Xbox series X but I've never gotten one. Even if I didn't get it, I

still would be grateful for what I received. Then my little brother woke up and started to scream at the top of his lungs and woke up the rest of the house. This was how Christmas Eve started. My mom made her delicious sausage casserole. We could smell it from a mile away. It was that good. We ate and I was as full as a pig. I sat on the couch not knowing what to do, so I took a nap. After my nap I felt refreshed and ready. I went outside and decided to take care of my chickens so I could get my body moving. But I didn't think it was going to be so cold. So, I decided to go back inside and not come back out for a while.

Before I knew it, it was eleven o'clock. Time flew by, I guess. I decided to play video games until it was lunch because I had nothing better to do. It was lunch time before I knew it. I already knew what it was because I could smell it. I was right, it was my mom's homemade pizza rolls with Jell-o for the side dish. After I ate, I decided to go outside, but this time I was going to wear a jacket and gloves. I wanted to go sledding on the hill, but my sled was broken, so I admired the beautiful mountains instead. It was about 3 o'clock and I headed back inside and sat by the warm fire and drank apple cider to warm back up. I was still so excited for tomorrow, but that had to wait. It was now about 5 o'clock when some of my cousins arrived at our house to hang out and have dinner with us. We were having chicken and donuts, my favorite. It was finally dinner time, and I was so ready because it had been so long since I'd had this dinner. Later I said goodbye to my cousins, and I headed to bed and went to sleep.

It was finally Christmas morning, the day I had been waiting for, but nobody was up so I watched TV. When my little brother got up and, of course, woke up the entire house, it was a normal Christmas morning. I got up and opened my stocking and I got way too much candy and a Rubik's cube. I opened one of my presents that was one of the shirts I had been wanting for a long time. I opened another present that was bigger than the other box and was very heavy. It was a cuboid shaped box. When I opened it, the entire thing was black. I didn't know what it was until I flipped it over and saw it was an Xbox series X! I was very happy because I had been wanting one for a long time. I also got games for it. It was my favorite present ever. I set it up after all of the presents were opened, I instantly got on it and started playing.

So much time had flown by that I missed breakfast, and it was already lunch. I was so hungry that if I missed lunch I would die of starvation. For lunch, we had pigs in a blanket and leftover sausage casserole. After lunch I decided to go outside but it was really cold, so I put some warm clothes on. I was done with sledding after I hit a tree, so I went back inside and warmed up by the fire and drank some apple cider. It was almost dinner, and we were having steak. After dinner was over it was almost time to go to sleep that night. I hopped into bed and knew that Christmas would come again next year. But this year's Christmas was the best one that I had ever had.

Nathan Riley Shuff

The Festive Prankster

A family of six lived in the woods on the outskirts of Woolwine, Virginia. The youngest child was Aedan and the middle child was Grant. As they began to get ready for school, Grant noticed something was off. No one was awake, not even their brother who never missed school! Grant began trying to put together the mystery while Aedan began playing with a toy gnome he got from his cousin Cassidy. They arrived at school and went to the gym. No one was there. They

were all alone. Amid the silence, Grant blurted out, "It's Christmas!" They both sprinted toward the door! However, all the doors were locked! But the doors don't lock themselves. Someone had to have done it! They heard footsteps. Aedan reached for his beloved gnome, but it was gone! In the distance, they heard, "You've been gnomed!" They thought nothing of it and headed to the principal's office to get the keys. However, the keys weren't there! Their best guess was that whoever locked them in had the keys. They began to search for the individual who locked them in, however, it came to them! It was Aedan's gnome! It must have come to life by some sort of Christmas magic! Before Grant could even react, it dumped water all over him! Before it could say anything, Grant tackled it as hard as he could, and the gnome went flying across the room. Grant found the gnome holding on to the keys, so he snatched the keys before the gnome could do anything! Grant called over to Aedan so they could go home and get away from this nightmare. So, off they went home to celebrate Christmas!

Grant Iacovone

The Lost Elf

On a freezing day just days before Christmas a cat was minding its own business lying down in its little blue cat bed next to the warm fire. Suddenly a loud thump from the upstairs bathroom startled the cat. This was strange because the family was out shopping. The cat was curious so it started sneaking up the stairs to see what could have caused the noise. The cat peeked around the corner, ready for anything, but when he looked inside, all he saw was the fallen shower curtain. This was mysterious because the curtain rod was nailed tightly to the wall. It was weird how the whole thing had just randomly fallen out of nowhere. The cat didn't pay any mind to it and just went back downstairs and went to sleep.

A few hours later, the family arrived home with groceries, but as they were putting them away, they heard a loud bang in the bathroom. The father climbed the stairs to see what the noise was, and the curious cat followed closely behind. As they entered the bathroom the father saw the fallen shower curtain just as the cat had discovered earlier. As the father inspected the bathroom, he noticed nothing out of the ordinary and fixed the shower curtain and went back downstairs. However, the cat saw something behind the toilet!

There was an elf! The cat walked over to the scared elf. The cat told the elf that there was nothing to fear and that he could trust it.

The elf told the cat that he had fallen out of a portal used by Santa to check on kids to see if they were naughty or nice. The elf said that he tripped over his own foot and fell onto the roof. He got into the house by going through the ventilation system. The elf was afraid there was no way to get back home. The cat told the elf that Santa would be arriving in a few days to deliver presents so he could wait for Santa and then catch a ride back home.

So the elf remained with the cat in the cat's scratching post so the family would not see him. The night that Santa arrived, the elf was waiting. Santa slid down the chimney and was surprised to see the elf there and wanted to know how he had gotten there. The elf told Santa his story and how the cat had helped him. Santa laughed and rewarded the cat with a brand new scratching post and all the cat food it could ever want. Santa and the elf then went up the chimney to the sleigh and as they rode out of sight Santa shouted, "HO, HO, HO! Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!"

Jasper Harvey Lockhart

MERRY CHRISTMAS

We are piecing together Merry Christmas and Happy New Year wishes for You!

QUILTED COLORS

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Sixth Grade

(cont. from page B5)

Home School

Diary of an Elf on a Shelf

Entry 1: Choosing day date: December 1 Time: 12:00 pm

I, Sugarplum, the top spy elf in the academy, am really nervous. Why? Well I am standing in line to get assigned to my house. I am nervous because this was my first year being in an actual human house! My job is to spy on the family I am assigned to and report back to Santa. Oh, they just called MY name, wish me luck!

Time: 12:20 pm

I just got out of Santas' office. I was nervous, but it was fine. I got my papers and left. I don't know why I was so nervous. I was assigned to a family called the Smiths. They have one child, 2 cats and 1 dog. I will be dropped off at 5:00 am December 2. I'll see what happens.

Entry 2: Getting dropped off Date: December 2

Time: 5:00 am

Right now I am on a jet going to the Smiths. I am really excited and anxious to get there. I hope that they will all be nice. I read a paper on the Smiths and all I know is they have 2 cats, and a dog. They also have a son and a daughter on the way. I am going over a list of possible hiding places.

1. Closet 2. Windowsill 3. Bathroom 4. Mantle in the living room... Oh, I have to stop writing. I am landing. I hope this goes well!

Time: 10:00 am

I just got into the house. My first objective was to go to a hiding place. I reviewed possible hiding spots then decided on the mantle in the living room. As soon as I started toward the living room a massive figure started bounding toward me. I got so frightened that I froze. As it got closer and closer I thought I would be ripped to shreds! Then it stopped and licked my tiny face. "EWWWWWW!" I said as I wiped slobber off my face.

