

## Illuminating Batesville

The 'Christmas Capital of  
Arkansas' shines brightly

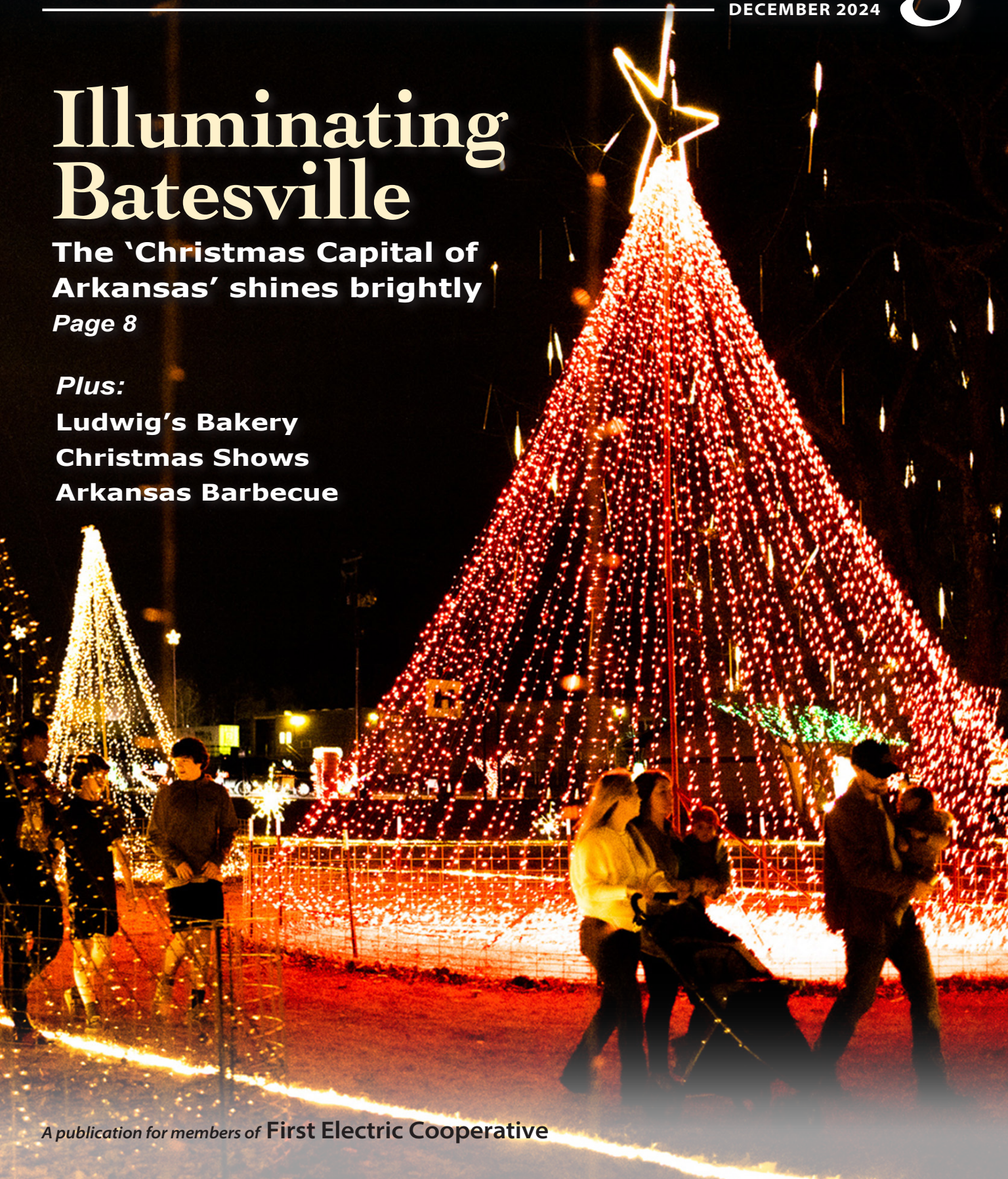
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*Plus:*

**Ludwig's Bakery**

**Christmas Shows**

**Arkansas Barbecue**



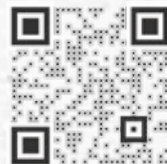




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Over 1 million lights are on display through Jan. 2 at Batesville's White River Wonderland, making it the "Christmas Capital of Arkansas."

*Photo courtesy of Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce*



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# The Power of Giving

BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

As the Christmas season — a time of warmth, kindness and goodwill — approaches, the employees of the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas are preparing to share a gift far beyond the usual holiday cheer.

This year, our mission is clear: Extend hope and comfort to communities recovering from the devastation of recent hurricanes. Our lineworkers selflessly assisted with Hurricane Helene restoration, but there is still more work to be done for communities grappling with widespread damage and struggling to recover.

Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (AECI) and Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC) have launched an employee giving campaign to support the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) Cooperative Development Foundation's Disaster Recovery Fund. This fund is dedicated to helping rebuild electric cooperatives and provide relief to families and businesses.

This Christmas, AECI/AECC employees have been invited to participate in this meaningful effort.

By contributing through payroll deductions, employees can give directly to the cause, ensuring that their holiday spirit is felt where it's needed most. These dollars will help restore power, rebuild infrastructure and provide crucial aid to communities in need.

And the giving doesn't stop there. The AECI/AECC Giving Committee matches employees' donations up to \$200 per employee per year. This matching program allows the collective power of employees' donations to stretch further.

