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Dec/Jan Issue

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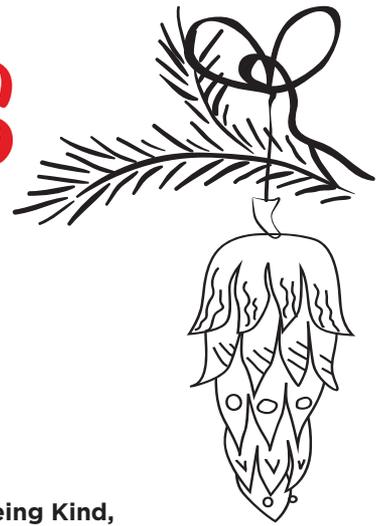
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# 5 Great Gifts

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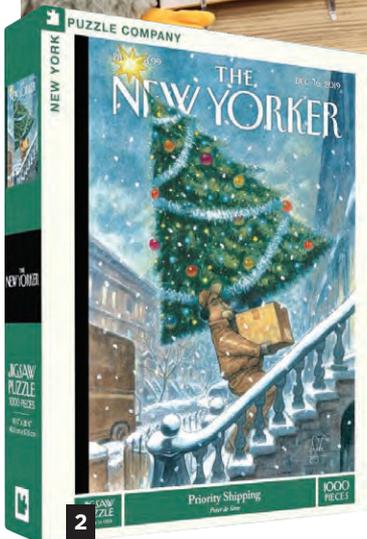


### 1. Feeling Grateful, Being Kind, Finding Muchness, and Chasing Dreams

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### 2. "Priority Shipping" by New York Puzzle Co.

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### 3. Frasier Fir Aromatic Candle by Thymes

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# DECJAN



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FROM  
THE  
EDITOR

# Take a Moment

**AS WE RUSH TO PREPARE FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEW YEAR, I ENCOURAGE YOU TO PAUSE AND REFLECT ON THE MOMENTS THAT MAKE THIS SEASON MEANINGFUL.** This issue is a gift — a cozy collection of nostalgic stories that capture the warmth and spirit we hope for.

In *VOICE*, Tim profiles John Leja, the brilliant band teacher and musician from *Boogie* and the *Yo-Yoz*, and Angela gives us tips for winter wellness. In *TODAY*, Jim shares all the traditional music, theater, and museum events happening right here in our hometown. Plus, there are light festivals, Christmas movies, *Great Reads* for winter, and the chance to give a dog a home for the *howl*-idays.

*TASTE* the season with festive recipes, wine pairings, and reflections over coffee. Jenni shares how big flavors are coming from a small, local kitchen — Ellinor. And, there's *MORE*: Tim is back with humorous memories from his early Christmases, and Joel creates traditional decor with delightful aromas.

Whether you're curled up by the fire or gathered around the table with loved ones, we hope to spark fond memories and inspire new traditions.

Warmest wishes and we'll see you again in February,

Sarah Peterson  
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### Dr. Seth Oberschlake

Dr. Seth Oberschlake is a 2014 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine. He has worked at Heritage Animal Hospital since 2015 and recently became the sole owner.



### Marissa Laird

Marissa Laird is a movie lover who lives in Appleton. Her favorite genre is horror, which makes sense since she is obsessed with Halloween. She also enjoys spending time with her husband and their dog, Remi.



### Jason Patzer

Jason Patzer has worked in coffee for over 11 years. He started Patzer Coffee as a way to continue his passion for coffee after leaving the industry. You can follow him on Facebook & Instagram @ patzercoffee. Or on his website, patzercoffee.com, where he highlights the local coffee community.



Wisconsin Historical Society  
Library Archives acknowledges  
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# VOICE

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A portrait of John Leja, a man with a beard and a mustache, smiling. He is wearing a dark patterned button-down shirt with rolled-up sleeves and blue jeans. He is sitting on a stool. The background is a textured, abstract painting in shades of brown, orange, and blue.

**John Leja**  
Music Teacher  

---

Musician

By TIM FROBERG

# Music Man

## LEJA'S LOVE OF MUSIC HAS NO LIMITS

By TIM FROBERG

**Spend a few minutes with John Leja, and his passion for music pours out.** It's as clear and vibrant as the opening guitar riff to *Sweet Child O' Mine*. Music is Leja's life. He teaches, performs, and writes it ... at an extremely high level. Leja's full-time job is band director at Hortonville High School. But he's probably better known for his part-time gig: a musician with one of the area's most popular rock bands, Boogie and the Yo-Yoz.

When he's not jamming with his band or teaching his students music, Leja is writing it. He has composed percussion pieces that have been sold across the globe in places like Singapore, Brazil, Denmark, Sweden, Bangkok, Argentina, and Italy. Leja also writes original music for another local band he fronts, Same Same but Different.

"John is the consummate musician," said Eric Peters, lead guitarist and founder of Boogie and the Yo-Yoz. "He's like a unicorn. Not only is he an incredibly good musician and entertainer, but he's funny and outgoing."

"All those attributes play into him as a teacher. My son (Ethan) had John as a teacher in the Hortonville School District when he was learning to play saxophone. He really liked 'Mr. Leja' and that was before John was in our band. When I told him that John was going to join our band, he said, 'That makes 100% sense.'"

Leja directs three different bands at Hortonville High: two jazz ensembles and a marching pep band. His job involves music selection, choreography, comprising drill charts (a layout determining the spacing and positioning of the bands for on-field performances), and simply working with students to improve their musical skills.



**"I always wanted to be a teacher," Leja said. "But when I was younger, I was super set on being a math teacher. And then, right around my sophomore year of high school, I realized that not everyone loves math as much as I do. But everyone loves music. So that became my passion."**

It's a passion he joyfully shares with his students and audiences.

"The part I enjoy the most about teaching is helping the kids share music with other people," he said. "Last year, I started taking the jazz band to nursing homes. It became my favorite thing to do because everyone was so grateful we were sharing music with them. The kids loved it and learned so much from those performances."

Introducing young people to music they have not previously heard is another part of the job Leja relishes.

"I teach with another band director (Breanna Wozniczka), and a couple of years ago we chose a Chicago medley to have the kids play," Leja said. "We were discussing it and were like, 'Well, the kids really don't know Chicago. Will they want to play it?'"

"But I thought, 'Well, it doesn't matter that they don't know it. It's something they need to know and I'll bet they will enjoy it.' So we had the kids listen to Chicago and I asked them: 'Who has actually heard any of these songs before?' Only three hands went up and there were like 60 kids in the room.

"So I asked them: 'Do your parents listen to this?' One kid says, 'No, my grandpa listens to it.' But after everyone had learned that piece, sure enough, everybody loved Chicago. They started listening to Chicago just



for fun. Some of these older tunes by groups like the Beatles and Led Zeppelin, the kids aren't necessarily trying to listen to them. But once you play it for them, all of a sudden they're into them."

And that's music to Leja's ears.

"That's exactly why I got into teaching," he said. "I wanted to help kids become passionate about music. I wanted to help them have the skills to become either lifelong players of music or lifelong lovers of music. I love being able to relate to these kids and show them what they're capable of."

Leja, 30, has taught at Hortonville High School for the past four years and previously taught music at Greenville Middle School for four years. This is Leja's fourth year with Boogie and the Yo-Yoz. Playing the trumpet is his primary role with Boogie, but Leja is no one-trick pony. He regularly assists with the guitar and vocals and has played the saxophone, trombone, and drums in concert.

The incredibly versatile Leja also knows how to play the piano, tuba, flute, accordion, clarinet, bassoon, and baritone.

"John has the chops to play just about anything we ask him to play," said Peters. "Trumpet is his main thing, but he's a very, very good guitar player, and he's good at so many different instruments. When he auditioned for us, I said right away, 'This is what we need.' And he's got such a great personality. He instantly became family."

Boogie is a skilled band loaded with talent and plays 60 to 70 shows per year. The group covers a variety of genres, and its top priority is to entertain audiences. Boogie will host its annual Christmas show at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center on Dec. 6 at 7:30 p.m.

"Playing with Boogie is awesome," Leja said. "We get a lot of energetic crowds, and it's so much fun to play in front of thousands of people multiple times during the summer. We have fun — even if the audience

isn't having fun. I will go out of my way to make sure we're having fun.

"We will bring energy no matter what. Even if I'm sick, I'll still be jumping around and making sure the audience is having fun because that's what people go to these shows for."

"I had always planned on being a music teacher, but had never planned on being a performer. What's interesting about our band is that most of the others don't have a formal music background. Take Eric (Peters), for instance. He doesn't really read music, but he can hear it really well, and it doesn't matter because he's such a great guitarist."

Leja even met his wife, Natalie, through music...at a middle school band camp at Appleton North. Natalie is also a music band teacher in the Little Chute School District. The couple became parents over the summer when their daughter, Kaliana, entered the world.

Leja's love of music started in his childhood while growing up in



the Adams-Friendship area near Wisconsin Dells. His father, Jim, played the accordion, and his mother, Janet, plucked the guitar. John's older brother, Jimmy, also played guitar and was in school band programs. John took piano lessons as a kid and learned to play the guitar and drums. Leja went on to take school band classes and became a member of the Adams-Friendship High School marching band. He eventually earned a bachelor's degree in music from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.

"I ended up being the only one who did it for a living, but music was always a family thing," Leja said. "My parents still play a little, but it was my older brother who kind of paved the way for me in music."

Leja's second band, Same Same but Different, is an indie-alternative rock group that includes another Boogie member, Jacob Opperman, who is a music teacher at Fond du Lac High School. Leja writes the music and does lead vocals, along with playing additional instruments.

"I started this around 2020, before I was even in Boogie and the Yo-Yoz," said Leja. "I like indie rock and enjoy writing original music. I never really pictured myself as a lead singer, but I can't imagine anyone else singing the songs that I write. We don't play as much as we want to. We'd love to play more, but it's always fun when we do."

Although music plays a prominent part in Leja's life, it doesn't define

him. He has numerous hobbies that range from family time to kayaking, hiking, camping, and downhill skiing. He's the ski club advisor at Hortonville High and takes up to 60 students on winter ski trips.

Leja is also accomplished in the kitchen. He's a top-notch cook who worked for three years as a sushi chef in Stevens Point during his college days at a well-known restaurant, Matsu Ya.

"I still go there for sushi — it's super great," Leja said. "I love to cook and love being busy. I love a full schedule."

And he certainly loves music.

*Tim Froberg has worked as a reporter for the Appleton Post-Crescent, Green Bay News-Chronicle, and Marinette EagleHerald. He won eight Wisconsin Newspaper Association writing awards.*



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Sat. Dec. 6: 11am-5pm

Thu. Dec. 11: 1pm-6pm | Fri. Dec. 12: 1pm-6pm  
Sat. Dec. 13: 11am-5pm

Thu. Dec. 18: 1pm-6pm | Fri. Dec. 19: 1pm-6pm  
Sat. Dec. 20: 11am-5pm

Mon. Dec. 22: 11am-5pm | Tue. Dec. 23: 11am-5pm

*Plus, Santa has a small gift for every child! Feel free to bring your own camera to capture the moment and bring your wish list to put in Santa's mailbox!*

By KELSEY WELCH



# 1903

On Dec. 17, 1903, the Wright brothers made the first successful flight with their powered aircraft over the dunes of Kitty Hawk, N.C.



When the Wisconsin rivers freeze, it's the perfect time to go eagle watching. They can be found gathering to fish in areas of open water.

**The snowy owl can be spotted in open fields.**



**Candy Canes** are the most popular candy sold in December.

**Turquoise is December's traditional birthstone.** It is considered to be a symbol of good fortune and success.



**Holly and the paperwhite Narcissus** are December's birth flowers. The Narcissus is a relative of the daffodil with white blooms.



**December's full moon is called the full cold moon.**

It will appear on Thursday, Dec. 4, and reach peak illumination at 5:14 a.m. CST.



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# BUILDING STRONG BANKING RELATIONSHIPS

By BRENT WALBRUN



Every successful business has a story, a journey shaped by ambition, resilience, and the right partnerships along the way. Among those partnerships, few are as influential as the one you build with your bank. It's not just about where your money is kept; it's about having someone in your corner who understands your goals and helps you navigate the unexpected.

## Why Relationships Matter

When your banker knows your business beyond the numbers, conversations shift from routine transactions to meaningful dialogue about growth, strategy, and opportunity. That insight can make the difference when you're planning for expansion, managing seasonal cash flow, or responding to sudden changes in the market. It's about having a trusted advisor who sees the bigger picture and helps you prepare for what's next.

## Rooted in the Fox Cities

Here in the Fox Cities, businesses thrive on connections. From small

family-owned shops to growing enterprises, our community is built on relationships — neighbors supporting neighbors, local businesses fueling local success. A strong banking relationship reflects that same spirit. When your banker lives and works in the same community, they understand the unique challenges and opportunities that come with doing business here. They know the seasonal trends, the local economy, and the networks that can help your business grow.

## Listening Comes First

The best relationships start with listening. When your banker takes time to understand your story — your goals, your challenges, your vision — they can help identify opportunities and anticipate obstacles before they arise. These conversations build confidence and create a foundation for long-term success. It's not about quick fixes — it's about building a partnership that evolves as your business does.

## VA Strategic Advantage

Strong banking relationships aren't just convenient — they're strategic. They give you access to insight, guidance, and support that can help you make better decisions. Whether you're planning for growth, navigating a tough season, or simply

looking for a sounding board, having a trusted financial partner means you're never facing those decisions alone.

In the end, banking is about more than numbers — it's about people. Building a strong relationship with your bank can be one of the most important investments you make in your business. Because when you have the right partner, you're not just managing money — you're building a future.



*Brent, a seasoned business banker with over 30 years of experience supporting local business owners, holds a B.S. in Finance from the University of Wisconsin and a graduate degree from the Graduate School of Banking in Madison. A passionate volunteer and accomplished hydroplane racer with three national championships, Brent also enjoys giving back to his community alongside his wife, Jill.*



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# WINTER PROOF YOUR HEALTH PART 2

By ANGELA HALDERSON

In Part 1, we explored how vitamin D, herbs, gut health, sleep, and movement lay the foundation for winter wellness. Now, let's build on those essentials with five more habits that help you stay balanced and vibrant through the coldest months.

## 6. Hydrate — Even When You're Not Thirsty

Cold weather often dulls our thirst response, but hydration remains just as important in winter. Fluids help transport nutrients, flush toxins, and keep your mucous membranes moist — your body's natural barrier against pathogens.

### Try this:

- Start your morning with a glass of warm water with lemon or apple cider vinegar to wake up your digestion.
- Sip herbal teas throughout the day — think ginger, licorice root, or nettle for immune and adrenal support.
- If you drink coffee, double the water to maintain hydration balance.

## 7. Add More Color to Your Plate

Seasonal produce is full of antioxidants that support your immune system. Brightly colored fruits and vegetables like orange squash, purple cabbage, beets, kale, and citrus



provide vitamin C, beta-carotene, and phytonutrients that protect your cells from oxidative stress.

Tip: Roast root veggies, make soups with greens, and enjoy frozen berries — they retain most of their nutrients and add a burst of flavor and color.

## 8. Manage Stress with Rituals, Not Just Reactions

Chronic stress is one of the biggest immune suppressors. Winter's slower rhythm invites us to create daily rituals that ground the nervous system and restore inner calm.

### Consider:

- Morning journaling or breathwork to set a positive tone for the day.
- Evening gratitude reflection.
- Herbal allies like ashwagandha, holy basil (tulsi), or rhodiola, which can help the body adapt to stress more gracefully. Check out Strong Meridian's blog for my favorite brands!