"Sorry," a low voice said. "It's a habit." I looked up and saw a massive, no huge Great Dane standing above me. Uuuuuuuu..... I stared in shock. I had never seen a dog before. Finally I said, "Hello," in a high squeaky voice. Then in a normal voice said, "I mean hello."

"Hi, are you the new elf to come and watch this Christmas?" "Um yes," I replied.

"Well, welcome to the Smiths house! It's fun here."

"Well thanks for the, umm, interesting greeting, but I really have to get set up to spy. I mean watch the family."

I started to walk away when the dog shouted, "Wait! Wait!" And bounded in front of me. "2 things. 1, what's your name? And 2, watch out for the cats. Every year they think the elves are mice and chase them around."

I gulped. "Did they ever catch anyone?"

"Nope, but it could happen," the dog replied. I sighed a relieved sigh then answered his first question.

"My name is Sugarplum. What's your name?"

The great big dog answered, "Bernard the 2nd. Their first dog's name was Bernard." "Ooo, that makes sense, thank you Bernard for warn-

ing me, and 1 more thing." "Yes," he said.

"Umm, could you help me up to the mantle?" "Of course I do it every year!"

Entry 3: The boy Date: December 3 Time: 9:00am-3:10pm

Well, the first clue that I should have payed attention to was the boy. He fought his parents about going to school, saying that it was a waste of time and boring. But children complaining about school is normal, so I didn't pay any attention to it. I did however pay attention to the black eye he came home from school with.

What happened was, his mother had shouted as he got home. She had shouted as she got an ice pack. "I, umm, hit my face on the flagpole," the boy said. The boy's name is Lucas. This conversation went on for a while, then finally Lucas's mother told him to go wash up for dinner. I was really anxious to know the truth about what actually happened, so I did something spy elves usually never do. I moved during the day. I was almost up the stairs when I heard a silky voice hidden in the shadows.

The voice said, "Come here, little mouse. We won't hurt you." Then another voice more high pitched like a teenage girl laughed. I was startled, and then I realized that it was the cats, Tiger and Snowball. I had heard their names from the parents. So, I did what any sensible elf would do in the encounter of a cat and ran away streaming my head off.

AAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!! The cats both leaped elegantly after me. I barely fit under the crack of the door into a room. When I turned around, I realized that I was in Lucas's room. "YESSS!" I yelled with delight.

"Long time, no see," a low voice said.

"Bernard!" I shouted. The great dog got up off the bed and walked to me. I was out of breath, but I still managed to say "Eww.." when Bernard licked me. Then I asked, "Is Lucas here?"

"Yup," Bernard answered. "He is in the bathroom." Then without me asking Bernard helped me up to the windowsill where I am writing this. Oh, I have to go. Lucas just came out of the bathroom.

I was sitting on the window sill when Lucas came out of the bathroom and looked over and saw me. His eyes got kind of wide. "w- w-weren't you down stairs?" Then for no reason at all he started squeaking, then started screaming, and then ran down stairs. I am so confused, but I can't go back with the cats or trek down the stairs, so I'll just stay here and sleep.

Entry 4: Report

Date: December 4 Time: All day Dear,Santa it's me Sugarplum, and this is my report on the Smiths. Christmas cheer 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10: 4

Naughty child scale: 6 Nice parents: 8

Notes: The boy Lucas got into a fight at school and at home. I don't know why, but I will try to find out more.

Do they believe in Santa: I am not

sure yet

-This is from me, Sugarplum the elf

This was my report that I turned in. Hopefully, it makes it there soon. I have never turned in a report before. I hope it is good enough. I answered all the questions that they told me to answer. Christmas cheer, Naughty child, Nice parents, and I had additional notes for Santa. And I didn't know if they believed in Santa. Well, it is already late. I better get to sleep.

Entry 5: Naughty for a good reason Date: December 5

Time 7:00 am

I woke up to the sound of crying. It was faint. I barely heard it, but I did. I saw Lucas with tears in his eyes. I didn't know what was wrong, so I waited for him to say something to give me a clue about what was wrong. Then he said, "I wish... yeah what I said inside my head." Then I heard footsteps. Lucas did too, so he jumped out of bed while drying his tears and wiping his nose on his sleeve and running to the bathroom. His mom came to wake him up, but he said he would be out soon. After he came out, he fed Bernard and took off down stairs. Leaving his door wide open!

Time: 2:00

How I wish that Lucas didn't leave his door open. I heard the silky voice and the high-pitched voice talking to Bernard, and they were getting closer! I hopped off the shelf and onto the floor. I scaled to the top of the bed and ran until I reached his pillow. Then I felt inside for the zipper. I unzipped it, crawled inside, and zipped it back up just in time. I heard Bernard's voice saying, "I'm going downstairs to wait for Lucas."

"Alright," said the silky cat's voice. "Okay," said the high-pitched one, which I figure is Tiger because she looks like a tiger. The older pure white one was Snowball. "I hope Lucas is okay," Tiger said.

"He will be fine soon, but if he cries anymore we will come lay down next to him and purr," Snowball answered.

"Okay, but first we really need to find that mouse."

Time: 3:10

"Hey, Bernard," Lucas called as he got home. I was still on his bed, but at least I wasn't in that stuffy pillowcase. I hope I find out what happened yesterday and if he came home with more bruises. Oh, I have to stop writing because Lucas is coming upstairs.

Time: 5:00 pm

Okay I think I found out what happened! I was sitting on the bed when Lucas came in. He saw me, but this time he just said, "O come on, mom, why do you keep putting this weird thing in my room?" Then he moved me down to the foot of his bed and flopped head first onto his pillow. He turned over and stared up at the ceiling sadly. Then Bernard jumped up and layed next to him. "Thanks boy," Lucas said. Then he sighed and said, "I wish they would stop picking on Mark. He is littler than that big bully Steve."

Then in my head I was thinking,

"Oh so that was what happened. He was standing up to a bully for his friend. And he didn't want to go to school because the bully was there."

Time: 11:00 pm

I am watching Lucas right now and thinking how I wish I could help him with his problem. Wait!!! I just got an idea. I have to stop writing now.

Entry 6: The present Date: December 9

Time: 12:00 pm

I was working all day yesterday and the day before that. I have made Lucas a PRESENT. It is a strong man toy. It is a plastic toy that looks just like the "Rock". I got the idea from watching wrestling matches downstairs with the parents. I decided to do a strong man toy because Lucas stood up to a big bully. So I made a card that says, "You're the best!" But I forgot my wrapping paper, so I asked some elves at the North Pole for a favor, and they said some wrapping paper will float down to the roof about 1:00 pm.

Until then I just have to wait. In two days I have to turn in another report.

Entry7: Santa Date: December 10

Time: 2:00

I am writing this from the rooftop of the Smith's house waiting on the wrapping paper. It is getting colder here. I think that the Christmas cheer has gone up since my last report. I saw Mr. Smith putting out some decorations in the morning. Oh, I have to stop writing. I think I see the wrapping paper.

Time: 3:10

I finished wrapping Lucas's present, and now I am waiting on the window sill with the present in my elf hands. Oh, Lucas just came in.

Time: 5:00

So Lucas came in, then he looked over and saw me. Then he saw the present and walked over and picked it up. He read the card then opened the present. A smile spread across his face as he shouted, "Mom! Mom! Santa came early and gave me a present." I was so happy because 1, he was really happy, and 2, he believes in Santa.

Most kids don't anymore. But I'm glad he did!

Entry 8: report#2

Date: December 11 Time: all day Dear Santa, It's me Sugarplum, and this is my second report on the Smiths.

Christmas cheer: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10: 8 Naughty child scale: 3

Nice parents: 9

Notes: Lucas the boy got into a fight, but he did it standing up for his friend.


Do they believe in Santa: Yes

- This is from your elf Sugarplum

Entry 9: Thinking


Date: December 12 Time : 5:00-7:00 pm

I am in the living room in the tree. Why? Because Mrs. Smith decided to put me here. The Smiths are having dinner in the other room. I can hear them talk about their day and other normal family things. I wish I could spy more. So far, I have only spied on Lucas and a little on Mrs. Smith, but I think that I should help Lucas with his problem. Oh, Lucas just got up. I



2023 was the year to rethink Patrick County. And we have been busy fulfilling that mission. From Ribbon cuttings to work shop, to road work, to reinvestment by our businesses, the launch of Dolly Parton Imagination Library, and so many more, Patrick County is reimagining what we can be!

FROM THE STAFF AND BOARD MEMBERS OF THE PATRICK COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, WE WISH EVERYONE A HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND MAY OUR COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO GROW IN THE COMING YEAR!




Happy Holidays
from your friends at



Sixth Grade

(cont. from page B6)

think I have an idea.

I jumped down to the ground gently, then ran to the bottom of the stairs. Then I sat down, legs crossed and my chin in my hands. Lucas came in and looked at me. "Snowball, I found the mouse," Tiger said, and my heart froze. I thought I might die. The cats bounded down the stairs, then Tiger was ready to pounce. I wanted to close my eyes, but I couldn't. All I could do was sit and wait. But then I felt a hand around me, and it lifted me up. "Come on, Bernard," Lucas said. Lucas took me upstairs and put me up on the bed then closed his bedroom door. As he did, the cats ran up the stairs. "Thank you," I said in my head. Lucas looked at me, then went into his bathroom to take a shower. Right now I am writing this and trying to think of a way to help Lucas with his bully problem.

Entry 10: Letters

Date: December 13

Time: 7:00-9:00 pm

I thought of an idea yesterday and got all the supplies today. The idea that I have is to write Lucas letters! I know I'm not supposed to do anything that might make people think that I am an actual elf, but most of the day I just look like a toy. Anyway, I have to start working on the letter and hope it goes well!

Time: 8:30 pm

So my idea didn't work as well as I thought. I wrote Lucas a letter, but he read it and then put it back and now he is asleep. Maybe it was the letter. I am going to put the letter in here.

Dear Lucas, my name is Sugarplum the elf. I have put this letter next to a toy. I have heard that you are having some problems at school with a bully. I would like to know a way I can help, or I could give you some of my 156 years of knowledge to help you. Now just check a box below, and put the letter back.

I would like to tell you how you can help?

I would like to hear some of your knowledge.

Time: 9:00 pm

But since the letter didn't work, I'll just have to try again tomorrow since it's Saturday.

Entry 11: More letters Date: December 14 Time: All day

I gave the same letter this morning and he checked off a box and put it back this is what he checked off.

How can I help

My knowledge

Listen to me

Time: 12:00

So he didn't check off my boxes, but it's a start. I hope that it will help him if I listen. But he gave me back the letter hours ago, so I don't know what I am going to do. Oh! He is coming up the stairs.

Time: 12:20

Lucas came into the room and said, "Okay, so I don't know if you are listening to me through a speaker or not. Because if you're not this would be a total waste of time. But if you are then I will leave a letter for you at 6:30 and you can read it while I'm in the shower."

"Yes!" I said inside my head. He is writing a letter back right now.

I'm just waiting for 6:30 because I have nothing else to do. OH WAIT I KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TO DO!!!

I am going to make... wait for it... Snow angels on the roof! Oh I love making snow angels!

Time: 6:30

Okay this is the letter I got from Lucas.

Dear Sugarplum the elf,

I don't know if you can help. But I guess I could use an answer to a question. What's 57 times 34? Just kidding, I want to know how do I make a bully at my school stop bullying my friend... And me.

-Lucas the kid

Okay so I was hoping it would be easier than this, but a kid needs help, so I'll try to help! But first I have to change the to-do list in the kitchen.

To do:

Bake cookies

Nothing else matters

Time: 8:00

So I wrote to Lucas while he was in the shower and this is what it said.

Dear Lucas the kid,

I think that you should tell your parents or the teachers.

-Sugarplum

Okay so it was more of a note than a letter, but still that was basically the only thing that I could say. I don't know any other solution.

Oh Lucas just came out of the shower. I hope he writes back again.

Time: 10:00

So he didn't write back yet. I'll see if he does tomorrow. Until then I'll get some sleep.

Entry 12: Questions

Date: December 15 Time: All day So Lucas did write back. This is what he said.

Dear Sugarplum,

Ummm, I have no Idea how to do that without getting beat up. Do you?

- Lucas

So now I don't know what to say. All I really know is how to spy and write in my journal. Oh I just got a really good idea!

Dear Lucas,

I had an idea for you: how about you send in an anonymous letter to the principal about the bully and how he bullies you and your friend.

-Sugarplum

Then I waited for Lucas to get home from his friend's house then Lucas wrote me back and this is what he said.

Dear Sugarplum,

Great Idea, why didn't I think of that?

-Lucas

So I wrote back;

Dear Lucas,

I don't know why you didn't think of it first.

-Sugarplum

So we wrote little notes like that for a little while then Lucas went to sleep.

Entry 13: Bullies and Heros Date: December 16

Time: 9:00-3:00

Dear Lucas,

Please put the toy elf on the shelf in your book bag so that way I can see what happens at school.

-Sugarplum

So he wrote back.

Dear Sugarplum,

Okay, but I had a question: is this a good letter?

Dear Principle Baker,

I wanted to let you know that my friend, other students, and myself have been bullied since the start of the year. The person who has been bullying us is Steve Randolph.

-Bullied kid

Whoa, that was a good letter! So I wrote back:

Dear Lucas,

Whoa, that was an awesome letter! It is definitely good enough.

-Sugarplum Time: 1:00

I was in Lucas's backpack when I heard the principal's voice come over the intercom. Would Steven Randolph please report to the principal's office immediately! "Yes!" I thought, "the letter worked!"

Time: 3:00pm

I can't believe Steve actually got suspended. I thought no one would be brave enough to tell on him! Mark, Lucas's friend, said on the walk back home, "Well at least we don't have to deal with him for the rest of this week and next week."

"Yeah! Oh gotta go, Mark, we are at my house."

Time: 3:20

Yes, Yes, Yes!! I am so glad I got to help Lucas with his problem. I think tomorrow we will celebrate. By we I mean him, Lucas. Well until then I will stay in the living room to spy.

Entry 14: Party

Date: December 17

Time: 9:00-10:00 pm

"Thank you, Mrs.Smith," Mark said as she gave him a cookie. He had come over to hang out with Lucas.

"You're welcome, Mark. Now you remember to have a good Christmas!" "You too, Mrs.Smith."

"Bye!" said Lucas.

"Okay, Lucas, you need to head to bed, mister. I'm going to make sure Mark gets home safely."

"Okay," Lucas replied. I had been sitting on the mantle in the living room where I am writing this. Oh Lucas is coming.

Okay so Lucas picked me up and took me upstairs. He wrote a quick note, gave it to me then went to take his shower. In the note were the two best words I wanted to hear.

Dear Shugarplum,

Thank you

-Lucas

I know it was just thank you, but I really have gotten attached to this family. I'll miss them when I have to go back home. OMyGosh I looked up, and Lucas was right there staring at me, and then very calmly he said ... "OMYGOSHYOURSUGARPLUMTHE ELFICAN'TBELIVE-IT!!!"