## 9. Nourish Yourself with Broths and Warm Foods

Winter is the season of warmth and nourishment. Bone broth, miso soup, and slow-cooked stews not only comfort the body but also deliver minerals, collagen, and amino acids that strengthen the gut and immune system.

### Try this for nourishment:

- Sip on bone broth daily or use it as a base for soups.
- Add immune-enhancing ingredients like garlic, ginger, mushrooms (shiitake, maitake, reishi), and turmeric for extra defense and flavor.

## 10. Create a Daily Light Ritual

Lack of sunlight affects more than just mood — it disrupts your circadian rhythm and vitamin D metabolism. Bringing light into your daily routine helps keep your hormones balanced and your immune system resilient.

### Suggestions:

- Get outside within 30 minutes of waking, even on cloudy days.
- Use a full-spectrum light lamp for 10–20 minutes in the morning if sunlight is limited.
- Open curtains wide, light candles in the evening, and stay connected to natural rhythms as much as possible.

## Bringing It All Together

Winter wellness is less about perfection and more about consistency. Small daily actions — hydrating, nourishing, resting — add up to strong immunity and vibrant energy. Think of these 10 habits as your winter survival kit, built to help you thrive through the season.

*Angela Halderson is the owner of Strong Meridian, a natural healthcare practice focusing on the root cause of disease. She is a dietitian trained in functional medicine, energy medicine, homeopathy and herbalism.*

# UP FRONT

## LISA STRANDBERG

Advocate for the Homeless,  
Gardener, Hiker

Shelter is a basic, fundamental need, and Lisa Strandberg works diligently to provide it for those who seek refuge.

Strandberg is the executive director of Pillars, which strives to meet the housing needs of homeless individuals in the area.

The Neenah resident has been with Pillars since 2020, previously serving as community engagement director before starting her current role in 2022.

"Our biggest need is always financial support," said Strandberg. "Our people, our programs, and about 70% of our annual budget is our personnel budget. So financial support is really what makes the services we provide accessible to those who need it."

A native of Suamico and a Bay Port High School graduate, Strandberg earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of Wisconsin and is finishing up work on her master's in business administration from St. Norbert College.

When she's away from the office, Strandberg enjoys hiking and gardening. She also enjoys cooking Thai food with her husband, Dave, and spending time with their son, Ryan, 24, who is attending graduate school at Marquette University, and their daughter, Rachel, 22, a recent UW graduate.



### RISING NUMBERS

"The number of folks experiencing homelessness, especially unsheltered homelessness in our community, has risen sharply for the past three years. The root cause is a very challenging housing market. When supply isn't adequate to meet demand, prices go up. That squeezes out the most marginalized and vulnerable in the community from accessing the rental housing they need."

### THE HOLIDAYS

"The holidays are a mixed bag for us at Pillars. Because it's winter in Wisconsin, we see an uptick in folks on our waiting list for shelter. We also see a tremendous outpouring of generosity from the community. People's hearts tend to swell this time of the year for those who need community support. There is always a lot of trauma for everyone during the holidays, but they're special and beautiful in many ways. We have staff members who choose to work on Christmas Day because it's a meaningful experience for them."

### SHARING A STORY

"One of the most beautiful things I remember was when we put together an Independence Day appeal to the community. We shared the story of one of our tenants who had moved through our shelter and into one of our affordable housing units and eventually into a permanent home of his own. He was a veteran who had served his country, and in return, his community was serving him. He was thrilled to hear that sharing his story brought in \$150,000 worth of support for other people like him who needed some support to get through their experience and move on to the next step. Now he's situated and able to have his grandchildren visit and stay with him."

By Tim Froberg  
Photo by Ashley Schmit  
Debbie Daanen Photography

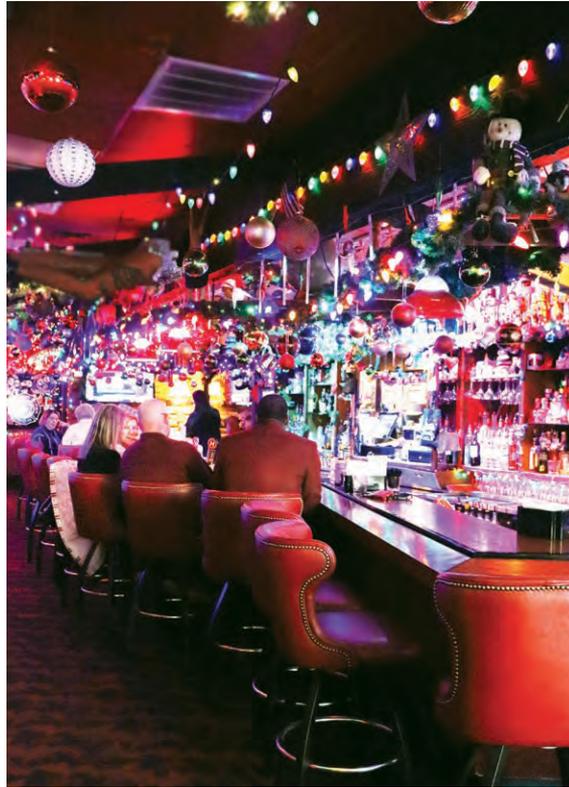
# GOOD STUFF

By SARAH PETERSON



## VISIT A MARKET INDOOR FOX DEN MINI MARKET

If you're longing for the excitement and community of Downtown Appleton's outdoor farm market, you'll be happy to know that the Indoor Fox Den Mini Market is back and will be located inside the newly renovated Fox Commons (formerly City Center Plaza and the Avenue Mall). Browse a rotating selection of 15 local vendors offering artisan food, hot drinks, handcrafted goods, locally made products, clothing, home decor, music, and more. Enjoy a cozy shopping experience and discover something new each week. See website for weekly vendor listings and offerings. Saturdays, Nov. through March, 9 a.m.–1 p.m. [appletondowntown.org/events/indoor-fox-den-mini-market](http://appletondowntown.org/events/indoor-fox-den-mini-market)



## SIP A FESTIVE DRINK CLEO'S COCKTAIL LOUNGE

Cleo's in downtown Appleton offers a festive atmosphere year-round, but the holidays are the best time to visit. Whether you're in the mood for a cocktail or simply want to soak in the over-the-top holiday decor, Cleo's is the perfect Christmas destination. Famous for their Dirty Snowballs and seasonal specialty drinks, Cleo's is an ideal spot to take a break from your holiday errands, relax with friends, and make your holidays even more memorable. [facebook.com/cleos.appleton](https://facebook.com/cleos.appleton)



## EXPLORE ART EXHIBITS TROUT MUSEUM OF ART

The stunning, all-new Trout Museum of Art is now open in downtown Appleton. The new building features expanded galleries, classrooms, a museum store, and The Drinkery cafe-bar. Admission to the museum is free through 2025, thanks to a generous donation from The Boldt Company. [troutmuseumart.org](http://troutmuseumart.org)



## READ A NEW BOOK THE CHRISTMAS SWEATER

Beloved children's author, illustrator, and *New York Times* best seller, Jan Brett, has released a new book, *The Christmas Sweater*, featuring an adventurous boy and an adorable pug. Join her for a 30-minute drawing demonstration and talk about the inspiration behind the book. Jan will also do a book signing, as time permits. The event is free, but tickets are required. Dec. 7 at 5 p.m. at Barnes & Noble in Appleton. [facebook.com/events/1251583036983458](https://facebook.com/events/1251583036983458)



## GET OUTDOORS NIGHTTIME HIKES

Embark on a tranquil, self-guided hike through illuminated winter wonderlands at our local nature centers. Hot chocolate and treats will be available. Silent Night Hike, Dec. 16, 5–7 p.m. at 1000 Islands Environmental Center, and Winter Solstice Hike, Dec. 19, 5–8 p.m. at Bubolz Nature Preserve. [kaukauna.gov/event/silent-night-hike](http://kaukauna.gov/event/silent-night-hike) [bubolzpreserve.org/bubolz-events/calendar](http://bubolzpreserve.org/bubolz-events/calendar)



## TREAT YOURSELF WHISK AND ARROW

Enjoy a delicious assortment of award-winning bakery, soups, salads, wraps, and cafe beverages at Whisk and Arrow Sugar Studio in Appleton. Stop by during one of their festive holiday events, including: Holiday Bakery with Amanda Cupcake (Dec. 6), Holiday Cookie Walk (Dec. 12), Pictures with Santa (Dec. 13), Karen's Krafty Paws (Dec. 19–20), and Brunch-to-Go (Dec. 21). [facebook.com/whiskandarrow/events](https://facebook.com/whiskandarrow/events)

# TODAY

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# Seeing The Light

## CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOWS ADD GLOW TO CHRISTMAS

By TIM FROBERG

Christmas lights have a way of brightening the holiday season.

We celebrate this special time of year by stringing lights on our houses, but the most extravagant displays are the public lighting shows. They are typically dazzling, affordable, and offer viewers a trip-to-the-North Pole type of experience without leaving Wisconsin.

These serve two purposes. They entertain us and enhance our Christmas spirit because they are usually stunning: a holiday feast for the eyes that leaves us repeating a three-letter word: "W-O-W."

Attending a public lighting show will not only put a smile on your face, but will also allow you to help others. The hard-working, kind-hearted

folks (often volunteers) who put on these magnificent displays aren't typically trying to make a buck. A majority of the light shows raise money for charity through entry fees and financial contributions.

How did it all start? Let's start with Christmas trees. They go back hundreds of years. German priest and theologian Martin Luther is often credited with popularizing the Christmas tree in the 16th century when he decorated an evergreen tree with candles to symbolize Jesus Christ being the light of the world.

Decorated fir trees — known as *Tannenbaums* — began being placed in homes in Germany, and the concept was brought to America by German settlers. The trees eventually became illuminated with

electric light bulbs in the late 1800s, following the invention of the first electric-lit bulb.

The first recorded use of Christmas lights on outdoor trees occurred in San Diego in 1904. Believe it or not, Appleton was one of the first American cities to decorate public streets with lights in 1908, beating even New York City to the punch.

Here's a look at five of the most prolific public lighting displays in our area. Two are positioned smack dab in the middle of the Fox Cities, while two others involve short drives to Green Bay and Oshkosh, respectively.

All feature more lights and colorful displays than even Clark Griswold could imagine.



# FOX CITIES FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



This is the sixth season for the Fox Cities Festival of Lights, an enjoyable walk-through experience at Darboy Community Park in the village of Harrison.

The lighted half-mile trail takes walkers on a festive loop through a wooded area expertly decorated with the sights and sounds of the season. Shaun Forslund, president of FCFOL, has more than 30 eye-catching, custom-made Christmas displays. Some represent well-known sites in the Appleton area, such as the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center and Grignon Mansion.

"We offer more of an intimate setting with the walk-through," said Forslund. "You get the personal experience, and we feel we have some unique displays."

One of the FCFOL highlights is a tunnel illuminated with lights.

"Our tunnel has been very popular and we've actually built a new one this year," Forslund said. "It's a good spot to take pictures."

There is no entry fee, but a \$5 donation is suggested, and donation boxes have been placed throughout the park. A majority of the funds raised go back to area nonprofit organizations that assist with the event.

"It's going great," said Forslund. "We're growing in popularity, and over \$80,000 has gone back into area nonprofits that help us put this on."

The Fox Cities Festival of Lights runs Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 5–9 p.m. Opening night is Nov. 29, and the finale is Dec. 28. Those dates include Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Santa will be available in his workshop from 5–8 p.m. until Dec. 28, with no charge for photos.

Street parking is available on Noe Road and Midway Road. There is also a parking lot at the end of Skipper Lane. No pets are allowed.

Fox Cities Festival of Lights is a nonprofit organization composed of volunteers who design, build, and set up the displays.

"It's something our volunteers really enjoy doing," said Forslund. "It's a way we can give back to the community and create a fun holiday event."

"For the last 10 or 20 years, there hasn't been any type of display like this in Appleton. We love doing it and have created some great friendships."

For more information, call 920-421-5483 or visit [fcfestivaloflights.org](http://fcfestivaloflights.org).



# TIMBER RATTLERS HOLIDAY LIGHTS

## A Walk-Through Event



The Wisconsin Timber Rattlers are taking a big swing at holiday lighting by offering a grandiose display sure to create a buzz in the Appleton community.

The Rattlers' holiday lighting show — which began Nov. 14 at Neuroscience Field at Fox Cities Stadium — features more than a million lights. It is an impressive walk-through, family-friendly event that offers Christmas displays, dazzling light shows set to synchronized music, a holiday train ride, a 30-foot Christmas tree, fire pits for s'mores, food and cocktails, photo ops with Santa, a letters-to-Santa station, and a stadium-wide scavenger hunt.

Visitors can walk through the decorated concourse and onto the field. The left field loge area will be available for warm-up sessions along with the stadium's fire pits, where guests can toast s'mores.

"It's going to be like Clark Griswold on steroids," said Timber Rattlers President and CEO Rob Zerjav with a laugh. "It's going to be a spectacle — a really neat event — and I think a lot of people are going to come and see it. When people drive by it on the highway, they're going to see this glow. It should turn some heads and make people want to come and see it."

The synchronized light shows take place every 20 minutes, and the holiday train ride will transport visitors around the stadium.

This is the first year the Timber Rattlers have offered the event. The Rattlers decorated the stadium area in past years, but never previously offered anything of this magnitude.

"We're really excited about it, and hopefully it becomes a holiday tradition for a lot of people," Zerjav said.

The event runs nightly through Jan. 3 and is open weekdays from 6–9 p.m., and weekends from 5–9 p.m., except for closed dates on Dec. 1, Dec. 8, and Dec. 24.

Ticket prices are \$12 per person in November and \$13 in December and January. Children ages 2 and under are admitted free. Parking is free. Single admission tickets are currently on sale and can be purchased through the team's website, [milb.com/wisconsin](http://milb.com/wisconsin), or at their ticket office. It is a cashless event.

The Rattlers are following the lead of other minor league baseball teams that have offered elaborate Christmas light shows.

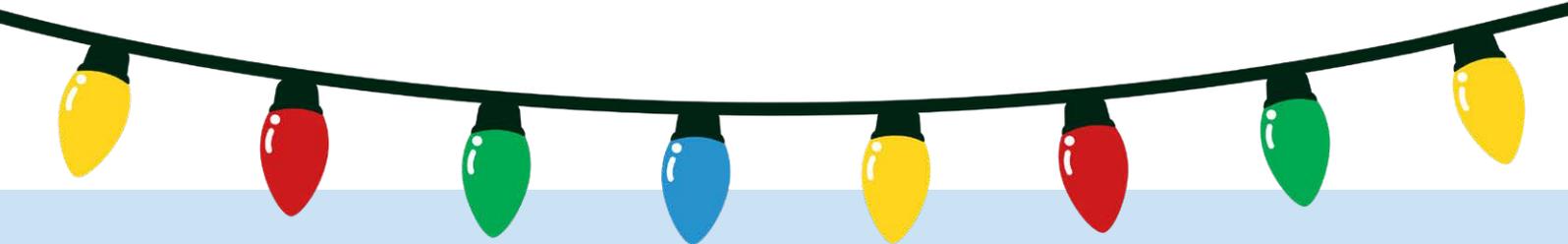
"We've been talking with the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau for a number of years about how to add a holiday event to the area," said Zerjav. "We were at the baseball winter league meetings a couple of years ago and noticed the Columbia Fireflies had a lot of success with a Christmas lights event."

"Then a handful of teams, including the Fort Wayne TinCaps, who are in the Midwest League, started doing it. This is our first year, but we think it's going to be unlike anything anyone has seen in the area."

A percentage of the ticket sales will go toward Timber Rattlers Give Back — a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting community programs and charitable events in the Fox Valley.

For more information, visit [milb.com/wisconsin](http://milb.com/wisconsin) or call 920-733-4152.





# OSHKOSH CELEBRATION OF LIGHTS

A short drive to Oshkosh offers viewers another top-notch light show that has been a long-standing area tradition.

The Oshkosh Celebration of Lights is a drive-through event featuring a spectacular 2.4-mile ride through EAA grounds (enter at 1858 Neunteufel Ave.), decorated with millions of sparkling lights, sculpted scenes, and animated light displays and shows.

More than 120 trees will be filled with lights, including a 100-foot-high Christmas tree. The number of shining lights is estimated to be a whopping 3.4 million.

The event runs nightly from 5–9 p.m. from Nov. 28–Dec. 31.

The admission fee is \$20 per car with a \$5 discount available for non-perishable food items or sealed hygiene items (such as shampoo or deodorant).

Visitors are encouraged to tune into 101.9 FM on their car radios to hear favorite holiday tunes synced to the fabulous lights.

There will be five Community Nights when no admission fee will be charged: Nov. 30, Dec. 7, Dec. 14, Dec. 21, and Dec. 28.

Additional special nights for veterans and senior citizens are also available, along with horse-drawn wagon rides on select nights. Visits with Santa can be experienced through Dec. 23 from 5:30–8:30 p.m. Visitors

must preregister for the wagon rides, which start every half hour from 6–8:30 p.m. Call 920-303-9200 or email [jodi@discoveroshkosh.com](mailto:jodi@discoveroshkosh.com) for wagon ride reservations.

This is the 24th year for the Oshkosh Celebration of Lights, which was previously held in Menominee Park. A small army of volunteers puts on the annual event, adding new displays each year. Proceeds raised benefit local nonprofits.

The Oshkosh Celebration of Lights is an established, well-known family event that draws more than 20,000 vehicles each holiday season.

For more information, visit [oshkoshcol.org](http://oshkoshcol.org) or call 920-312-4283.





# GARDEN OF LIGHTS



The annual Garden of Lights at the Green Bay Botanical Garden is another excellent, family-friendly lighting event steeped in tradition.

The Garden of Lights, presented by Wisconsin Public Service Foundation, is a walking event along a scenic one-mile path filled with thousands of lights and sensational outdoor scenes and exhibits.

Two interesting displays — the interactive Tic-Tac-Snow Game and the Aurora in Bloom laser light show — have been added for this season. Wagon rides are also available on every event night.

The Garden of Lights will be open from 4:30–9:30 p.m. on Nov. 28–30, Dec. 4–7, Dec. 11–14, Dec. 18–23, and Dec. 26–30. No one will be admitted after 8:30 p.m. On-site parking is free and available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Ticket prices range from \$17 for adults and \$8 for children (ages 3–12) on peak nights, to \$14 for adults and \$5 for children on value nights, which are Dec. 4, Dec. 7, Dec. 11, Dec. 14, Dec. 18, and Dec. 26–30. Children 2 and under are admitted free.

A wagon ticket, which includes the walking path, is \$19 for adults and \$10 for children.

Tickets are available online at [gbbg.org](http://gbbg.org). They should be purchased well ahead of time, especially for weekend events, because they frequently sell out.

Photos with Santa are available on select nights. Cookies and hot cocoa are also sold on site.

Special themed nights will be Afterglow (Nov. 29 for adults 21 and up only), Kids Glow Free (Nov. 30, kids 12 and under get a free walking ticket with one paid adult), Frozen Magic (Dec. 14 in which the garden transforms into a world of ice and lights), and Reindeer Cheer (Dec. 21 in which guests get to interact with live reindeer).

The walking tour usually takes 30–45 minutes, and the wagon rides are 10–15 minutes. Pets are not allowed unless they are service animals.

Green Bay Botanical Garden is located at 2600 Larsen Road. It features 47 acres filled with 120,000 plants from across Wisconsin and around the world.

For more information, visit [gbbg.org](http://gbbg.org) or call 920-490-9457.

## WINTER JUBILEE LIGHT SHOW

Yes, NFL football is the main order of business at Lambeau Field, but the Packers are doing their part to provide holiday cheer through their annual Winter Jubilee Light Show.

The free light show at Lambeau and the Titledown District is a brief but sensational blend of holiday lights,

music, lasers, animation, special effects, and fireworks.

How does it work? Basically, a laser light show is set to music and projected onto Lambeau Field's west façade, culminating in a fireworks display. The seven-minute light show plays every 30 minutes from 6–9 p.m. on 14 different nights.

The best views are from Hy-Vee Plaza and Ridge Road, looking towards Lambeau Field, or lots 5 and 6. To fully enjoy the experience from your car, tune your radio to 87.9 FM.

Winter Jubilee Light Show nights are Nov. 28–29, Dec. 5–6, Dec. 12–13, Dec. 19–24, and Dec. 26–27. The Dec. 27 light show will be cancelled if there is a Packers home game that day.

The Winter Jubilee Light Show is presented by EUA and Shopko Optical.

A Winter Jubilee Warm Up will be held in the Titledown District on Nov. 28–29 from 10 a.m.–10 p.m. The event allows visitors to skate at Hy-Vee Plaza and for children to meet Santa and interact with live reindeer before the premiere of the Winter Jubilee Light Show at 6 p.m.

For more information, visit [titledown.com](http://titledown.com) or call 920-569-7500.



# A Hometown Holiday

*Celebrate the Christmas Season with  
Local Performances and Events*

By JIM COLLAR

As temperatures chill, our hearts naturally grasp for the comfortable feelings of home. It's a time of joyous memories, rich traditions, and it becomes so much easier to appreciate the many things we would otherwise take for granted.

That feeling of home shines through in our recipes, stories, and decorations. It's a feeling that also extends to the greater community.

We're fortunate in the Fox Cities to have easy access to famous performers and glitzy national productions. But we're just as blessed to have an incredible amount of homegrown talent and artistic passion.

Our very own artists and organizations have become an integral part of the Fox Valley's holiday traditions. From song and dance to reminders of Christmases past, our deep and varied list of holiday shows and celebrations demonstrates both our creativity and community strength.

Relish every moment of the events that have become part of your family's Christmas celebrations and make a point to enjoy something new. If you still haven't experienced our local arts scene and the wonderful work of our community groups, there's no better time than during the holidays.

## **Experience Christmas in Chorus**

Choral music is an art form rooted in community. In a season defined by togetherness, few traditions capture the spirit of the holidays quite like an evening with a talented chorus. Here in the Fox Valley, we're blessed with an abundance of opportunities.

Key among them is the Appleton Boychoir and its signature event. They will present *A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* on Dec. 13 at Lawrence Memorial Chapel with performances at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m.

The program begins with a solo boy soprano before a grand procession of singers arrives with a powerful organ accompaniment. The concert will





feature 100 men and boys as well as Copper Street Brass and a variety of instrumentalists.

For many, the story of Christmas in Appleton couldn't be told without mention of the *Lessons and Carols* concert, Executive Director Hilary Armstrong said.

"It's a great way to kick off the holiday season," she said. It's been going for 45 years and it's an event that is really engrained into the fabric of our community."

Many of the Fox Valley's finest young female singers will help usher in the holidays on Dec. 19. Badger State Girl Choir will present *Midnight Clear*, a celebration of Christmas that is part of its 20th anniversary season. Concerts will take place at 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at Appleton's Belfry Hall.

The next day, many of our finest adult vocalists will leave their mark on the holidays. NEWVoices, an Appleton-based choir of more than 80 men and women, will perform *Good News (Of Great Joy)* at the Lawrence chapel on Dec. 20 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Enjoy familiar carols and new settings of holiday classics during a performance that includes audience sing-alongs, the incredible sound of the chapel's Brombough organ, and a traditional candlelight closing.

Perhaps you're looking for something more fun than poignant. The Fox Valley also has that base covered.

The Fox Valleyaires Barbershop Chorus will bring their signature four-part, a cappella harmony to their holiday show, *A New Santa Claus in Town*, on Dec. 9 at the new

Neenah High School Performing Arts Center. The 7 p.m. concert will feature Christmas classics sung by the chorus and chapter quartets. The Lawrence Community Girl Choir will also perform.

Those who can't get enough of that delightful barbershop style can get a second helping on Dec. 13. Fox Valley Chorus, a chapter of Sweet Adelines International, will offer a performance and Christmas market at First Presbyterian Church in Neenah at 2:30 p.m.



## Strike Up the Band

The Fox Valley's many talented instrumentalists also have plenty in store.

Fox Cities Tuba Christmas takes place on Dec. 5 at Appleton North High School. It's free to attend and begins at 7 p.m. Organizer Greg Forton said it's a wonderful evening of camaraderie for tuba and euphonium players and a delight for the audience.

The Appleton concert is in its 36th year and is just one of nearly 300 annual events worldwide. The audience will hear familiar favorites and is invited to sing along.

"For any tuba player or low brass player, there's this feeling of joviality to be able to produce something together, and all the wonderful harmony," Forton said. "We're used to being at the back of the band producing backbeats. At this event, the amount of sound and type of sound is unique from anything else. It's absolutely gorgeous."

Trade tubas for French horns and you have the idea behind Horns a Plenty Christmas, which will take place at 2 p.m. on Dec. 20 at Belfry Hall. This year, Horns a Plenty celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Our community bands will also spread their holiday cheer.

The Little Chute Community Band will perform Christmas favorites on Wednesday, Dec. 3 at the Little Chute High School Auditorium. The performance begins at 7 p.m. and will include treats, hot cocoa, and a visit from Santa. Just across the Fox River, the Kimberly Community Band will delight listeners at its annual Christmas concert at 2 p.m. on Dec. 7 at J.R. Gerritts Middle School. Meanwhile, the Neenah Community Band will hold its winter concert at 3 p.m. on Dec. 7 at the Neenah High School P.A.C.

## Holiday Theater and Dance

While concerts are a staple of our holiday entertainment, local performances aren't limited to song.

For many in our community, Christmas isn't Christmas without experiencing the beauty of *The Nutcracker Ballet*. Join Valley Academy for the Arts for this beloved tradition at The Grand in downtown Oshkosh.

Featuring the music of Tchaikovsky, the classical ballet is based on E.T.A Hoffmann's classic story, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*. The Neenah ballet company will offer performances from Dec. 19–29. For tickets and showtimes, visit [thegrandoshkosh.org](http://thegrandoshkosh.org).

For a little variety, include the Xavier Fine Arts Theatre on your list of destinations. It's the host of *Christmas Stars*, a large-scale holiday revue that serves as a fundraiser for the St. Francis Xavier Catholic School System. Performances run from Dec. 4–14 and will feature music, original choreography, comedic scenes, and a living nativity. Visit [christmasstars.org](http://christmasstars.org) for show times and ticket information.

Looking for a fun, irreverent take on the holidays? Take the short trek to Green Bay.

*A Frank's Christmas* runs from Nov. 28–Dec. 27 at the beautiful Meyer Theatre. It's presented by Let Me Be Frank Productions, a company well known for its hilarious, locally inspired, and always original stage performances.

## Museums Dressed in Their Holiday Best

The Christmas season in the Fox Cities is much like an Advent calendar. Behind some doors, you'll find time machines.

Step back into Wisconsin's early days during the Grignon Mansion Christmas tours in Kaukauna. Charles A. Grignon built the mansion in 1837 as a gift for his bride. Today, the elegant home is a museum, and on Dec. 6, 13, and 14, volunteers will offer a glimpse into 1800s holiday traditions.



Volunteer Mary Grogan-Seleen said the tours will feature decor of the 1860s and 1870s.

“We want to tell the story of the Grignon family at Christmas and how some of the early families in Kaukauna would have celebrated the holiday,” she said. “We give a nod to the German heritage of our area. Every year, it gets a little bigger and a little grander.”

Reservations can be made at [thepaine.org](http://thepaine.org).

While Oshkosh’s EAA Aviation Museum isn’t ornate or historic, its high-flying team is just as adept at capturing the warm, generous spirit of the holidays.

On Dec. 6, enjoy free museum admission from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. during EAA Christmas In the Air. Children can write letters to Santa and visit the Sweet Shoppe. Local dance,



The events begin at 2 p.m. and include candlelit tours from 4–7 p.m., horse-drawn wagon rides, crafts, cider, and hot chocolate. Tickets can be purchased online at [kaukauna.gov/grignon-mansion](http://kaukauna.gov/grignon-mansion).

Appleton’s Hearthstone Historic House Museum will present nature-themed Christmas decorations in each room during its Victorian Christmas: Naturally Yours exhibit. They will also present How Victorians Invented Christmas. Enjoy guided tours and open houses throughout December. Check their website for dates and times, [hearthstonemuseum.org](http://hearthstonemuseum.org).

Yet another historic home turned museum will use its ornate beauty to bring a beloved piece of fiction to life. Those who treasure *The Nutcracker* once again have an interactive opportunity within the historic Paine Art Center in Oshkosh. *Nutcracker in the Castle* includes 20 decorated settings and 70 Christmas trees. Its guided tours include music, actors, and dance performances.

music, and choral groups will perform throughout the museum and Santa arrives at noon by helicopter. EAA invites its visitors to bring along a donation of unwrapped toys for Toys for Tots or non-perishable food for Father Carr’s Place 2B.

As we count our blessings this holiday season, let’s include the wonderful entertainment and inspiration around us. After all, the concept of home isn’t just a backdrop to our celebrations, but the very heart of them. Make a point to enjoy the hard work and great talent of our friends and neighbors throughout December.



*Jim Collar is a journalist, lifelong resident of the Fox Cities and a supporter of our local music scene. He previously worked as a reporter for The Post-Crescent and The Oshkosh Northwestern.*

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# MANNHEIM STEAMROLLER

## HIGHLIGHTS DECEMBER P.A.C. SHOWS

By TIM FROBERG

Tickets to a show at the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center make for a terrific Christmas present.

The P.A.C. is providing customers with plenty of good gift options.

Mannheim Steamroller, a household name among holiday performers, is among the exceptional acts visiting the P.A.C. in December.

Mannheim Steamroller will be in town for a one-night show on Dec. 9. It follows another iconic national group, **Straight No Chaser**, which offers its amazing a cappella skills in a one-night show at the P.A.C. on Nov. 30.

Additional Christmas-related concerts in December include three outstanding holiday shows featuring local and regional talent: *For Kids from 1 to 92* (Dec. 4), headlined by the multi-talented Steve March-Torme and former Vic Ferrari frontman, Michael Bailey; *Christmas on the Avenue* (Dec. 5), and *Boogie and the Yo-Yoz Christmas With You* (Dec. 6).

If you're looking for something other than a Christmas concert, check out *A Magical Cirque Christmas*, which has two shows on Dec. 13. It is a fast-paced, high-flying variety show featuring world-class acrobats, aerialists, contortionists, and magicians who perform their acts to popular Christmas tunes.

"The holidays are a special time at your Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, which truly has something for kids from one to ninety-two," said P.A.C. President/CEO Maria Van Laanen. "Whether it's the thrills of *A Magical Cirque Christmas* or the local flavor of *Christmas on the Avenue*, every production brings a little something special to discover."