So my cover was blown, but after that he and I had a chat. I explained to him that he can't tell anyone that I'm an elf and that he can't say that I'm a spy elf. So he agreed to not say anything, if I would come back next year. So I agreed. I hope Santa will allow me to. So now I have to do my final report to Santa.

Entry 15: Final report Date: December 18 Time: All day

Dear Santa, This is from Sugarplum the elf

Christmas Cheer: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10: 10

Naughty child scale: 0 Nice parents: 10 Notes: No notes

Do they believe in Santa: Yes definitely

From,

Sugarplum

Entry 16: Christmas eve Date: December 23 Time: All night

"I am going to stay awake all night and wait for Santa. That way I will have time to say goodbye to you," Lucas said.

"Well, I think that Santa won't come," I said. "What? I thought he went to every house."

"He does, but he won't come to yours if you are awake. He will wait until you are asleep. And you will have time to say goodbye to me tomorrow."

"Okay," Lucas replied. "Good night Lucas." "Good night Sugarplum."

After that Lucas went to sleep, so I got him a blanket from a basket near the couch and covered him up with it. Okay, so now I have to do my jobs for Santa before he gets here.

fluff the stockings

dust the chimney and make sure there are no fires.

make sure everyone is asleep.

get some milk and pour it into a glass.

get 1 cookie on a plate.

Then after I do those things Santa comes. Oh I just heard Santa touchdown on the roof.

So after Santa touched down on the roof I did all the things I was supposed to. Then Santa came down the chimney and whispered to me, "Flawless job on the chimney, Sugarplum." Then he said, "Oh milk and cookies! Thank you. Yum. Oh I am getting distracted. Let me just..." Then he pulled out a bunch of presents and left.

Okay now I have to take all the presents and rearrange them better.

Entry 17: Christmas!!!

Date: December 25

Time: 5:00-6:00 am

When it was 5:00 am Lucas woke up and ran up stairs to wake up his Grandma. His mom was in the hospital because they thought that the baby would come soon, and his dad was with her. Lucas had been disappointed and asked if they would be at their house for Christmas. They had said we don't know. My grandma said we can start opening presents. "I wish you could stay here forever, Sugarplum," Lucas said.

"Me too, but I can't. But I'll be back. But before then you will have Rosey to keep you company."

"Who is Rosey?" Lucas asked.

"Go check outside," I told him. Just then the doorbell rang, and Lucas got up to answer it. His mom and dad were standing on the porch with a baby girl in his mothers arms. "Let's go inside and open presents," they said. "Yeah!" Lucas said. I was in the chimney with a wind catcher. It looks like a parachute, but it lifts elves out of a chimney. Lucas looked at me, and I was afraid that he might try and stop me. But he just sat there and mouthed "thank you." Evangeline Walker

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Seventh Grade

The Red Button

On a chilly Tuesday afternoon, Theo the elf was shutting down the sled repair shop. There were all sorts of sleds in the shop. Some were for display and others were for tuning up. Theo was finishing polishing up the brand new red and golden sled that was built last month. The sled could travel all around the world in only a couple of minutes. It was shiny and smooth, with all sorts of gadgets and toys

that Santa might need. Theo was one of the ones who helped build it. He knew the manual and the sled better than any of the other elves.

After Theo was done, he began putting everything back in place and shutting off the lights. Theo could worry about anything, he would freak out if something out of his control would happen. As Theo was about to shut the metal door, he noticed a red blinking light on the sled. Even though it was tough, Theo left the shop. Santa could handle it the next day.

While Theo was making his way through the deep hard snow, he realized that he had left the door to the sled shop unlocked. He trudged through the snow as he headed back to the shop. His face was tinted red, and he was out of breath. As he was rushing to get back, he tripped and fell over an old dead pine tree that had fallen over two months ago. It fell during a massive snow storm that was brutal.

As Theo was trying to stand up and continue to keep running, he noticed a tiny bit of red on the snow. When Theo looked down at his knee, he saw that one of the old branches had made a tiny scratch on his knee. Theo stood up, and continued running. Though the tiny cut stung a bit, he pushed through it.

When Theo finally made it back to the shop he entered through the unlocked door to where it was nice and warm.

Theo went to the back and found a first aid kit and pulled out a band-aid to put on his scratch. As Theo went to throw away the papers from the band-aid he walked past the sled. This time the blinking light was almost calling out to Theo. He couldn't resist going over to examine it. He hopped in the sled and the seat was almost twice his size. He went straight to work by pushing shiny buttons and pulling different switches. Theo started to get aggravated when nothing would work, so then he angrily slammed his little hand on the red blinking button. The button finally stopped blinking, but the engine started to make an odd humming sound. The sled started to slowly lift up off the ground while the humming noise got louder. Theo tried to hop out of the sled, but it was too late. The sled had already burst through the door.

"What have I done?!" Theo screamed.

The sled was already hundreds of feet in the air in the midnight sky. He tried to contact the radio team, but there was only static. In his panic, he remembered that there were all sorts of gadgets on the sled. He opened up one of the compartments and pulled a tracking device out of the sled, so the elves would know his location. He also got out a translator. Theo then remembered that there were elf sta-

tions all around the world for elves that might get left behind on Christmas Eve night. Theo then checked the tracking device to see where he was. Theo was only about 3,500 feet away from Paris. Then he looked at the device and saw that there was an elf station in Paris. He held on for dear life while looking over the sled at Paris. The Eiffel Tower was gorgeous. The tower was shimmering in the sky. It was absolutely beautiful.

After going in circles for about three hours, Theo was finally able to take control of the sled and turn on the invisibility mode. He parked the sled behind a friperie. "Hmmm, I wonder what a friperie is," Theo said. He took the translator out and typed in friperie. The translator said out loud in a robotic voice, "Friperie means thrift shop in French." Theo then checked the tracker and saw that the elf station was inside the thrift shop. He came up with a plan to sneak into the thrift shop. He climbed up a tree and shimmied across one of the branches to a window that was open. Once he got to the very end of the branch, he hopped off and landed inside the store.

When Theo entered the shop, he was frightened by a worker who was dusting one of the tables beside the open window. The worker said, "Bonjour, Monsieur." Theo whipped out the translator and had it listen to her. The translator replied, "Hello, sir." Theo said to the worker, "I don't know French." The worker then said, "Oh it's fine. I know some English. How may I help you today?" Theo walked past her quickly while she was still speaking. He was only trying to find the elf station with no distractions. Though Theo was a bit concerned and curious as to why the worker wasn't scared of him since he was short and came through the window. He got down on the floor and started to crawl under the tables so he wouldn't be seen. Theo came across a hump in the floor which didn't concern him at first, but then right as he crawled past it, the tracker started to buzz. Theo crawled back to the hump and started to push on it to try to open it.

Aher a couple of minutes, Theo gave up and started to crawl back under the table. While putting both of his hands on the floor he heard a noise. As he looked down, he saw that there was now an empty slot on the floor. Without hesitation he slid down a metal slide. The slide had many curves and when Theo started to see light, he landed in a foam pit. When he looked around, he saw many elves working. There were all sorts of gadgets, toys, and technology everywhere. As Theo was getting out of the pit, he asked an elf how to get back to the North Pole. The elf said to follow him. Theo followed the elf into a back room and as he went in, the elf shut the door and told him to wait for a while. After what felt like years, Theo heard a knock at the door. When the door opened it was Santa. Theo ran to him and hugged him tightly. Santa then said, "Now, Theo, next time you go oh messing with my sled, you let me know." Theo replied, "Yes, sir!" and they both walked up the stairs to the sled.