Mannheim Steamroller has performed at the P.A.C. in recent years. The group is best known for its modern recordings of

Christmas music, blending neo-classical new-age music with progressive rock to provide a fresh take on holiday hits. The group has sold over 28 million albums in the U.S. alone.

"For many of us, the holidays don't truly begin until they've heard the distinctive sounds of *Mannheim Steamroller Christmas* by Chip Davis," said Van Laanen. "So we're thrilled to have them back. Audiences know exactly what they're in for: a grand rocking tour of holiday classics."

Another intriguing December show is **Leslie Odom Jr.**, on Dec. 10. Odom is best known for his portrayal of Aaron Burr in the Broadway smash hit *Hamilton*, which earned him Tony and Grammy awards.

"Many of us know Leslie Odom Jr. for his role as Aaron Burr in *Hamilton*, but his wonderful holiday albums have brought him an entirely new audience," Van Laanen said. "We are so fortunate to have him sharing the holidays with us."

In addition, the highly skilled Fox Valley Symphony will host its annual Christmas show, *Hearts in Harmony*, on Dec. 7.

Theatrical plays and musicals at the P.A.C. in December include the hilarious *Sisters Christmas Catechism* (Dec. 4) and *Hell's Kitchen* (Dec. 16–21), which features new songs and the greatest hits from 17-time Grammy winner Alicia Keys.

Among the January highlights will be *Staying Alive* – Bee Gees Tribute on Jan. 16 and a visit by wonderfully sarcastic comedian **David Spade** on Jan. 29.

*Hamilton* storms into the P.A.C. in February for an extended stay (Feb. 3–15).

To purchase tickets, call the ticket office at 920-730-376 or go to the P.A.C. website at foxcitiespac.com.



Mannheim Steamroller

# SENSORY-INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

## AT THE FOX CITIES PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

At the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center, every patron is invited to experience the magic of live performances, and sensory-inclusive experiences ensure that patrons with sensory needs feel welcome and included. The Center is proudly KultureCity® certified, reflecting its commitment to creating a theater environment where every person can enjoy the arts.

Community members see this commitment come alive during sensory-inclusive events including *Music in Motion*, a collaboration with the Fox Valley Symphony Orchestra and Expressive Therapies. In its first season, Kimberly-Clark Theater was filled with music, movement, and laughter as children and adults explored instruments and participated in songs. This season, the collaboration expands with two exciting programs: *Music in Motion: Soundtracks* on Nov. 8 and *Music in Motion: Sun, Moon, Stars* on March 14. Designed for community members of all abilities, these programs blend live symphonic music with a welcoming environment that encourages movement and participation. Attendees can engage with the performance using handheld instruments and colorful scarves provided at the event, while enjoying flexible seating and consistent lighting.

Another highlight this season is Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia's *Billy Goats Gruff and Other Tales*, performing on Jan. 15 in Thrivent Hall. This lively performance brings fresh twists to three beloved children's stories, filled with humor, adventure, and delightful surprises. In *Billy Goats Gruff*, three determined goats must outwit a greedy troll to reach the lush green grass on the other side of the bridge. Next, *Wolf vs. Pigs* flips the script on *The Three Little Pigs*, as the pigs set clever traps to outsmart the hungry wolf. Finally, in *Goldilocks*, a mischievous raccoon



stumbles upon an unexpected adventure in a mysterious cottage. Perfect for audiences of all ages, this performance promises laughter, excitement, and storytelling magic for the whole family.

To help patrons feel confident and prepared, the Center provides sensory-inclusive video guides that walk patrons through Thrivent Hall and Kimberly-Clark Theater, showing everything from arriving at the building and finding seats to settling in and exiting after the show. Paired with KultureCity® sensory bags available for check out at the patron services desk, these resources allow patrons to engage comfortably with each experience. The bags include noise-cancelling headphones, feelings thermometer/needs card, fidget tangle, fidget mesh, fidget noodle, fidget toy, weighted lap pad, and strobe-reducing sunglasses.

Through these efforts, the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center is creating more than just accessibility, it's fostering connection and belonging. With the support of the Mielke Family Foundation, Dave and Kerry Gross, and Barb and Chuck Merry, the Center continues to expand its sensory-inclusive services, ensuring that live performing arts are welcoming, inclusive, and enjoyable for every member of the community.

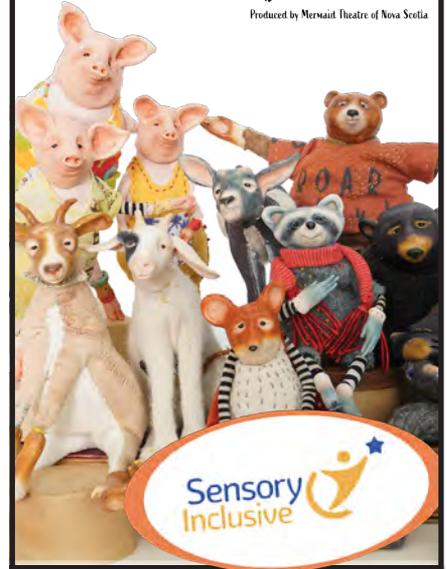


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Produced by Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia



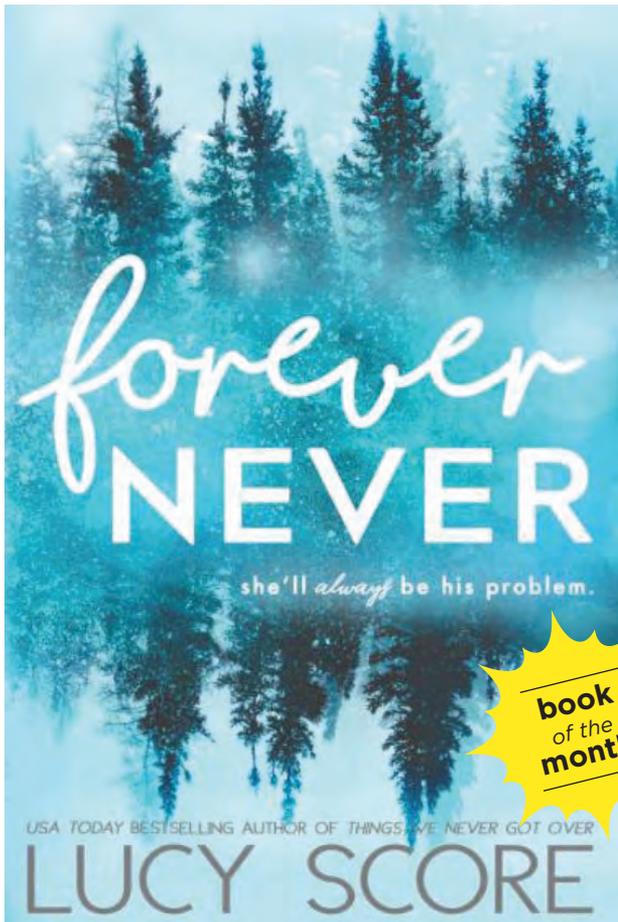
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**book of the month**

**Lucy Score**  
*Forever Never*

*Forever Never* is just the steamy, heartfelt romance you need to warm up this holiday season. Set on Mackinac Island in the dead of winter, this enemies-to-lovers story beautifully proves it's never too late for second chances. Remi Ford returns home with a broken arm, a few secrets, and every intention of keeping her distance from the man who once shattered her heart — Brick Callahan. But avoiding the big, brooding hero is impossible on a small, snow-covered island. As old wounds resurface and sparks reignite, Remi must decide whether she can afford to risk her heart again. Lucy Score delivers humor, heat, and hope in this emotionally charged love story.

**Katherine May**  
*Wintering*

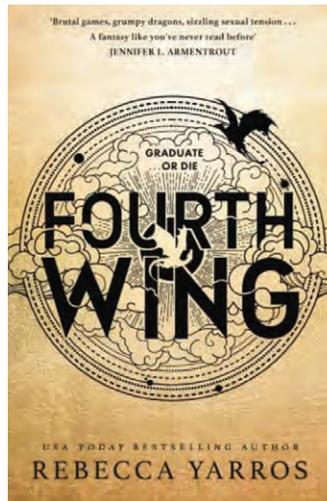
This aptly named work of nonfiction perfectly relays the concept of repairing and revitalizing what has been broken in one's life. May's memoir is chock full of heart-breaking moments, accompanied by beautiful prose — perfect to curl up with on a chilly winter day.

**Jennifer Lynn Barnes**  
*The Inheritance Games*

*Knives Out* meets *Clue* in this gripping young adult mystery. When billionaire Thomas Hawthorne dies and leaves his fortune to ordinary teen Avery Grambs, she's thrust into a world of riddles and rival heirs. The question begs to be asked: will she survive?

**Marcus Kliewer**  
*We Used To Live Here*

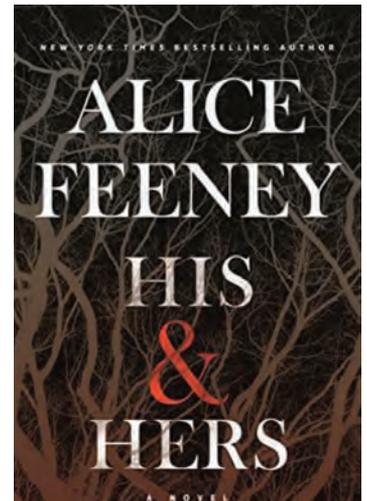
When a knock at the door interrupts Eve's house-flipping project, her world is turned upside down. Horrors beyond imagination begin invading her life as she uncovers secrets buried in its walls. She'll soon realize that the house isn't finished with her yet.



**Rebecca Yarros**  
*Fourth Wing*

*Fourth Wing* by Rebecca Yarros spent 13 weeks atop the New York Times Bestseller list — and it's easy to see why. The novel follows Violet Sorrengail, a young woman destined to live as a scribe until her formidable mother, the general of Basgiath War College, forces her to train as a dragon rider. Suddenly thrust into a deadly world of magic, mystery, and fire-breathing dragons, Violet must find the strength to survive — or perish trying.

*Casey Marion is an aspiring author and struggling college student. She works at the Kaukauna Public Library and can always be found with a book in hand.*



**Alice Feeney**  
*His & Hers*

Alice Feeney's *His & Hers* is a dark, twisted thriller that's impossible to put down. As the title suggests, there are always two sides to every story — in this case, *His & Hers*. The novel follows Anna Andrews, a down-on-her-luck news reporter assigned to cover a grisly homicide in her hometown, and Jack Harper, the lead detective on the case. Jack and Anna's pasts and presents collide as they race to solve a brutal murder before more lives are lost. What was once a quiet English village becomes a breeding ground for secrets and violence in this fast-paced, sharply written novel that keeps readers on edge from beginning to end.





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# The Joy of Jellycats

By SARAH PETERSON

A British-born collection of lovable plush toys, known as Jellycats, has long been popular among children. However, recent sales have surged among young adults and “kidults” worldwide. Founded in London by Thomas Gatacre in 1999, Jellycat specializes in plush toys known for their luxuriously soft textures, high-quality craftsmanship, and charming designs.

Starting with a collection of animals, including its iconic Bashful Bunnies, Jellycat has introduced many designs over the years. Their line of “Amuseables” gives playful personalities to everyday objects, such as food, plants, sports gear, and more. Seasonal designs such as sparkling snowflakes, sweet Christmas cookies, and friendly elves appear around the holidays.

Jellycat owes much of its recent success to social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where its plush characters have gone viral. The company's sales skyrocketed in 2024, reaching nearly \$450 million. Young adults report liking the comfort and child-like joy that the Jellycats provide.

Sue Broeren of The Lullabye Shop, the only licensed Jellycat retailer in Appleton, can attest to the brand's growing popularity. She said that many adults and teens are buying Jellycats to add to personal collections, give as gifts (often to their significant others), or resell online. Some customers are hunting for specific characters, while others are torn between which one to take home.

Stocking the shelves with Jellycats — especially the most popular characters — has become increasingly challenging as the company works to meet demand. Many small

shop owners have been turned away when asking to become authorized Jellycat sellers. Brian Doerfler, owner of The Lullabye Shop, fought for several years to secure exclusive rights to sell Jellycat products. Now that they've succeeded, Sue works tirelessly to order as many Jellycats as possible, but it's not always easy. A lot depends on the company's available stock, how quickly orders can be processed, and whether the requested inventory actually arrives.



Still, The Lullabye Shop offers a wide selection of Jellycats, from classic animals to the latest quirky Amuseables. The shop also carries many Jellycat books and baby items. “Jellie” fans travel from across the state to purchase these plush companions, which make perfect gifts for birthdays, baby showers, or the holidays.

Sue warns of counterfeit plush toys, which lack the official Jellycat tag, and of buy-and-sell groups that mark up retail prices. Due to rapidly moving inventory, The Lullabye Shop no longer sells Jellycats through its website. However, they post updates about new arrivals on their Facebook page and are happy to ship to customers.

Whether you're a dedicated collector, hoping to impress your date, or just beginning to discover the joy of “jellies,” stop by The Lullabye Shop to experience these adorable plush friends.





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Image Makers: Debbie Daanen & Ashley Schmit

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## HOME ALONE

(COMEDY/ACTION 1990)

STARRING: MACAULAY CULKIN  
(KEVIN MCCALLISTER)

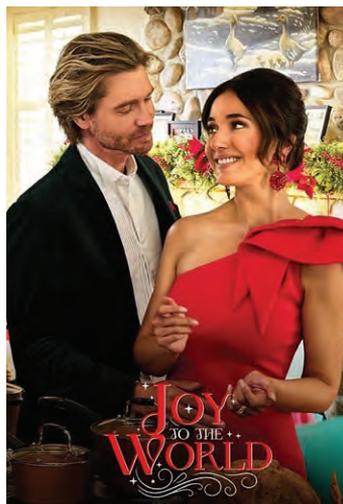


The McCallisters are heading to Paris this Christmas, but in the morning chaos, they forgot something very important: their son Kevin. Being home alone is a Christmas miracle for Kevin until two crooks try to break in. Kevin takes matters into his own hands to protect his house, creating a big surprise for the crooks.

## JOY TO THE WORLD

(ROMANCE 2025)

STARRING: EMMANUELLE CHRIQUI  
(JOY EDWARDS)



Author Joy Edwards doesn't just write about the perfect lifestyle; she lives it — at least that's what the world thinks. A TV show wants to do a livestream of her family on Christmas Eve, and the only issue is that the "perfect" family she writes about doesn't exist. Not wanting the world to know her secret, she puts together a fake family to come spend Christmas Eve with her.



## RED ONE

(ACTION/COMEDY 2024)

STARRING: DWAYNE JOHNSON (CALLUM DRIFT)

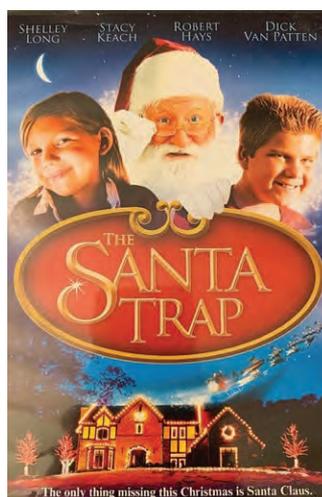


Looking for some action this holiday? It's only three days until Christmas, and Santa gets abducted! Desperate to find him, the head elf teams up with the best tracker, who also happens to be on the naughty list. Together, they must find Santa to save Christmas, but this adventure is going to be a dangerous one.