Ainsley Lawson,
Woolwine Elementary School

The Missing Coal

Once there was a snowman named Thomas who lived in a village. The village was the coldest place on earth. It wasn't a normal village. It was completely made of snow and only snowmen lived there except for a dog. This dog was the only thing in the village that liked Thomas. All of the snowmen made fun of Thomas because he was missing a piece of coal in the middle of his stomach.

One day he went out to find a piece of coal, but there wasn't any coal within 50 miles, and it was a rough path to get there. He would have to go through Avalanche Valley and Windy Peaks.

Thomas and his dog set off on their adventure. They had to find a way to get past Avalanche Valley. When they were almost there, they found a friendly elf who had a way to get past the valley. He told them there was a secret underground chamber to the other side. Once they got in the chamber, they thought about going back, but they went on through and came to Windy Peaks. Thankfully, someone left boots that would help Thomas stay on the mountain.

Finally, they found the coal and went back to the village. All the other snowmen regretted not liking Thomas for not having coal on his stomach.

Lemuel Newsome,
Woolwine Elementary School

Super Santa

Once on a cold, snowy, Christmas Eve night, Santa was going to deliver all the presents to the good boys and girls. He had a lot of work to do to prepare for the full night ahead. All of his elves had wrapped the presents and fed the reindeer so they would have energy, but suddenly an alarm went off and scared the reindeer. They all flew away and disappeared into the night sky. Santa saw everything and used his magic dust to fly after them, unsure of where they went.

As he flew away, a glow was shining in the sky. It was Rudolph with his bright red nose, along with Comet, Cupid, and Dancer. Santa was happy to find them, but the others were still missing and there was no sled in sight. As Santa kept flying, he had to take a few breaks because the snow was falling more steadily making it hard to see. Eventually, he ran into all the other reindeer who were eating gumdrops. Santa gave them a big hug and they followed him to find the sled. To be sure he didn't lose them again, he put bells on each of the nine reindeer.

Santa was getting very cold from what now was a huge snowstorm, and he was getting sleepy. Luckily, he found a candy cane cave to rest in, and to his surprise, there was his sled! Santa was so happy, and all the reindeer were too. Santa flew his sled back to the bright red, green, and gold shop. He had to quickly get ready to deliver the presents because the night was almost over. As Santa flew into the dark night sky to visit all the boys and girls, the famous words that have been said for many years were yelled out, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

Mason Conner,
Woolwine Elementary

My First Christmas in Stuart

In 2014 I moved from South Boston

to Stuart, Virginia. It was a pretty big change moving from a big city to a small town with not many people in it. But it was an easy adjustment considering the amount of people. I quickly got used to living there and liked it much better than a big city. It was my first Christmas in a new environment, but I had a feeling it would be better than the others. It was a much more welcoming community than before.

On Thursday we set up our Christmas tree and put all the decorations on it and the big star on the very top of the tree was glowing and it was beautiful. We could hardly wait for Christmas, and I was eager to open all my presents. Soon enough it was Christmas Eve. So it was time for me to open one of my presents! I chose the smallest box because my brother and I secretly tore off some wrapping paper and we saw what was inside. It was a glass tea set that I had been wanting for a while. After playing with my tea set with my brother and grandma I headed to bed.

As soon as I woke up, I rushed downstairs to open my presents. My brother and I got almost everything we had wished for, and we had never been happier on Christmas. Everything was perfect. After playing with all of our new toys and looking at all of our new clothes, we ate Christmas breakfast with the family. After a long tiring day, I finally headed to bed and got some sleep. I am so glad that I moved to this small town!

Jasmine Swick,
Woolwine Elementary

A Trip To The North Pole

"Tik, tok, tik, tok," said the clock as Vivian, a nine year old girl, lay on her stomach peering through the staircase bars at the Christmas tree, brightly lighting up the room. She looked over at the digital clock that was lighting up one of the dark corners the tree hadn't lit up. Eleven fifty-seven, it read. Then she started to remember what had caused her to be lying on a cold wooden step leading to the second floor. The day before Christmas break her classmates were arguing. "He is real!" "No, he isn't!" Vivian stayed out of the argument, but was unsure of what to believe. "I shall find out tonight," she said quietly to herself.

Suddenly, bells started to jingle, and the sound of stomping footsteps stumbled across the roof. Her eyes bounced from the clock to the fireplace where the chimney ends. With a blink of an eye, Santa Clause was on his knees unpacking gifts from an enormous red sack and placing them under the colorful tree! Vivian wasn't believing her eyes. She needed more evidence. Undetected, she crept across the room and went out the back door and up the cold metal ladder onto the roof. She hopped in the back of the sleigh and waited.

Soon after, a warmly dressed man in red clothing came out of the top of the chimney, climbed into the sleigh, tossed his bag on the back, and went to the last few houses. When they got to the North Pole, Vivian peeked out to see a winter wonderland, candy canes, peppermints, elves, and a large rainbow factory. She pinched herself, but surprisingly, this was not a dream. This was real! When she finished admiring the view, Santa had

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Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luke 2:14

Seventh Grade

(cont. from page B8)

already walked into the factory. She stepped out of the sleigh and made her way to the huge factory. She walked through the big doors to see elves working on toys. She saw many doors leading down the hallway to her left. Vivian explored the magical doors, hallways, and rooms, until finally, she made it to the library. She turned around to see the doors close behind her. When she turned back around, she saw Santa Claus sitting at a brown wooden table with a long list of children's names and a snow globe with a miniature snowman inside. "Come here, Vivian," he said. Vivian took a few steps forward. "Although you should not be here, you are already here," he added. "I'm sorry," she said. "It's okay, but since you're here, let me show you what you have not seen." Santa showed Vivian the rest of the factory. At the end, Santa told Vivian to promise not to tell anyone what she had seen.

The next morning, Christmas arrived, and she was tired. She opened presents, ate delicious food, and spent time with her family. Come Monday, she could have told everyone in her class about her experience, but she decided to keep her promise to Santa and do her work so she would be on the nice list next year!

Addison Gray Friedrichs,
Woolwine Elementary School

The Day Santa Was Late

On a cold Christmas morning a mom and dad woke up to see how many presents were under the tree. However, when they made it to the living room there were no presents! "Where has Santa gone?" the mother shouted, "Where are all the presents?" the dad yelled. "If Santa doesn't get here before the kids wake up, Christmas is ruined!" the mother cried.

Eventually, the reindeer woke Santa up after he fell asleep in his sleigh due to exhaustion. "Oh no! I have fallen asleep on the job with a whole town left to deliver presents to!" Santa worried. "Rudolf, what time is it?" "6:00 in the morning, I'm afraid." Santa was taken aback by this, knowing that he had very little time before the kids woke up. So, Santa rode off through the town, going from house to house delivering presents to the wishful children.

Finally, he reached the last house he had to deliver to. However, this house was heavily guarded by booby traps and a guard dog. Santa carefully avoided the traps up until he got to the dog. Next to the dog there were milk and cookies. Hungry from this long night of delivering presents to kids, Santa decided to eat one cookie. Unknown to him, however, one of the kids had set a trap for Santa so that when he pulled a cookie the dog would wake up. The wire to the cookie pulled and the dog jumped violently at Santa, causing him to scream out in pain. Hearing this ruckus the family was alerted and they rushed out to help Santa.

Eventually, they got the dog off of Santa, for which he was very thankful. Santa finally delivered the last presents and headed off into the night, taking the cookies and milk!