## THE SANTA TRAP

(COMEDY/ACTION 2002)

STARRING: SIERRA ABEL (JUDY)



This might be the Christmas magic you've been waiting for! Seven-year-old Judy is determined to prove to her family that Santa is real. She sets up a trap to catch Santa, which is a success! Things take a turn for the worse when her parents call the police for a break-in. With Santa in jail, who is going to deliver all the presents this year?

*Marissa Laird is a movie lover who lives in Appleton. Her favorite genre is horror, which makes sense since she is obsessed with Halloween. She also enjoys spending time with her husband and their dog, Remi.*

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# Celebrate Holiday Season With A Furry Friend

By TIM FROBERG

Dogs are amazing, gentle creatures that don't judge and give unconditional love. They deserve some holiday cheer, too.

The Fox Valley Humane Association is doing its part to make sure shelter dogs experience the warmth and wonders of the holidays through its fourth annual Howliday Sleepover event.

The Howliday Sleepover is a successful program that gives shelter dogs a Christmas gift: a much-welcomed opportunity to spend the holiday season in a cozy home rather than a kennel.

Program participants take the canines home for the holidays after being matched with FVHA shelter dogs that fit their home and lifestyle. Participants will be asked to make at least a two-day commitment, but it's preferred that the pooch remain with them until the start of the new year due to light holiday staffing at the shelter.



The hope is that participants will decide to temporarily foster the dog until it finds a forever home or make it a permanent part of the family by adopting it. And if neither happens, the dog gets at least a brief reprieve from the shelter.

"Even a few days in a home can make such a difference for these dogs," said Alex Sturm, FVHA's community outreach coordinator and volunteer-foster coordinator. "It helps them relax, show their personalities, and experience the comfort and love they deserve during the holidays."

The FVHA launched the program in 2021, and it has been a major success.

"It's been very successful," Sturm said. "We've had quite a few dogs that have been adopted — some permanently and some in long-term foster homes. It's great to get the dogs out of the shelter and with families."

Participants are asked to attend matching appointments scheduled for Dec. 22–23, where they will meet dogs and work with the FVHA's adoption staff to find furry friends that best suit their home situation.

"Not all of our dogs would do best at big family gatherings, and not all of our dogs are the best fit for a home with cats, so we run it like an adoption appointment," said Sturm. "We match them with the best-fit dog for their home and what their week looks like."

"No matter how long a family participates, each Howliday Sleepover helps a dog feel safe, loved, and part of something special during the season of giving."

Sturm anticipates that at least 10 dogs will be up for adoption — and possibly more.

"The Howliday Sleepover has become one of our most beloved traditions," said Sturm. "Some families fall in love with their furry guest and decide to adopt. That's known affectionately

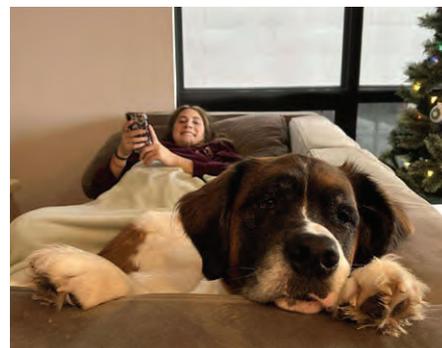
as a foster fail, and we consider that a win-win."

"Others enjoy fostering through the holidays or continue fostering until their dog finds a home. Our adoption team is eager to make perfect matches once the time comes."

For more information on the program and to see what dogs are currently available for adoption, go to the FVHA's website, [foxvalleypets.org](http://foxvalleypets.org). Or call 920-733-1717.

The FVHA — located at N 115 Two Mile Road in Appleton — is a nonprofit organization focused on saving the lives of animals and offers a variety of events and programs to the community. It is a full-service, state-of-the-art animal shelter and resource center, serving thousands of people and pets each year.

Although the Howliday Sleepover doesn't officially start until Dec. 23, FVHA dogs, cats, and all animals can be fostered or adopted at any time.





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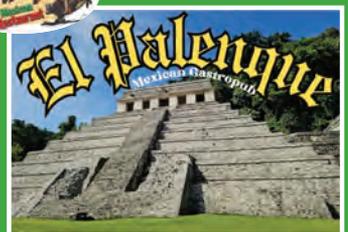
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# Smile!

We ♥ seeing our readers having fun and making the most of our beautiful communities!

BY: SARAH PETERSON

Send your photo submissions to: [editor@appletonmonthly.com](mailto:editor@appletonmonthly.com)



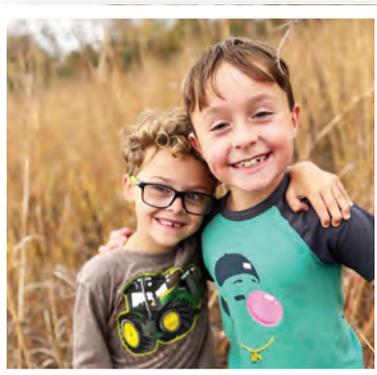
Amanda from Curated Neat and Millie created a festive stand at the **Season of Wishes** craft fair in Appleton to benefit Make-A-Wish Wisconsin.



Tina Palmer (Red Door Mercantile), Analyse Palmer (Evermore and Co.), and Kaleigh Hilger (Bits of Beautiful Bakery) gather at a **pop-up bakery event** at Evermore and Co. in downtown Neenah. *Photo credit: Kaleigh Hilger*



Principal Jack Knaack laughs with students at Richmond Elementary's **annual Pumpkin Run**. *Photo credit: Marissa Marx*



Best buddies Levi and Lennon enjoy a sunny fall field trip to **Bubolz Nature Preserve**. *Photo credit: Katie Stanley*



Cyndi Faulkner and her husband Jeffery participate in the annual **YMCA Freaky 5K Run/Walk** with family and friends, including Jordan Crawford, Olympic speed walker (top left). *Photo credit: Cyndi Faulkner*



Joseph Scala poses with his beloved dog Chloe during **Appleton Flight Center's Oktoberfest**. *Photo credit: Joseph Scala*



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# Blue and Red for Christmas

By KATIE CONNELL

A local program — The Police Lights of Christmas — continues to grow.

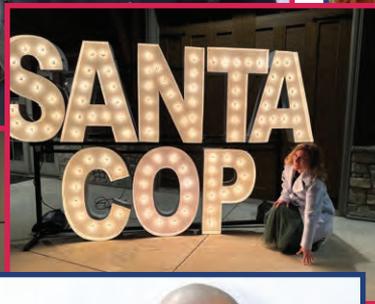
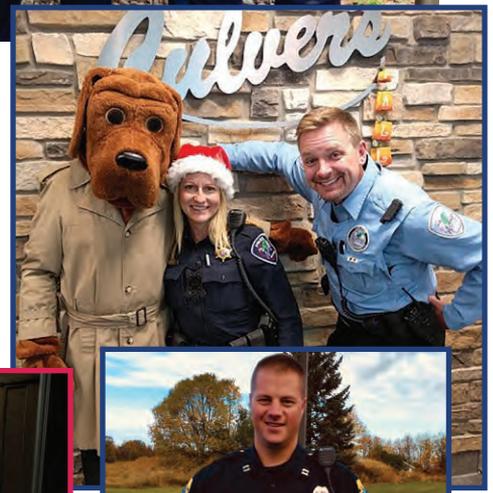
What started with just two area law enforcement agencies in 2016 (Appleton PD and Green Bay PD each received \$5,000 in gift cards that first year) has now grown to include well over 100 law enforcement agencies across the state.

The program is simple: turn donations into gift cards, and hand those gift cards off to officers so that they can help people in need that they encounter while on patrol. (All gift cards are purchased from local schools' Scrip programs — so the schools benefit too.)

Donations come through business sponsors, private donations, and from fundraising events hosted by the officers, like the annual Cops@Culver's Day, the law enforcement Ride with the Lights, and the recent viral "Photo COPetition".

This year, the program will hand off \$300,000 in gift cards just in time for Christmas — giving the officers a meaningful way to go above and beyond the badge to help neighbors in need. The stories of hope that have come from this program are what continue to build each year, spurring more agencies to want to be a part of the program.

You can learn more about the program and donate all year by going to the website — [lightsofchristmas.us](http://lightsofchristmas.us).



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# THE SCENE

Top 10 reasons to fill up your calendar this month

By SARAH PETERSON

## 1. GATHER 'ROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Bundle up and head to downtown Menasha for live holiday music, festive activities, food, and drink, as well as their annual tree lighting with Santa in Curtis Reed Square. *Dec. 4, 5–7 p.m.*

[facebook.com/MenashaParksandRecreation](https://facebook.com/MenashaParksandRecreation)



## 2. A VERY NEENAH CHRISTMAS

The streets of Downtown Neenah come to life during this free holiday event featuring live window displays, reindeer, carolers, ice sculptures, food, shopping, and, of course, Santa himself. You won't want to miss the movie-like charm of this Christmas tradition. *Dec. 5 from 5–8 p.m.*

[futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/a-very-neenah-christmas](https://futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/a-very-neenah-christmas)

## 3. A VERY NEENAH CHRISTMAS MARKET

New this year in Downtown Neenah, browse a beautifully lit village of cozy huts brimming with one-of-a-kind holiday gifts, handcrafted goods, warm drinks, and festive treats. Enjoy live music, carriage rides, and visits with Santa

and his reindeer in a glowing atmosphere. *Dec. 5, 5–8 p.m., Dec. 6, 10 a.m.–8 p.m., and Dec. 7, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.*

[futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/neenahs-very-merry-christmas-market](https://futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/neenahs-very-merry-christmas-market)



## 4. BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

Fox River Mall is hosting a Breakfast with Santa to benefit The Greater Fox Cities Area Habitat for Humanity. Tickets guarantee an opportunity to meet Santa in the North Woods Cafe. Ages 2 and under are free. *Dec. 6, 8:30–10 a.m.*

[foxrivermall.com/en/events/30803](https://foxrivermall.com/en/events/30803)



## 7. FESTIVAL OF CAROLS & CHILI DINNER

First United Methodist Church, Appleton, will host a chili dinner and *A Festival of Carols* performed by musicians from Milwaukee and Chicago. A free-will offering will be taken to support youth programs. *Dec. 10, dinner from 5–6 p.m., concert from 7–8:30 p.m.*

[appfumc.org/full\\_calendar](https://appfumc.org/full_calendar)

## 8. LUMINARY NIGHT & COOKIE CRAWL

The historic streets of downtown Neenah will be lined with luminaries, and stores will be open late, creating a cozy scene for last-minute shopping, dining, and enjoying plenty of holiday cheer. Purchase a cookie passport to collect cookies, milk, and a holiday treat bag from various businesses. *Dec. 11, 4:30–7:30 p.m.*

[futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/luminary-night-cookie-crawl](https://futureneenah.org/events/featured-events/luminary-night-cookie-crawl)

## 9. CHRISTMAS IN THE MARSH

Visit the Brillion Nature Center for horse-drawn wagon rides, luminary-lined hikes on the Cottonwood Trail, a visit with Santa, kids' crafts, food and refreshments, and more. \$10 per car load. *Dec. 12, 4–8 p.m.*

[facebook.com/events/1087008272796520](https://facebook.com/events/1087008272796520)



## 5. THE GRINCH FAMILY BREAKFAST

Enjoy a pancake breakfast with your family while watching *The Grinch* movie (30-minute version). Then take photos with *The Grinch*, and participate in an outdoor candy cane hunt. Register with Neenah Parks and Recreation. *Dec. 6 from 9–10:15 a.m. in the Washington Park Shelter.*

[futureneenah.org/event/the-grinch-family-breakfast](https://futureneenah.org/event/the-grinch-family-breakfast)



## 6. GREAT HOLIDAY DASH

Gather your team and don your holiday gear for a festive challenge where you'll solve clues, snap pictures, record videos, and complete geotagged missions to earn points using the GooseChase App. Cash prizes will be awarded to winners. Registration is required. *Dec. 6, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.*

[parks.appletonwi.gov/programs\\_events/great\\_holiday\\_dash.php](https://parks.appletonwi.gov/programs_events/great_holiday_dash.php)



## 10. POLAR EXPRESS NIGHT

Put on your coziest pajamas, bring a warm blanket, and enjoy a screening of *The Polar Express*! Enjoy a hot chocolate cart, and each child will receive a sleigh bell to ring on Christmas. Registration is required. *Dec. 22, 1:30–3 p.m. or 6–7:30 p.m. at the Kaukauna Library.*

[kaukaunalibrary.org/event](https://kaukaunalibrary.org/event)





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# WATCHING SPORTS ISN'T THE SAME WITHOUT 'SNACKS'

By TIM FROBERG

Sports fans all look different, and the one I'll always remember wasn't the usual Monday morning quarterback.

He was a gentle, four-legged furball with kind eyes, the healthiest of appetites, and a long tail that never stopped wagging.

He was my sports-viewing companion for all the big games on TV. Oh, I'm pretty sure my beautiful border collie mix was more interested in mooching snacks than witnessing Aaron Rodgers-led comebacks or Jordan Love's development at quarterback. But for the past nine years, he was always there — right by my foot — for countless Packers, Brewers, and Bucks games, Super Bowls, and NCAA basketball Final Fours.

His name was Jasper, but because of his proclivity for eating anything not nailed to the wall, I often called him "Snacks" after Damon "Snacks" Harrison, the former Packers' wide-bodied defensive tackle. We spent almost a decade together before he died unexpectedly recently at the far-too-young age of 10.

Together, we watched years of sports drama unfold in what I like to call the "man cave" of our home. We watched the end of Mike McCarthy's lengthy stay in Green Bay, the ongoing Matt LaFleur era, and two MVP seasons delivered by Rodgers.

We celebrated when Mason Crosby beat the Cowboys with his walk-off 51-yard field goal in a 2017 divisional playoff game and sulked when Tom Brady crushed Green Bay's Super Bowl hopes by torching Kevin King and the Packers' secondary in the 2021 NFC Championship Game.

We watched Atlanta's mind-blowing collapse against New England in the 2017 Super Bowl, the rise of Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs, and Philadelphia's shocking ability to shut down Mahomes and the Chiefs' offense in the 2025 Super Bowl.

Jasper was the ultimate sports buddy. He quietly endured my boisterous rants about NFL officiating, LaFleur's questionable game management, and Love's annoying picks. He never told me to just shut up already — not even with a bark. He was just happy to be at my side, hanging out on Sundays and devouring whatever food I would give him. He loved Doritos, pizza,

and chicken wings. He would stare me down for long periods before I'd cave and toss him something yummy when my wife wasn't looking.

The Super Bowl was his third-favorite holiday (yes, it's a holiday in my house), behind Christmas and Thanksgiving because, well, there were a lot of snacks involved.

He even accompanied me to ballgames at Fox Cities Stadium for the Timber Rattlers' "Bark in the Park" events. We always had a deal. He would get a hot dog if he behaved himself. When he eventually scored the frankfurter, Jasper would wolf it down in a single bite. It's a dog-eat-dog world, and Jasper wasn't about to waste any snack.

He was also my running partner, my late-evening, post-work greeter at the door, and my in-house editor, who could usually be found near my feet as I pounded out stories on my laptop for publications like *Appleton Monthly*. He was a swift and skilled rabbit hunter who caught four of them in our backyard — much to my chagrin — and an accomplished traveler who accompanied us without issue on cross-country road trips to Colorado Springs, Boston, and New Orleans.

But more than anything, Jasper was the sweetest and smartest dog I've ever had. I find myself missing him countless times throughout the day and especially during Packers games when I ignore every facet of healthy eating.