Conner Glenn King,
Woolwine Elementary School

The Sad Snowflake

I always like the beautiful clouds in the sky.

Once I saw a snowflake falling from the sky.

I asked the snowflake, "Why are you crying?"

He said that he was dying. The snowflake knew his happiness would be gone.

The sun was going down and the day was done.

The snowflake knew that his time had come.

The snowflake did have a lot of fun. But he knew his time was about to be done.

He always feared that today would come.

Then a puddle of water is what he would become.

Levi Ojodeagua,
Woolwine Elementary School

A Failed Plan

My sister, my brother, and I have always stayed up to see Santa. We were never able to find him or we would just fall asleep before he came. However, this year is different because my sister has an idea to make a hole in her door. The problem with making a hole is the fussing we will get from our mom and dad.

Day after day, my sister slowly made the hole in her door, hiding it with a poster. When she finished it, it was Christmas Eve. We went to Dollar General to buy cookies for Santa. And my sister also got snacks for staying up all night.

Christmas Eve night my brother and I sneaked into my sister's room and around two o'clock, we heard noises. "It's Santa!" said my sister. We were so excited.

When we went out to talk with him, he was gone. So we will have to wait until next year to talk with Santa.

Noah Bowling,
Woolwine Elementary School

The Day of Christmas

Once upon a snowy day in December, there was a little girl named Chloe. She was a lovely little girl who was nine years old. Chloe was sitting on her bed trying to pick a movie with her older sister named Winter, while her other older sister, Heather, was cooking with their mother for family

and friends. Back in Chloe's room, Winter had the remote and said that she wanted to watch the movie called "Nightmare Before Christmas" and Chloe was trying to get the remote from Winter and saying that she wanted to watch the movie called "Frozen 2." In the kitchen Heather could hear the argument and she got upset about it so she went to Chloe's room and took the remote away from Winter and said, "If you two can't agree on something, then no TV."

Heather left the room, and Winter left after her. Chloe started throwing a tantrum, so Chloe's father came into the room and asked her what was wrong. Chloe said that Heather took the remote from her and Winter left when they couldn't agree on a movie. Her father looked at her and said, "Well, Chloe, some people want to watch something else instead of watching Frozen." Chloe looked at her dad and nodded.

When Chloe walked out of her room, she looked at Winter and Heather watching a movie together. Heather looked at Chloe and got up to hug her, but Chloe went to their mother and hugged her instead of hugging Heather. Then, Heather got an idea and walked back to Winter and said, "Hey, I know we're watching a movie, but do you want to go to the park and bring Chloe with us?" Winter thought for a second and said, "Okay, but on the condition that I can bring a friend." Heather walked to Chloe and asked, "Hey, Chloe, do you want to go to the park with Winter and me?" Chloe looked at the floor and said, "Okay, I'll go." Heather smiled at Chloe and opened her arms for a hug.

Before they left, Chloe secretly put something in her pocket. Then, the girls went to the park for a walk. While they were walking, something happened. Snow started falling! The girls were amazed by the snow and Chloe was really happy to see the snow fall. The snow reminded her of the secrets in her pocket that she had made for her sisters. Chloe told her sisters to close their eyes and hold out their hands. Then Chloe put their presents into their hands.

Winter and Heather opened their eyes to see a picture of each other and a piece of candy. Each picture was

made while it was snowing. They both looked at Chloe and Chloe said, "I know it's not much, but I wanted to say sorry for how I acted earlier. I know this won't make up for it, but I love both of you and I hope you two will forgive me." Winter and Heather looked at each other with tears in their eyes and hugged Chloe at the same time.

They both forgave her and went to play in the park. When they got back home, they walked to Chloe's room and watched "Nightmare Before Christmas" and then fell asleep in Chloe's room.

Aeress Flint,
Woolwine Elementary School


Best Christmas

The best Christmas ever was when I was ten. I got everything I wanted and more. Christmas Eve was when it all started. I was at my nana's house for dinner and presents. She always lets me choose three of my favorite foods and she will cook them. I chose stuffing, mashed potatoes, and peas. I was so happy when I saw my meal sitting on the table. It tasted so good. The first bite was like heaven. When we finished our food, everyone was ready for presents.

In our family the youngest, who is me, gets to go first. I got a new bike, and it was the prettiest thing I had ever seen. It had stars and hearts on it with glitter. After I opened my presents, we had to leave because it was getting late. So, we told everyone bye and that we loved them and left.

When we got home, I laid out cookies, and milk and then I went to bed. I was so excited to open presents the next morning. When I woke up, I was not even tired, I was ready to open presents. The first thing I opened was my stocking that was filled with candy and small stuffed animals. The next thing I opened was the gift from Mom and Dad. They gave me a bunch of Barbies. My favorite was the Disco Barbie. The last thing I opened was the present from Santa. When I opened it, my eyes filled with happy tears. I got a new Barbie Dream House. I still have it to this day and every time I walk by it, it reminds me of my best Christmas ever.

Bella Martin,
Woolwine Elementary School

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Ninth Grade

Patrick County High School

A New Clause

By Abigayl Slate

I wiggle my toes in the already broken-in shoes that had been left for me. Everything had been where it was every year, or at least I had to assume so. I was an intruder in a space that was mine. The shoes drag me down as I unintentionally stomp over to the mirror to see myself in my father's outfit.

It's too big. Everything is too big. The coat hung down to my knees and shoes were made for a man much bigger than me. My father was bigger than me, in more ways than size. When he walked into a room, his presence was known. All eyes were always on him. When we spoke, when he wasn't swamped by work, he was always so loud and boisterous.

My voice is more meek, quieter. My mom's nickname for me used to be "Little Mouse," because at dinner I was quiet and ate my food in tiny pieces. Could you imagine that? A Santa Clause whose laugh doesn't fill the room? Or Noelle Clause, whatever.

I put the only thing in my outfit that fits me, my hat, on my head. It was easy for my dad, just before he passed, to claim I'd grow into the rest of it, but the hat wasn't going to fit no matter how much I grew. So, he took the time out of his busy day to get one of the elves to make me a special hat. And even though I know that the hat's perfectly made, it still feels wrong.

I'm not fit to be a Santa Clause, no matter how much red I dress in,

or how much everyone around me likes to pretend like they like the current arrangement. We haven't got any other choice, I'm lucky to have been born at all.

I tromp down the hallway and grab my sack. I used to ask my dad about the sack, how the magic worked. I still don't understand it, not really. How do all the children in the world's presents fit in one sack? Dad always just told me that it's magic, that the mechanics of it don't matter, then he'd laugh and pat my head and go off to consult the elves on whatever they were doing.

My thoughts are interrupted by my mom walking out of her bedroom. "Oh, darling!" She rushes over to me and fusses over my outfit, how I'm going to get cold. "Oh, wait! I almost forgot!"

Mom runs back into her room and comes back out with something red. A pair of gloves. "Here." She says, slipping the woolly fabric onto my hands. "You always said you hated mittens. Your dad made sure they would be made by tonight."

I feel tears sting my eyes and hold them back. "Ah, mom, I'm going to be late if I don't go now."

My mom reaches up to my cheek and stands up on her tiptoes to kiss my forehead. "Be safe."

I run as best I can with the boots that are dragging me down with every step, even though I've got five pairs of socks on. "I will!"

I step out into the biting cold air and rub my gloved hands on my face. No wonder the Santas of the past always had rosy cheeks. Not even the Clauses are immune to the cold. One of my fathers most

trusted elves rushes to my side and walks with me to the sleigh.