So long, Snacks. You were one of the best friends I've ever had.



*Tim Froberg is a professional writer who covered the Packers Super Bowl appearances in New Orleans (1997) and San Diego (1998), and has written several feature stories for various Packers Yearbooks.*

# TASTE

CHEF'S TABLE 56 | HOLIDAY PASTRIES 60 | WINE & DINE 64 | FOOD & DRINK 66



**ellinor**  
FINE DINING

By JENNI EICKELBERG



**PEEK INSIDE**

# THE AMAZINGLY SMALL KITCHEN AT ELLINOR

By JENNI EICKELBERG

In a quiet residential block just north of downtown Appleton, Ellinor is a culinary destination tucked inside a pie-shaped building that's easy to miss — but impossible to forget. With a kitchen barely larger than a walk-in closet and seating so close you might brush elbows with a stranger, Ellinor proves that great food doesn't need a grand stage.

Chef-owner Adam Marty, who's spent more than two decades in the restaurant industry, always dreamed of having his own place.



quality food,” Adam says. He builds each menu around what’s in season, sourcing produce and specialty menu items from Kendall Vosters at Fox Cities Farms and shopping at the Downtown Appleton Farm Market. He’s loyal to ingredients that meet his standards — like the three types of East Coast oysters he consistently orders, or the perfect prosciutto that took him five years to find.

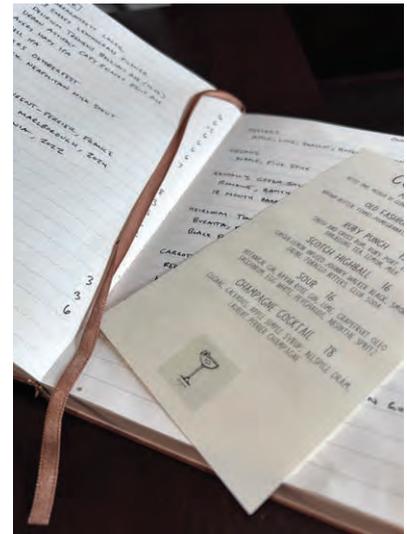
Ellinor’s dishes are inventive yet grounded. Favorites include guanciale pizza and a roasted cauliflower dish that’s so beloved, Adam jokes he’d be crucified if he ever took it off the menu. In the fall, the butterscotch pot de crème — made with dark chocolate from California and salted butterscotch — is a standout.

The restaurant’s small size is part of its charm. Initially walk-in only, Ellinor added reservations after its first winter to help manage demand. While a handful of neighborhood regulars walk over for dinner, the majority of guests come from across Appleton and beyond — drawn by word of mouth and the restaurant’s reputation for bold, seasonal cooking.

Behind the scenes, it’s a team effort. Adam credits his staff — from servers to dishwashers — and his wife, who handles the books, for Ellinor’s success. “There are 30 people I rely on to make this happen,” he says. “It’s not just me — it’s all of us.”

Ellinor is a reflection of its team, its ingredients, and Adam’s inventive approach to seasonal cooking — where even the simplest touches are turned into something unforgettable.

## **MARVOL: APPLETON'S MOST INTIMATE DINING EXPERIENCE**



That dream took shape when he and his wife, Lindsay, spotted the building while driving through the neighborhood. It wasn’t even listed for sale, but Adam reached out anyway. The buildout was challenging but rewarding, laying the foundation for a small, intentional space with big culinary ambition.

At the heart of the restaurant is its wood-fired oven, which anchors a menu that changes five to six times per year. “Quality ingredients make

Just a mile from Ellinor, Adam’s second restaurant, Marvol, is tucked into another tiny neighborhood building — and it’s about as cozy as it gets. With only 14 seats, no host, and a two-person staff, it feels more like dining in someone’s home than a traditional restaurant.

The menu is always changing, built around small plates that highlight seasonal ingredients and creative pairings. Menus are handwritten in notebooks, allowing guests to flip through past creations like a culinary journal.

Drinks are just as thoughtful. Marvol’s beverages focus on balance and creativity, featuring uniquely crafted cocktails, a rotating beer list, and a curated selection of wines. Cocktails are designed seasonally by Patrick Frawley of Commodore Club, adding a personal touch to every pour.

It’s a place where the team cooks, serves, and even washes dishes together. “We wanted to give Appleton something that didn’t exist,” Adam says. And with Marvol, they’ve done just that.

By CARLY CERNIGLIA

*The holiday season brings some of the best flavors around.* When I think of those flavors, I think of pecans, cranberries, apples, and orange zest — all of which are in this trio of recipes. The tender roast duck is glazed in a deliciously tangy cranberry-orange sauce, and the hearty jeweled rice complements the duck beautifully. The Brussels sprouts with bacon are arguably the best way to eat a Brussels sprout. What's not to love about bacon and shallots?

Perhaps the best part about this meal, however, is that you can make the Brussels sprouts, wild rice, and sauce ahead of time and just heat them when you're ready for dinner. The duck itself cooks within minutes, making this a remarkable meal to serve for company.

Enjoy!  
Chef Carly



## Cranberry-Orange Roasted Duck Breast

Serves 4-6

### INGREDIENTS

#### For the duck:

Four boneless duck breasts  
Salt and pepper to taste

#### For the sauce:

1/2 cup orange juice (about 1 large orange)  
1/2 cup unsweetened cranberry juice  
6 tablespoons honey  
1 tablespoon white balsamic vinegar  
2 teaspoons orange zest  
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/2 teaspoon sea salt  
Two slices ginger root



### DIRECTIONS

#### For the duck:

Pat dry the duck breasts with a paper towel and score the skin and fat in a criss-cross pattern, taking care not to cut too deeply and expose the meat. Season with salt and pepper.

Place the duck breasts skin side down in a large, seasoned cast-iron skillet. Bring the skillet to medium-high heat and cook the duck breasts, untouched, for 4-6 minutes, until the skin starts to crisp and turn golden brown. The duck should release easily from the pan at this point. Flip the duck and continue cooking on the other side until the internal temperature reaches 130-140 degrees F, about 2-6 minutes. Remove from the pan and let rest for 10 minutes.

#### For the sauce:

In a small saucepan, mix together all ingredients. Bring to a simmer and cook until reduced by half, about 40-45 minutes. Remove the ginger root before serving.

#### To serve:

On a serving platter, spread the hot jeweled rice evenly. Place the duck, skin side up, on the rice and spoon the cranberry-orange sauce over the duck. Alternatively, slice the duck breast before serving and serve plated portions. Serve with the Brussels sprouts with bacon for a complete meal.



Photo by Carly Cerniglia

# Brussels Sprouts With Bacon

Serves 4–6

## INGREDIENTS

3 pounds untrimmed Brussels sprouts  
1/4 cup water  
10 strips bacon, sliced  
2 shallots, sliced  
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar  
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder  
Salt and pepper to taste

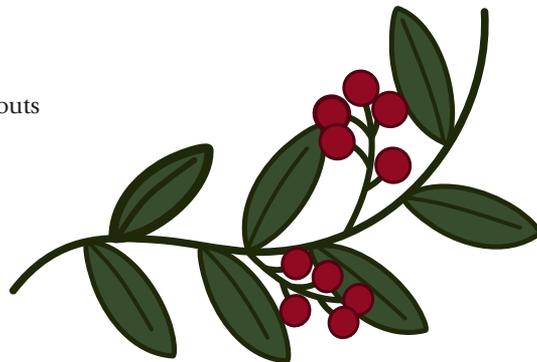


Photo by Carly Cerniglia

## DIRECTIONS

Wash and trim Brussels sprouts, slicing the larger ones into halves and/or quarters.

In a large frying pan, fry sliced bacon until crispy. Remove the cooked bacon from the pan, reserving the bacon fat. Add the shallots to the hot fat and cook over medium heat for 2–3 minutes. Add the Brussels sprouts in a single layer. Cook, untouched, for about 5 minutes. Stir and add the 1/4 cup water. Sprinkle with salt, garlic powder, and pepper. Continue cooking the Brussels sprouts with minimal stirring until they are tender and caramelized, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in bacon and balsamic vinegar, and keep warm until ready to serve, or cool and store in the refrigerator.



Photo by Carly Cerniglia



# Jeweled Wild Rice

Serves 4–6

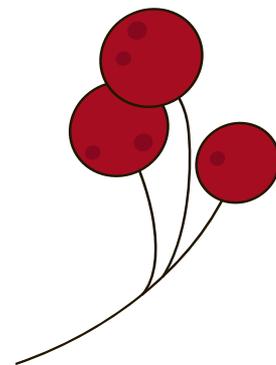
## INGREDIENTS

*For the rice:*

1 cup wild rice blend  
1 3/4 cups chicken stock, plus more as needed  
1 tablespoon butter  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

*For the dressing:*

1/4 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/4 teaspoon onion powder  
1 ounce dried cranberries, chopped  
1/2 cup diced onion  
2 tablespoons butter  
1/2 Honeycrisp apple, diced  
1/4 cup toasted pecans



## DIRECTIONS

Wash 1 cup of wild rice blend. In a medium saucepan combine the rice, chicken stock, butter, and salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover with a lid and simmer for 40 minutes. If rice is not cooked after 40 minutes, stir in an additional 1/2 cup of stock and simmer for another 3–4 minutes. Remove from heat.

While the rice is cooking, melt the dressing butter in a small frying pan and add the diced onion. Cook until the onion is translucent and starting to caramelize. Add the diced apple and cook until it begins to soften. Stir in the garlic powder, onion powder, cranberries, and pecans. Remove from the heat and stir into the cooked rice. Keep warm until ready to serve or cool to room temperature and store in the refrigerator.

*Merry Christmas!*

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# Appleton

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# Michiels Bar & Grill

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# Spiced Chocolate Cupcakes with Christmas Trees

Makes 12

These nicely spiced chocolate cupcakes are sure to add a little flair to your holiday desserts! Similar in flavor to chocolate gingerbread, these cupcakes are delicious. Topped with fluffy white buttercream and a cute chocolate tree, little and big hands alike will be reaching for them this season.



## Cupcakes:

1 cup sugar  
One egg  
1/3 cup sour cream  
One stick unsalted butter  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
1/4 cup strong brewed coffee  
1/4 cup cocoa powder  
1 cup flour  
3/4 tsp baking soda  
1/4 tsp salt  
1/2 tbsp molasses  
1/2 tsp cinnamon  
1/2 tsp ginger  
1/8 tsp cloves  
1/8 tsp nutmeg

## Vanilla Buttercream:

Two sticks unsalted butter, room temp  
5 cups powdered sugar  
1 tsp vanilla  
2-5 tbsp heavy cream, as needed

## Christmas Trees:

Six chocolate covered biscuit sticks  
1 cup green candy melts  
Assorted sprinkles

## Cupcake Directions:

Preheat oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Line a cupcake tin with 12 green cupcake liners. In a small pot, melt butter. Stir in cocoa powder until incorporated. Stir in heavy cream and coffee. In a medium sized bowl, stir together sugar, eggs, spices, salt, and molasses. Slowly temper in butter mixture. Once butter mixture is incorporated, mix in flour and baking soda. Stir until just combined.

Fill cupcake liners 3/4 full. Bake for 20-30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

Let cool in pans for a few minutes, then transfer to a wire rack. Cool completely.

## Buttercream Directions:

In a stand mixer, beat butter until fluffy. Add in powdered sugar one cup at a time until each cup is incorporated. Add in vanilla, and thin with heavy cream as needed.

## Tree Directions:

Melt 1 cup of green candy melts. Cut 6 chocolate covered biscuit sticks in half. Evenly space out the stick halves on a sheet of parchment. Transfer melted candy melts to a piping bag. Clip the tip and pipe chocolate over sticks in a Christmas Tree shape. Working quickly, decorate with sprinkles. Let harden.

## To Assemble:

Transfer buttercream to a piping bag fitted with a large star tip. Pipe evenly onto cupcakes. Top with sprinkles. Insert a tree into each cupcake. Enjoy!





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# Holiday Memories

By JASON PATZER

The holiday season is in full swing! We've already made it through Thanksgiving, and possibly a couple of winter parties or concerts, but the gatherings are likely just beginning. It can be a busy time, typically filled with friends and family, joy and happiness, office parties, and school concerts. But beneath all of the cheer and merriment, there can also be a little bit of sadness. It could be as simple as not being able to come up with that perfect gift, or as the new year approaches, thinking about goals you haven't met. Or maybe, and likely, you're thinking of a loved one you will not be able to see this year. It's a unique blend of joy and melancholy that defines this time of year. It's OK to be sad. That sadness is a reflection of the love you had. It's OK to sit in your sadness for a while, too. It's a season inherently linked to memory and connection, so use this time and these gatherings to share a special memory. For many of us, the comforting ritual of food or beverage is right at the heart of it all.

A warm mug can be like a time machine. It whisks us back to cherished holiday mornings. One for me (and likely, my own children) is having to wait a few extra minutes so that Dad has his coffee brewed and ready before we open presents so early in the morning. It's funny to think back on how anxious I was waiting for my dad back then, and to now see my kids waiting for me.

I've written here before about Irish coffees, and even shared a recipe (March 2023), but what I hadn't shared was that I started making these at my mother-in-law's request. She, like me, was not a whiskey drinker. Unlike me, though,



she was Irish, and I think that's what compelled her to request them at festive gatherings. I enjoyed making them and sharing them with her. Despite neither one of us liking whiskey, something about the combination, the company, and the season just made it work. I'm not sure when I'll next make an Irish coffee, but I do know it will be an emotional experience filled with fond memories.

That's just it, though: coffee is more than just a beverage in these stories; it's a point of connection. Every sip carries a trace of their presence, an echo of a shared moment. The coffee we brew this holiday season might taste a little somber because it serves as a reminder of loved ones past, but let it also be a vehicle to share and embrace those memories.

Maybe, for you, it's not a cup of coffee. Maybe it's a specific cookie you only have this time of year. Or a special pot

of soup that makes the kitchen smell just right. Possibly, that special holiday punch you only ever see at the holiday gatherings. Whatever it is for you that unlocks that memory, embrace it and sit with it a bit. Share it with someone. As I write this, I'm reminded of going out on the snowy porch of my aunt and uncle's house on Christmas to grab the ice cream pail of brandy slush after dinner for the adults. These sensory details are the anchors of our most treasured memories, and the simple act of partaking in that dish or sipping that drink can bridge the past with the present.

The holidays offer a fantastic opportunity to reconnect and remember. When you get together with family, coworkers, or dear friends, the stories flow freely. It's usually the same stories, too. It's the laughter you share over the misadventures of the past. The story of the glass gravy boat blowing up because it was set on the burner. The time you forgot the coffee filter when brewing the coffee. Any story, really, it doesn't matter. It's the sharing of memories that makes a difference.

Even if you can't do big gatherings with lots of people, you can still have these moments of connection. There's a beautiful, understated intimacy in asking, "Can we get some coffee?" This small gesture is an invitation to connect and slow down for a moment. The gentle ritual of sipping acts as a natural rhythm for dialogue. It encourages pauses, active listening, and the kind of unhurried presence that facilitates connection and support.

*Jason Patzer has worked in coffee for over 11 years. He started Patzer Coffee as a way to continue his passion for coffee after leaving the industry. You can follow him on Facebook & Instagram @patzercoffee. Or on his website, patzercoffee.com, where he highlights the local coffee community.*

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# Making Wine Easy for the Holidays

By STEVE JOHNSON

Let's be honest.