"Do you know what to do, Noelle?"

I huff. "Yes! I know what to do! It may as well be tattooed on my brain!"

The elves' only response to my small outburst is to mumble under his breath as I climb into the sleigh. He starts going over everything, apparently as a precaution. Like I'm totally going to mess it up.

He steps off so I can start leaving and I have to remind myself to breathe. I look to the elf for help, but he's gone, and I feel my voice trembling as I yell. "Uh, on Dasher, on Dancer, on... Oh come on! You know the drill! Go!"

The reindeer do, in fact, know the drill because they're off before I can blink. My hat threatens to fall off my head and I have to hold it against my head to make sure it doesn't. Is this what all the past Clauses felt when they made this journey for the first time? Were they all as unsure and nervous? Or is it just me?

I wiggle my toes in my over-grown boots and shut my eyes tight until we stop. Which is even scarier. Because now I have to do the real part. I have to deliver the presents.

I tentatively reach in the sack like my dad told me to, and out came two presents, one wrapped in red and the other in green. My boots go hard into the snow, but when I look back to see the footprints there's none there.

I stop at the chimney and let out a tiny cry as I force myself to go down. It's an easy fit, and I step outside the fireplace to take in this family's Christmas tree. It's small, and few

presents are under it. I search the room and find the cookies. Dad told me to only take one from each house so I don't overfill, so I slip one off the pretty glass plate and take a small bite. It's a snickerdoodle, which is shocking because Dad always said most houses had chocolate chips, but I'm glad. I love snickerdoodles.

I flinch when I hear a tiny voice come from the hallway. "Wow! A girl Santa!"

It's a little boy, around the age of four, and I instinctively know the green presents for him. And that his name is Micheal. He trots over to me, dragging a small ragdoll in his hand. "Do you like the cookies? Mama said she wanted to give you some... uh..."

"Variety?"

"Yeah!" He exclaims, lightly bouncing on his toes. "I'm going to be a big brother soon! Mama says it's a big responsibility."

"Well!" I say, putting my hands on my hips, trying to ignore the coat dragging my shoulders down. "Do you think you're up to the task?"

Micheal shrinks in on himself. "I'm not sure."

I look the boy up and down and reach for his present. I sit down on one of my knees so he can look at me without having to crane his neck. "I think you'll be a great big brother."

I place the present in his hands and his eyes light up. I grin at his reaction, pat his head and walk over to the fireplace. "Merry Christmas. Good luck!"

He waves goodbye and in a second, I'm back up on the roof. I start walking back to the sleigh and smile. My boots don't feel so heavy anymore.

Twelfth Grade

By Danyel Koger

As white particles gracefully descended from the clouds, delicately dusting the earth with their ephemeral beauty, a realization dawned — Eve needed to prepare for the town's eagerly anticipated feast. Following an honored tradition, three days after the initial snowfall, the quaint community of Pinewood would unite in a celebration, partaking in a lavish meal and exchanging humble gifts to welcome the arrival of the new season. To Eve's honor, she found herself chosen to spearhead the festivities this year.

That night, the young girl took a leisurely stroll home, her mind ablaze with considerations for the upcoming celebration. Mulling over what would bring joy to the townsfolk, she decided to pause at a nearby bakery, hoping to find inspiration among the delicate pastries that sat on its shelves.

As Eve stepped inside, a gust of cinnamon-scented air wrapped around her like an embrace. The bell above the door chimed softly, announcing her arrival to the elderly baker behind the counter.

"Eve! It's wonderful to see you, my dear!" The baker, Mrs. Carol, greeted with genuine warmth. "What brings you in today?"

"Well, I'm not quite certain yet. I'm hoping to find some inspiration here."

"Inspiration?" The older woman looked

momentarily puzzled before understanding dawned. "Ah, yes! You're in charge of this year's feast, aren't you? I've always hoped to be the organizer, but I'm not too sure they want an old woman like me trying to plan! I'm glad that they chose a nice girl like you."

A sudden idea struck Eve. "Well then, if you don't mind me asking, do you happen to know your most sought after pastry? And could you possibly whip up around one hundred of them by Sunday?"

Hope shimmered in Mrs. Carol's eyes, and Eve crafted an immediate plan.

Over the next three days, she left individual requests on every door—a call for unique, personalized dishes. The town square transformed under Eve's meticulous hands, draped in radiant lights and extravagant ornaments. A place was set for each resident at the large table, promising the grandest celebration yet.

On the third day, the residents of Pinewood filtered through the room, each bearing their dishes, accompanied by bright smiles and joyous laughter

"Hello, everyone!" Eve began, her voice echoing throughout the room. "As you may know, I'm Eve, and I was chosen to lead our celebrations this year. Traditionally, the feast is prepared solely by the chosen individual, but I wanted this year's celebration to be a collective effort, embodying the spirit of our communi-

ty. Our town thrives because of its people, and today, alongside the new season, we celebrate each one of you. Let's feast!"

The people roared in cheers, immediately setting their food upon the table and getting plates of their own. As the delightful aroma of the feast filled the air, Eve stood back, watching with joy as the people of Pinewood reveled in the collective effort that had brought them together. As the snow outside continued to fall, Eve knew this is what fulfillment felt like.

In that moment, surrounded by the laughter and shared stories, she knew that this feast wasn't just a celebration of tradition; it was a celebration of community, of unity, and of the bonds that held them together. The town of Pinewood had come alive in a tapestry of colors, tastes, and shared moments, and Eve couldn't have been prouder to be a part of it.

As the last bite was savored, and the last story shared, Eve raised her glass for a toast. "To Pinewood, to tradition, and most importantly, to each and every one of you. May our community continue to flourish, just as the seasons change and bring us together. Cheers!"

The clinking of glasses echoed through the room, and Eve couldn't help but smile, knowing that this celebration, much like the gently falling snow outside, is a reminder of the beauty that comes when a community joins hands and celebrates the richness of life together.

Inspiring ideas for last-minute holiday shoppers

It's unlikely that anyone aspires to be a last-minute holiday shopper. Putting off holiday shopping until the last minute can make for a stressful home stretch to the season, and there's no guarantee store shelves won't already be picked clean or that gifts purchased online will arrive on time.

Despite how unappealing last-minute shopping can be, it's still a fact of life for millions of holiday shoppers. As the clock winds down this holiday season, shoppers can look to these ideas for inspiration.

- Gift cards: Gift cards may never earn a distinction as the most sentimental item to give a loved one during the holiday season, but they are surprisingly sought-after. In fact, a survey from the National Retail Federation found that 54 percent of participants identified gift cards as the most-wanted gift of the 2022 holiday season. Chain retailers, small businesses and restaurants are



among the many establishments that sell gift cards, so shoppers are bound to find a card to please anyone on their shopping list.

- Food/beverage: The holiday season is a popular time to indulge in some great food and wash it down with a favorite wine or another adult beverage. That makes food and beverages a great holiday gift. Shoppers can take a loved one out to a favorite

restaurant, prepare a homemade treat or purchase a favorite dish from a local specialty grocery store or eatery. Pair the food with an appropriate beverage and this accessible last-minute gift idea is sure to be a hit.

- Tickets: Tickets to a movie, sporting event, live theater performance, or concert are another gift idea that likely won't be gobbled up by early bird shoppers. People of all

ages enjoy experiences, and a 2022 survey from the travel booking platform GetYourGuide found that 50 percent of survey respondents indicated they would enjoy tickets to a concert or show.

- Books: Books make an ideal holiday gift for everyone from young kids to grandparents. Traditional print books are small enough that they can likely arrive on time even if they're purchased just a few days before Christmas. E-book sellers enable gift givers to pick the perfect time to notify loved ones they have received an electronic book. Audiobooks, which can be downloaded to a smartphone or given as a CD, make an ideal gift for loved ones who spend a lot of time behind the wheel.

Last-minute holiday shopping can be stressful. However, various sought-after items can be secured at the last minute, ensuring gift givers' loved ones have a happy holiday season.

Step back in time with Christmas goose

The holiday season is a sentimental time of year. Nostalgia for past holiday seasons and excitement about what's to come make this a particularly special time of year for millions of people across the globe.

It's not uncommon for Christmas celebrants to include a little history in their decorations and celebrations each year. Some families may read Charles Dickens' early Victorian novella A Christmas Carol together before watching one of the many film adaptations of the beloved story. Many popular Christmas carols also date back to the nineteenth century if not earlier, adding another degree of nostalgia to the season. Even food can add a touch of the sentimental to Christmas celebrations. This year, holiday hosts can create some nostalgia around the Christmas dinner table by serving this recipe for 'Roasted Christmas Goose' courtesy of the Food Network and Mark Slawson of the The Wort Hotel in Jackson, Wyoming.



and trim excess fat from the tail. Rub inside cavity with lemon juice. Place apple, potato, orange and celery inside the body cavity. Truss the bird like a turkey.

4. Place the goose in the preheated 450 degree F oven. Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees F. Cook 20 to 25 minutes per pound. Baste the goose every half hour with the Basting Syrup.

5. Carve goose and serve with Stuffing and Cumberland sauce.

Basting Syrup:

6. Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl.

Stuffing:

7. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

8. Coarsely chop the chestnuts and put in a large bowl. Add the stuffing mix, raisins, celery, apple, onion and salt and pepper. Toss to combine. Pour in the chicken stock, butter and cream and mix until evenly moistened.

9. Transfer to a baking dish and bake until the top is browned and crisp, about 1 hour.

Cumberland Sauce:

10. In a saucepan, combine the stock, port, vinegar, shallots, peppercorns and orange juice. Bring to a boil, cook until reduced by 2/3, about 25 minutes. Strain and refrigerate. Serve cold over roast goose.

Basting Syrup (recipe follows)

Stuffing (recipe follows)

Cumberland Sauce (recipe follows)

Basting Syrup

- 1/3 cup corn syrup
- 1/3 cup cane syrup
- 1/3 cup melted butter
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons brandy

Stuffing

- 3 cups whole chestnuts, roasted and peeled
- 1 14-ounce bag stuffing mix
- 1 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/4 cup diced apple
- 1/4 cup diced onion
- 3/4 teaspoon salt

- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 3/4 cup melted butter
- 1/4 cup heavy cream

Cumberland Sauce:

- 1 1/2 cups beef stock
- 3/4 cup port wine
- 3/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 3 shallots, peeled and chopped
- 1 tablespoon crushed black peppercorns
- 3 oranges, juiced

1. Place goose in a large pot. Add water to cover and stir in the sea salt. Refrigerate overnight.

2. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

3. Remove goose from water and drain well. Remove all innards

Roasted Christmas Goose

Yields 6 to 8 servings

- 1 14- to 16-pound goose
- 1/4 cup sea salt
- 1 lemon, halved
- 1 apple, cut into chunks
- 1 potato, cut into chunks
- 1 orange, sliced
- 1 cup chopped celery

Day trips to entertain holiday guests

Travel tends to heat up as the weather begins to chill around the holiday season. With friends and family to see and holiday cheer to spread, it's no wonder why millions of people take to the roads, railways and friendly skies to travel during the holiday season.

It's not uncommon for holiday hosts to open their homes to loved

ones for days at a time. Holiday hosts who want to ensure that visitors enjoy their stay can plan certain excursions to make the most of their time together.

- Go see the lights. Holiday lighting displays are popular across the country. Treat guests to a visit to a nearby attraction. That could be an amusement park that drapes the center of the park in lights, Main Street storefronts and town centers that put on tree lighting ceremonies, urban centers where department stores showcase impressive windows, or other attractions where lights take center stage.
- See a show. From productions of 'A Christmas Carol' to other holiday favorites, it's not difficult to find entertainment that showcases some holiday spirit. Dance troupes may be showcasing 'The Nutcracker' or a choral ensemble may be putting on a concert of Christmas carols. Enjoy a night or day out at one of these events.
- Visit a cathedral or temple. The holiday season brings many individuals closer to their faiths. Travelers may want to visit a house of worship during their stay. Many churches are dressed up for Christmas and some may even have live animals in their living nativity scenes.
- Cut down a Christmas tree. Save the tree cutting and trimming for when guests arrive. This way ev-



everyone can enjoy a day out at the tree farm as families select the perfect evergreen. Partake in refreshments such as hot chocolate or warm cider, then return home

to decorate the tree together. Day trips with overnight guests staying for the holidays can make for an entertaining way to get out of the house and enjoy time together.

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7 ways to organize and store holiday decorations

Decorating a home for holidays is quite popular. A survey from the National Retail Federation found that 53 percent of respondents said they were planning to decorate their home or yard for Halloween in 2023. Lombardo Homes polled 1,000 Americans in 2021 and 94 percent said they celebrate Christmas in at least some way, and 84 percent said they decorate. According to Time-2Play, which surveyed 1,000 Canadians about their holiday decorating habits, Manitoba puts up Christmas decor earlier than any other province, with these residents taking out decorations 4.3 weeks ahead of Christmas Day on average.

With so many avid holiday decorators, individuals will need to find ways to organize and store their seasonal items. Holiday decor comes in many different sizes, from the smallest tree ornaments to illuminated statues for the yard or inflatable items. Figuring out a storage plan can take a little effort. These seven tips can help.

1. Purchase clear, similarly sized storage bins and shelving racks, hanging them where you plan to keep the decorations. Most people prefer an out-of-the-way spot, such as in the garage, attic or basement. Label each bin by holiday and put the bins in chronological order to make finding items more convenient. Uniform bin sizes make it easier to stack and store.

2. Store smaller items inside larger decor items. Decorative baskets

or wrapped boxes brought out for Christmas or Chanukah are ideal places to keep smaller tchotchkes like ceramics, dreidels, candlestick holders, or mantel hooks. Delicate items can be tucked into Christmas stockings or wrapped and stored in a fluffy tree skirt. Egg cartons can be used to keep small items safe as well.

3. Label everything so you will not need to dig through boxes or bins to know what is inside. This might be a good year to ask for a label maker for the holidays!

4. Use overhead or wall storage for holiday decor. Overhead spaces in the garage or basement walls can be good spaces to keep holiday decorations. Always keep bins and boxes off the floor so they are not vulnerable to damage related to leaks or floods.

5. Garment bags can protect larger decorations, such as wreaths, artificial trees or signs. If you have a large number of mechanical, illuminated or inflatable lawn ornaments,



consider investing in a small shed where these items can be safely kept. Wrap the extension cords and any bracing stakes or strings used with the decorations so it's easy to find.

6. Utilize pieces of cardboard as well as toilet paper or paper towel tubes to keep lights and wires tidy. Tuck cords into the toilet paper

tubes, and wrap lights around the cardboard to avoid tangles.

7. Each year, take inventory of your decoration collection and toss out anything that is damaged or has seen better days.

Storing holiday decorations will take some time, but once you establish a system, things will be simple year after year.



Merry Christmas!

Here's hoping you and your family have a holiday built with old fashioned cheer. Happy Holidays from all of us at...

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