We joyfully look forward to the holidays and the preparations that come with them. But, for many of us, the holidays bring too much stress over how, when, and what to do when it comes to entertaining. When it comes to wine, here are a few tips to reduce stress and enhance the joy!

There are so many holidays, types of gatherings, and meals that it is impossible to find just one wine for all occasions. There aren't any strict rules when it comes to selecting a wine for a meal or celebration, but there are some principles that can ease your stress. Here are four main principles to consider:

## Local and Regional Offerings

There is a saying in the culinary world that "What grows together, goes together." So I will make suggestions for both international and regional grape varieties and wines.

## Complementary Weights and Textures

Lighter-bodied wines, such as sparkling wines, whites, and rosés, pair best with more delicate foods like salads, fish, and salty hors d'oeuvres. When starting a celebration, few wines create a more festive mood than sparkling wines, such as Italian Prosecco or Wisconsin sparkling wine.

## Complementary Flavor Profiles

You can enhance a particular flavor in food by finding a similar flavor in the wine. The fruitiness of a cranberry sauce can be enhanced with the fruit-forward lightness of a red such as pinot noir from Oregon or Marquette grown on the Wisconsin Ledge.

## Consider Acidity and Sweetness Levels

Higher-acid or brighter wines should be paired with more acidic foods so the wine does not taste flat. Pair your appetizers with bright whites, like New Zealand sauvignon blanc or Ledge Blanc from Northeast Wisconsin. For richer foods like prime rib, go with a California cabernet



sauvignon or a semi-sweet Frontenac or Marquette from Wisconsin.

If all that still seems too complicated, keep it simple by remembering this: it's not about perfection, it's about versatility. Many of your guests won't be wine connoisseurs, so the goal is to make the majority of them happy.

Most of us who are new to wine or casual drinkers don't have the palate or stamina to drink heavy reds all night. It's better to stick to whites, roses, and lighter reds when trying to please a larger crowd.

Just like your meal, you should start with lighter wines and finish with heavier or more robust ones. Wine expressions vary greatly with their serving temperatures. Whites, rosés, and sparkling wines should be well-chilled, at 40 to 45 degrees F; lighter reds between 55 and 60 degrees; and heavier reds are best served between 60 and 65 degrees.

My last piece of advice: drink a full glass of water between each glass of wine, and you will be more present with your company and feel good the next day for your next celebration.

All the best!

*Steve Johnson is co-owner and winemaker at Parallel 44 and Door 44 in Kewaunee and Door Counties. His passion is growing and crafting wines from Northeast Wisconsin, an unexpected, but increasingly recognized corner of the wine world.*

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# Gingerbread Martini

The Gingerbread Martini is perfect for celebrating the holiday season. This holiday martini tastes like the famous cookie in cocktail form.

If you'd prefer not to use heavy cream, you can substitute it with half-and-half or whole milk. For more of a rum/cinnamon-forward flavor, use Rumchata in place of Baileys.



DRINK

## INGREDIENTS

### Gingerbread Syrup:

- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

### Martini:

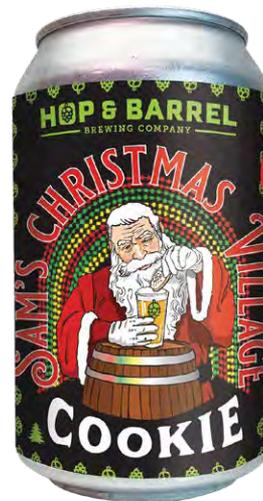
- 2 ounces Baileys Irish Cream
- 1 1/2 ounces vodka
- 1 1/2 ounces gingerbread syrup
- 1 ounce heavy cream
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Gingerbread cookies for garnish, crushed or whole
- Whipped cream (optional)

## DIRECTIONS

Heat the water, sugar, molasses, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves in a small saucepan over medium heat until the sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes.

Mix Baileys, vodka, gingerbread syrup, heavy cream, vanilla extract, and ice cubes in a martini shaker. Shake for 20 seconds and strain into a chilled martini glass. Top with some whipped cream and crushed or whole gingerbread cookies. Enjoy!

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EAT

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By TIM FROBERG

# YULETIDE MEMORIES FROM A YOOPER TURNED CHEESEHEAD

LOOKING BACK AT THE HUSTLE, HUBBUB OF HECTIC HOLIDAY SEASON

By TIM FROBERG

It comes just once a year, but Christmas memories are eternal.

We all have them. The yuletide season is an amazing time machine capable of transporting us back to our childhood days when life seemed far less complicated.

If I close my eyes, I can still picture generous strands of tinsel hanging from that leaning Christmas tree. The Froberg family tree was always stationed next to that old box-shaped TV and wooden stereo cabinet, complete with record player and my parents' selection of country music records ranging from Tammy Wynette to Glen Campbell.

What I remember the most was the chaos and commotion of the Christmas season. There were always armies of relatives visiting the house, wrapping paper strewn everywhere, and dogs wearing fake reindeer horns and not looking too pleased about it.

Photography and recording devices go a long way toward helping preserve these nostalgic moments. But the mind does the best job of storing them away for easy access when you need them — for happy conversations when reminiscing with friends and family.

Here are a few of my favorite Christmas memories from a childhood spent in the tiny, no-stoplight town of Gwinn, buried deep in the heart of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.



## OUR ANSWER TO AMAZON

Remember that hilarious scene from *The Jerk* when Steve Martin's Navin Johnson character was jumping around in jubilation like he had just won the lottery while yelling, "The new phone books are here! The new phone books are here!"

That's how my brothers and I felt when the Christmas catalogs arrived.

Sears, J.C. Penney, and Montgomery Ward always published these thick, wonderful catalogs loaded with everything from socks and underwear to a wide variety of popular children's toys. We scoured every inch of those catalogs like treasure hunters who had just been given a map to millions buried underground. Everything we wanted for Christmas was in those pages.

My mom — a kind, thoughtful woman named Irene — bought most of our gifts from the catalogs. We made our targets clear by either circling them or going the direct route with four much-repeated words, "Ma, I want this."

The countdown to Christmas would start when those catalog-ordered packages began arriving in the mail. We didn't have Amazon, but we had the Sears catalog, and that was good enough for us.

Those fat, fantastic catalogs eventually became paper dinosaurs. Sears discontinued its Christmas catalogs in 1993, and the original Montgomery Ward — which we commonly called "Monkey Wards" — closed down in 2001. L.L. Bean, J. Crew, and Lands' End are among the current companies that still send out mail-order catalogs, but they're much smaller and less diversified than those old classic holiday catalogs that once brought so much excitement and anticipation into our lives.

## PEPPERING UP CHRISTMAS

His name was Pepper, and he was a gorgeous black lab who was my first dog. Pepper had a sweet, gentle nature and fit in well with our loud family. But much like us, he was a bit rambunctious: a lovable troublemaker who had a knack for canine mischief.

Dogs and Christmas trees don't always get along. Pepper always seemed stumped at why a living tree was suddenly perched in his living room. We spent hours one December evening covering every inch of that tree with pear-shaped non-LED lights, countless decorations, and enough tinsel to fill the garage.

It was the type of garish, over-the-top Christmas display that Clark Griswold — still several years away from being a holiday household name — would approve of.

Just minutes after our marathon tree-decorating session had wrapped up, Pepper brushed up against the best-looking Christmas tree I had ever seen. And that's all it took. There was a loud crashing sound, with countless lights and ornaments spilling onto our shag carpeting and a stunned dog wondering what in the name of Kris Kringle had just happened.

Branches had been broken — along with our spirits — and that once gorgeous tree never looked the same. It had a permanent lean to it after we propped it back up and went through a lengthy redecorating process despite my mom's



threats to throw the darn (that wasn't exactly her word) tree into the snowbank.

Pepper figured it out and kept his distance from the tree in future seasons. But he eventually outdid himself in the trouble-making department. One summer, my brothers and I kept breaking windows due to our backyard Wiffle Ball games. No window was safe from the Froberg boys. That's why my dad — known to everyone as "Fuzzy" — decided to wait until late fall to replace a pane of glass on the door window frame that led to the backyard and our house.

With no glass in the door frame, Pepper spent the entire summer jumping through the frame to enter the backyard when no one was there to open it for him. One memorable September afternoon, Fuzzy eventually slid the glass into the frame. Roughly 10 minutes passed before there was another alarming "crash." Pepper had jumped through the frame once again — only to smash the newly installed glass into a million pieces. He wasn't hurt — just a bit startled. Just like he was with the Christmas tree incident.

## THIS LITTLE LIGHT DIDN'T SHINE

Most of us have performed in a Christmas concert or play at some point during our childhood. These so-called shows are incredibly cute, but not so good in terms of quality as patient music teachers attempt to line up fidgety 6-year-olds and get them to deliver some rendition of an actual song.

No production is complete without someone in the choir or play screwing something up. That was me in the second grade: a Yooper version of Beaver Cleaver. The song we were destroying with our unpolished voices was called *This Little Light of Mine (I'm Gonna Let It Shine)*. Looking to add Hollywood-type production value to our performance, we came armed with battery-powered candles that we were supposed to turn on while singing. The only problem was that my little light wouldn't shine. The batteries were weak, so the candle didn't work.

There were no tears — just lots of panic on my face as I kept hitting the 'on' switch only to be rejected every time. I was bombing. I had the only little light in the choir that wasn't shining and it felt like a million eyes were on me (there were maybe 20), watching me crash and burn. My best friend, Kirk Marjomaki,

who was stationed next to me, saw my desperation and bailed me out, sharing his working candle with me.

Several Christmas concerts followed at Gilbert Elementary School, but the only one that stayed with me all these years was the night my little light didn't shine. The incident taught me the values of friendship, teamwork, and always having spare batteries available.

## ELECTRIC FOOTBALL WAS OUR MADDEN

I can't pinpoint specifically what my favorite all-time Christmas present was, but the Tudor Electric Football game was truly unforgettable. It was one of the first tabletop games to feature moving players and was considered to be cutting-edge for the times.

You were given painted, plas-



tic football figures that moved around a metallic gridiron in reaction to vibrations created by an electromagnetic motor. The idea was to attach a felt football to one of the figures, put a few blockers in front of it, and watch your plastic playmaker vibrate down the field.

The main problem was that these action figures seldom moved straight ahead. They veered off in different directions most of the time, often moving sideways and in circles. It

was much like a Green Bay Packers game of the 1970s.

It was hilarious in contrast to today's sophisticated football video games, such as the Madden series, which feature moving players and were considered cutting-edge for their time — kind of like comparing the Wright Brothers' Kitty Hawk to a Boeing 747.

But that's all we had. My brother and I spent countless hours laughing and unsuccessfully scheming to move those little plastic football players into the end zone, and they often ended up in the wrong one.



## MINI JOE

I'm not sure what my worst childhood yuletide present was, but the Joe Namath Football Launcher was a top candidate. Namath, who had famously guaranteed a Jets' Super Bowl upset of the Baltimore Colts in the 1968 Super Bowl, was a big name back then and endorsed everything from shaving cream to children's toys. The Namath launcher looked awesome in the Christmas catalog, and it was easy to envision catching footballs from what sure

looked like a full-sized mechanized prototype of Joe Willie.

But we didn't read the fine print. It came way, way, way smaller than we expected — maybe 16 inches in height. It was a teeny-weenie version of No. 12 with tiny plastic footballs and far too kid-like for progressive 8-year-olds like myself.

Instead of getting Broadway Joe, I got Mini Joe. I appreciated my parents' thoughtfulness in getting me this coveted Christmas gift, but let's say that the Joe Namath Football Launcher came up a little short.

## THE BIRD'S NOT THE WORD

A runner-up in my worst-Christmas-present-ever category came my junior year of high school when I tore off the wrapping paper of a present from my very first girlfriend. I had put a lot of thought into her gift and figured she would reciprocate with something sweet. Instead, it was downright obscene. I found myself staring at a t-shirt with a grinch-like character extending his middle finger to the world.

I was certainly no prude. I was a typical sarcastic teenager who probably should have paid more attention in church. But this shirt was in really bad taste — even for a goof like me. Where on Earth would I wear a t-shirt with a strange little guy flipping the bird to everyone who sets eyes on it?

I laughed it off, but my mom, who actually had a good sense of humor, didn't appreciate the shirt or the girl. The relationship ended a few months later, and that horrendous T-shirt never made it out of the drawer. But I've never forgotten it.

## THE MAGICAL FRUIT

My parents grew up during the Great Depression (1929-41), experiencing hardships we could never imagine.

My brothers and I didn't fully understand the Great Depression, but we knew that our parents were raised without a lot of things we took for granted...like indoor toilets. My dad was a quiet man who never really talked about having modest resources as a child. But it didn't take much prodding to get my mom to open up about it.

One Christmas season I asked her what type of presents she received as a kid.

"An orange," she replied.

"An orange?" was my response. "An orange what?"

Surely, she couldn't be talking about the citrus fruit. She had to be joking.

But she wasn't.

As baffling as it seemed, oranges were a rare, exotic fruit during the days of the Great Depression. They were a luxurious treat and commonly used as an actual Christmas present.

Their humble holiday haul as children didn't prevent my parents from being extremely generous to everyone, especially their four kids. We got basically everything we wanted each Christmas, and our brightly lit tree was always bombarded with presents.

There were no oranges underneath those trees. The oranges were sitting in our refrigerator by the dozens — not exactly a major treat. But back in the childhood days of Fuzzy and Irene Froberg, oranges were just that: a Christmas gift that symbolized the trying times our country was going through.



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# A Cozy, Nostalgic Christmas

By JOEL LAPER

The holiday season is here! Every year, I look forward to browsing retail stores and Christmas shops despite the fact that I already have plenty of holiday décor, especially when it comes to Christmas! Well, like many of you, I'm sure that doesn't last long. I stay firm on this idea until I see that one thing that inspires me, or I convince myself that I may not find another piece like it.

The shiny, bright, and new is what attracts many people to buy a new car. That's how I am with holiday and home decor, or anything that involves interior design. I guess I need to come to terms with the fact that I'll never stop wanting to create, design, and fulfill a true passion. Well, that is my excuse, and you are welcome to use it too!

When writing these articles, I try to showcase different styles and genres of home decor and design, hoping to inspire everyone — and this inspires me even more.



Photo by Joel Laper



Photo by Joel Laper

Last year, I designed and wrote about a space that was more neutral and modern. This year, I wanted to work with more nostalgic and traditional colors. I had fun creating a couple of handmade decorations that you can recreate yourself.

The first nostalgic design I created was handmade pomanders using whole cloves studded into oranges. I created several different patterns, nestled them in fresh pine boughs, and accented them with flocked pinecones. This display not only evokes a sense of nostalgia, but it also fills the room with a warm and inviting aroma.

The second design is ornaments made using only applesauce and cinnamon. They look like gingerbread cookies but are delightful-smelling DIY holiday decorations. I hung them on a small tree in my kitchen and added dried orange slices and quilled snowflake ornaments.

Each of these designs evokes a sense of nostalgia and helps to create a beautifully scented display for the holidays.

As this year comes to an end, I hope you are able to take time for yourself. Design, create, and inspire others — and yourself — this season!

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# A Season for Remembering

By SARAH PETERSON

If there is ever a time when nostalgia calls, it's Christmas. At first, it's faint, but it's there. Evenings grow shorter, branches drop their final leaves, and we wince a little as the wind shifts from warm to wintry. The stars and street lights begin to shine with a certain crispness, and I feel it — a tug, then a spot of warmth — the time of year I hold dear.

If I reflect on the Christmases I've been so fortunate to have, I find it difficult to remember any moment that was less than perfect. I know there were many, still, I can only recall a swirl of scenes that, in my world, *were* perfect. Little vignettes, fuzzy around the edges with coziness and Christmas lights, weave through my mind like old picture slides. They are places I want to visit again. Places of safety and joy.

While so much of Christmas nowadays is shiny and new (maybe it was the same back then), it's nostalgia that infuses our present celebrations with the warmth and wonder of the past. I have many family keepsakes — some of which I can physically display during the holidays, and others that live only in the slide deck of my mind. Both are treasures.

My grandma, who may not recall much now, always made Christmas special (along with my grandpa). Our large family would gather on their farm, set on a hill, which meant driving up a long, snow-covered driveway and



hoping you wouldn't get stuck. The cars would park on top of one another (or so it seemed), and we'd enter in droves, leaving piles of wet boots, jackets, and mittens in the entryway. We were loud, boisterous, and messy with Christmas excitement, but they didn't mind.

They had a Christmas village that was set on an old hutch. It was carefully curated with ceramic houses, churches, lamp posts, and a mirror-turned skating rink that was hidden by tufts of batting grandma used for snow. The lure of the lighted windows made me want to become part of the tiny Currier and Ives world. I would get lost in the village while around me grown-ups chattered, forks clanked, cider steamed, and the soft glow of the tree enveloped me in what I now know was love.

The village originally belonged to my grandpa's mother and contained paper and plastic houses (circa 1940), now owned by my aunt. My grandma collected the ceramic houses, and today, I have the church from her village. I will display it proudly, share the photos with my children, and someday pass it on to one of them. When my grandma is no longer with us, the little church certainly won't replace her. Still, it will represent the warm hospitality she extended to everyone who entered, especially at Christmas. Nostalgia, whether woven through our keepsakes or memories, gently calls to remind us that what we cherish most will endure through generations.



*Sarah Peterson is a lifelong resident of Appleton, a mother of four, a wife, a writer, an artist, and an active community member. She finds inspiration in her family and faith, exploring themes of nostalgia and the beauty of simplicity in her work.*

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# Let the Grinch Brighten Your Holiday Season

By TIM FROBERG

A trip to Whoville is not required to spend Christmas with one of the season's most beloved characters. All it takes is a visit to a local retailer or a few clicks on your computer.

The Mr. Christmas Grinch Sleigh Tree Topper is sure to put a smile on even the grumpiest of holiday faces. This product is a combination tree topper and mobile decoration. It features an 8-inch, LED-illuminated star with a prominent glow, but its most unique part is a figure of the Grinch and his dog, Max, in a sleigh with a "Merry Grinchmas" flag attached that circles the Christmas tree.

The Grinch Sleigh Tree Topper has a motor that allows the Grinch and Max to circle the tree continuously. The unit has an AC adapter to power the rotation of the sleigh. The base of the topper attaches to the tree and is held in place with Velcro straps.

This yuletide product offers both light-only and full-animation modes, and is 21.75 inches tall, ideal for most Christmas trees. It

can be used on both real and artificial trees, but should only be used indoors.

Based on original characters created by American writer and illustrator Theodor Seuss Geisel, more commonly known as Dr. Seuss, this topper is not only an amusing decoration, but also a conversation piece. In 1957, Geisel wrote the popular children's book, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, which was eventually turned into an animated television special. The special debuted on CBS in 1966 and became a perennial holiday favorite.

Boris Karloff, a star of horror films in that era, provided the memorable voice of the Grinch, a green-skinned grouch who tries to stop Christmas from coming, only to have a change of heart. His heart actually grows three sizes in a day, and redeems himself for stealing the Whos' presents, food, and decorations.

In 2000, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* became a full-length Hollywood feature film directed by Ron Howard and starring

Jim Carrey as the Grinch. It was a major hit and became the highest-grossing film of 2000.

Menards is among the local retailers that carry this product. To purchase online, visit [mrchristmas.com](http://mrchristmas.com) or [menards.com](http://menards.com).

Mr. Christmas is a third-generation family-run business known for animated, musical, and illuminated designs.

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# Understanding Feline Chronic Gingivostomatitis

By DR. SETH OBERSCHLAKE

Feline chronic gingivostomatitis (FCGS) is a debilitating and painful condition that leads to severe inflammation of a cat's oral cavity. It can affect the tissues around the teeth, the back of the mouth and throat, and even the tongue and esophagus. Many cats with this condition develop bright red, ulcerated gums that bleed easily and make eating painful or even unbearable.

The exact cause of feline stomatitis is not completely understood and is thought to be multifactorial. It is believed to result from an overactive immune response in which the cat's immune system begins attacking its own oral tissues. This reaction is often triggered by dental plaque bacteria, and certain viral infections — such as feline calicivirus or feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) — may also play a role in predisposing cats to this disease.

Cats are remarkably good at hiding pain, so the signs of stomatitis can sometimes be subtle at first. Common symptoms include drooling (sometimes with blood), bad breath, difficulty eating or dropping food, pawing at the mouth, weight loss, and a decrease in grooming. Some cats may also become irritable or withdrawn because of chronic pain.

Diagnosis of FCGS is made through a combination of oral examination, dental



X-rays, and sometimes a biopsy to rule out other conditions. Because the disease is so painful, a full oral evaluation is usually performed under anesthesia. Treatment focuses on reducing inflammation and managing pain. In general, the mainstay of treatment is extraction of the teeth, which — depending on the severity and location of the inflammation — can involve removing all the teeth behind the canine (fang) teeth, or in some cases, all of the teeth. This may sound extreme, but it often provides the best chance for dramatic relief and allows cats to return to a more normal, happy, pain-free life.

Not all cats experience full resolution

of their stomatitis, even with complete extractions. Some are resistant to treatment and may require additional therapies such as ongoing pain control, immunosuppressants, or immune-modulating medications. Cats that have concurrent viral infections such as feline calicivirus, feline leukemia virus (FeLV), or FIV have an increased risk of being resistant to standard treatment.

Most cats adjust surprisingly well to life without teeth and are often more comfortable and active afterward. Feeding soft food and maintaining regular veterinary checkups will help support their long-term oral health. Though feline stomatitis can be a challenging and frustrating condition, it is not hopeless. With proper diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care, many cats go on to live comfortable, pain-free lives. If you notice any changes in your cat's eating habits, drooling, or mouth comfort, contact your veterinarian — early action can make all the difference.

*Dr. Seth Oberschlake* is a 2014 graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine. He has worked at Heritage Animal Hospital since 2015 and recently became the sole owner.

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**Raquel**

Raquel is a 2-year-old spayed female mixed breed. She has been patiently waiting at the shelter and is now considered one of our long-term residents. She is a sweet and shy girl who finds the shelter overwhelming. She is seeking a patient home to help her blossom.



**Pierogi**

Pierogi is a 1.5-year-old Labrador retriever mix. He is enthusiastic and friendly, truly just a big, goofy boy. He came to FVHA as a stray, so his history with other animals is unknown. He would do well with children who would enjoy his exuberant nature.



**Kairi**

Kairi is a 1-year-old spayed female cat. She has one beautiful green eye and a fiercely independent spirit. Kairi would thrive in a home where she has safe access to both an indoor environment and the freedom to roam outdoors.



**Dak**

Dak is a bashful 2-year-old neutered male kitty. He is working hard to become brave. The key to his heart is a wand toy; once his playful side takes over, he forgets there is anything in life to be afraid of.

# Sumac for Your *Holiday* Containers

By HOLLY BOETTCHER

Does your front porch feel a bit repetitive each holiday season? If you find yourself placing the same greenery in the same containers year after year, it might be time to look for inspiration in your own backyard. For many homeowners, a stunning and often overlooked resource is growing right along the edges of their property: the staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*).

This wild beauty, with its vibrant fall colors and unique texture, offers a fantastic way to refresh your seasonal decor. Instead of another trip to the garden center, you can forage for materials that bring a truly authentic touch of nature to your home. Let's explore how to use this abundant plant to create breathtaking arrangements for your porch and landscape.

## Getting to Know Staghorn Sumac

Before you start snipping, it helps to understand what makes staghorn sumac so special. This small, hardy tree gets its name from the fuzzy, reddish-brown hairs that cover its young branches, which look and feel like the velvet on a deer's antlers.

Its structure is just as interesting. Long stems, which feature feather-like leaflets arranged on opposite sides, create a lush, tropical look in the summer that transforms into a fiery display of red, yellow, and orange in the fall.

The female trees produce the real showstoppers: dense, upright clusters of fuzzy red fruits called drupes. These cones of crimson persist long after the leaves have fallen, providing a pop of color throughout the winter. Beyond its good looks, sumac is a powerhouse for local ecosystems. It provides shelter and food for wildlife, and its flowers are a nectar source for pollinators.

## Caution: Know Your Sumac

It's crucial to correctly identify the plant you're harvesting. While staghorn sumac is harmless, its cousin, poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*), is highly toxic and causes a severe skin rash.

Here's how to tell the difference:

- **Staghorn sumac:** Has fuzzy red fruit clusters that point upward and grow in dry, sunny areas. Its stems are fuzzy.
- **Poison sumac:** Has drooping clusters of waxy, white or greenish-white berries and grows in wet, swampy soil. Its stems are smooth.

## Planting Sumac

Plant sumacs, such as staghorn, in areas with plenty of open space, as they will become "thickets" by sending out suckers, which will spread.



## More About Sumac

Birds aren't the only ones who enjoy the fruits of sumac, which are mildly sweet and pleasant in flavor. These berries have also become quite popular, as they have been used for years in Middle Eastern recipes that feature a spice blend including za'atar. Additionally, they are prized for their antioxidant-rich and anti-inflammatory properties.

Sumacs are easy to grow, as they are tolerant of most types of soil and conditions. Besides the staghorn, consider winged sumac, elm-leaved sumac, lemon berry sumac, sugar sumac, and one of my all-time favorites, tiger eye sumac, because of its chartreuse-to-yellow summer foliage which turns a bold scarlet color in the fall. And best of all, it has a much less aggressive tendency to sucker and spread, making it more manageable as a specimen plant, or in mass plantings.

So, gather your creativity, step outside, and forage thoughtfully — evergreens, berries, and twigs in hand — to craft a holiday container that's uniquely yours.

*Holly Boettcher is a Master Gardener and an aspiring Naturalist. Her love for the outdoors and nature shines through in everything she does. Holly and her husband own Whistler's Knoll Vineyard on Highway JJ near Hortonville.*

# WHY I LOVE CHRISTMAS MUSIC

My favorite scene in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* is not one that can be faithfully recapped in a polite publication such as this. But my *second* favorite scene is no slouch either: Our bumbling hero traps himself in a freezing attic (curiously uninsulated for Chicago), only to discover a projector and a trove of undiscovered family 8mm reels. One is labeled "Christmas '59", so our hero watches wistfully until he falls through the attic door, presumably to his death and immediate reanimation.

It's a great scene, and made that much better by the song choice: *This Time of Year*, from the great Ray Charles. The song is melancholy and hopeful and nostalgic and uncynical, and I adore it for those reasons and a dozen others. It's an easy song to love.

But what always has struck me about this particular song, at this particular point in this particular movie, is how it so perfectly encapsulates what makes me such an ardent defender of Christmas music. Namely, that it portrays on screen the way I usually feel when I listen to these sorts of songs: melancholy, hopeful, nostalgic, uncynical. And those are qualities that, even if I might detect them in a certain song, I don't usually apply to myself as I listen. Only Christmas music does that.

(Quick detour: I am aware that there is an ongoing semantic debate about saying "holiday" as opposed to "Christmas," but that debate doesn't really apply here. I'm referring to the genre as "Christmas music" only because that's what it is.)

It's not news to say that Christmas music is nostalgic in tone; after all, many of the most popular songs

are well over 70 years old and were implanted in our brains from birth. Additionally, most modern iterations use the same time-tested elements — gauzy production, bells galore, placing the chorus before the verses — to make them indistinguishable from the ones they're emulating. But I still think it goes deeper than that.



## ONE MORE THING

By TYLER SJOSTROM

Each of us, to some degree, imagines our life to be like a movie, where the songs we love (or the opposite) provide the soundtrack. Old favorites may make us feel nostalgic for our mixed-tape era, or for riding in the backseat while our parents fought with an atlas up front. But only Christmas music, as far as I can gather, can make us nostalgic for something we never personally

experienced. I can hear *Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire* and immediately feel as though I'm in a midcentury living room with a conversation pit, even though I'm not sure I actually like the song or know how roasting a chestnut would work in practice. That is some impressive sorcery.

As a musician myself, I've written maybe a dozen or so Christmas songs of my own. I use all of the same clichés and iconography that you would expect. Whether or not someone feels like they're in a Christmas movie when they hear them is a question I can't answer. But I can explain the headspace I'm in when I write them, which is much more sentimental than when I write anything else. It's a place I like to go, frankly. And it's also why I flip on the holiday stations the moment it's socially acceptable to do so.

For two months out of the year, the movie of my life is a Christmas movie. The songs are familiar, even if they are (allegedly) new. They bring out sentiments — goodwill, sincerity, propensity to cry during commercials — that aren't so easily manipulated in any other season.

I like this movie. And by the time it ends, I'll already be looking ahead to next year's version.



*Tyler Sjostrom is an Appleton-based writer who will show you pictures of his kids whether you ask for them or not. Heckle him at [tysjostrom@gmail.com](mailto:tysjostrom@gmail.com) or read more at [tyler-sj.com](http://tyler-sj.com).*

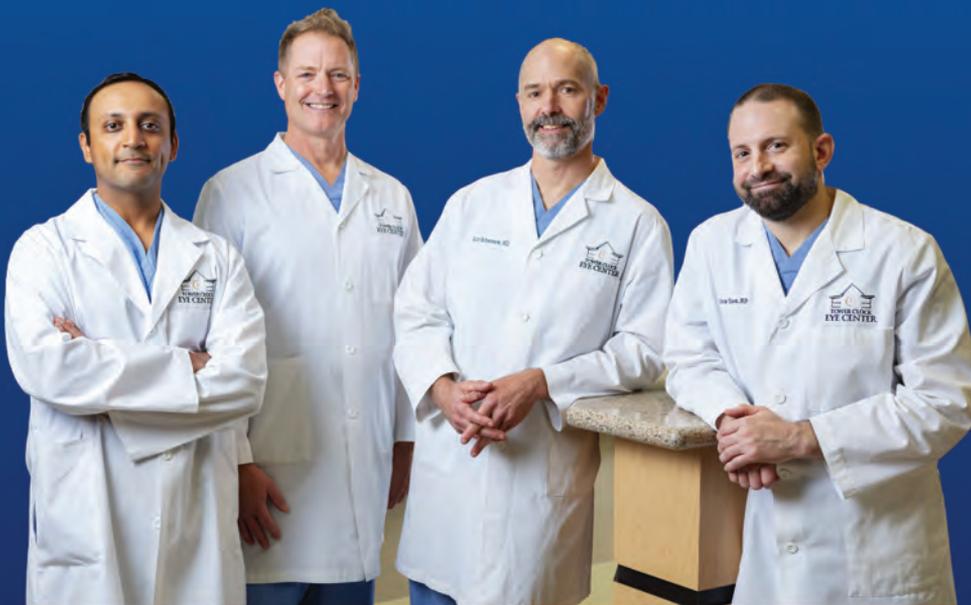
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