In addition, our 17 member distribution cooperatives have been invited to join this effort, extending the cooperative principle of Concern for Community far and wide. Some cooperatives are helping in other unique ways. For example, Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative, which held a community supply drive in November in partnership with Surry-Yakin Electric Membership Cooperative (SYEMC) in Dobson, North Carolina. AVECC shipped supplies to SYEMC, which delivered them directly to rural electric members in need.

Such acts of care and compassion are the cooperative way. They are the Christian way. And there's no better time of year to affirm our faith, nor a better way than to love our neighbors.

Together, we can light the way for a brighter future, offering recovery and healing — one generous deed at a time.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas,

*Jennifer*  
Jennifer Christman Cia  
jennifer.cia@aeci.com



Employees of the Electric Cooperative of Arkansas are raising funds to help those recovering from hurricane devastation.



# Christmas Wish List

BY VERNON “BUDDY” HASTEN

President and CEO of Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., and Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation



I expect that Thanksgiving tables across the state were full of interesting conversations this year, with a presidential election just three weeks before and lots of change looming on the horizon.

Some conversations likely expressed optimism

about America’s future, while others expressed something more like “Bah humbug.” However, one topic that is always highlighted and wished for this time of year is world peace. Given recent global conflicts that have been raging and the turmoil in our own country, there is a real need for everyone to add this to their Christmas wish list.

It has happened before. There was a Christmas truce in 1914 during World War I, where for a brief time on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, soldiers stopped fighting in the trenches with reports of impromptu soccer games, a day of ceasefire and fellowship between enemies who were shooting at each other the previous day.

After world peace, the next item on my Christmas wish list is a common-sense national energy policy, one that balances affordability and reliability with environmental responsibility. For too long, our energy policy has been unbalanced, and we have seen the erosion of affordability and reliability in our nation’s electric grid.

National policy has continued to apply disincentives to traditional and reliable baseload power generation resources while applying incentives to renewable resources. This disturbs the reliability equation and tilts electricity markets to increased overall cost and power shortages. Most Americans don’t know that they actually get two power bills these days — one the cooperative sends you monthly and one the IRS sends you every April 15.

What am I talking about? Renewable energy subsidies

that are funded by your taxes. The U.S. spent \$7.4 billion in 2016 on intermittent energy subsidies, and that increased to \$15.6 billion in 2022, with a total of \$84 billion over that period. The U.S. fiscal year 2024 budget, created before the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), included another \$145 billion in intermittent energy subsidies over the next 10 years. The fiscal year 2025 budget (post IRA) showed that number increasing to \$1.1 trillion.

To show the imbalance, nuclear energy received \$415 million in subsidies in 2016 and \$390 million in 2022, for a total of \$2.8 billion over the entire period. While both renewable and nuclear sources produce low-carbon energy, they are fundamentally different. Nuclear is highly reliable while renewable resources are by design, intermittent. See recent headlines about Germany’s “dunkelflaute,” a high-pressure weather system that caused the wind to stop blowing, for a prime example.

The dunkelflaute effect was a sudden reduction in renewable energy and a heavy reliance on fossil generation — about 95% — to keep the lights on. This resulted in

wholesale electricity prices spiking to about \$800 megawatt hours (MWh). Compare that with average U.S. prices between \$30 MWh and \$40 MWh. Germany’s unbalanced energy policy, caused by closing coal and nuclear plants and replacing these resources almost entirely with renewable energy sources, has caused them long-term economic harm. The availability and cost of energy drives a national

economy. Germany’s new “normal” industrial energy prices are double that of the U.S. and China, Germany’s competitors.

As we look to the future, I do believe that the new administration’s focus on energy will bring balance to American energy policy. I think there will be increased focus on reducing regulations and restrictions on reliable and controllable baseload power sources like nuclear and natural gas, and possibly slowing down retirements of reliable coal plants that still have remaining useful life. ➤



WISH LIST continued on page 6



# Woodruff County Solar operating at full capacity

Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC) is now operating its 122-megawatt Woodruff County Solar project at full capacity and commercial operation.

The solar array is located adjacent to the site of the former Carl Bailey Generation Station in Augusta. The energy produced will provide supplemental, weather-dependent generation.

In its first year of full capacity, the Woodruff County Solar facility is expected to generate 270,487 megawatt hours, enough to power 25,000 homes.

“AECC and our member cooperatives support all types of wholesale power generation resources,” said Vernon “Buddy” Hasten, president and CEO of AECC and Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (AECI). “As part of our long-range planning, the Woodruff County Solar project fits into our need for additional capacity. The intermittent energy produced by this facility will supplement our mission-critical, readily dispatchable baseload generation resources.”



Located in Augusta, the 122-megawatt Woodruff County Solar project is now fully operational.

# Arkansas Youth Tour delegate awarded national scholarship

Rukaya Alrubaye of Fayetteville, a 2022 Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas Youth Tour delegate from Ozarks Electric Cooperative, was awarded the Glenn English National Cooperative Leadership Scholarship, winning \$10,000.

Selected by her peers, Alrubaye was the 2022 Arkansas Youth Tour Leadership Council (YLC) delegate. In 2023, she was chosen to be the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) spokesperson for the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour program.

Alrubaye attends the University of Missouri at Kansas City, where she is enrolled in a six-year bachelor’s and medical school degree program.

“Rukaya is a shining example of an exceptional young leader. Her dedication, intelligence and passion were evident from the moment she attended Youth Tour. We are incredibly proud of her accomplishments,” said JD Lowery, Arkansas Youth Tour director and director of community and economic development for Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (AECC).

The Glenn English National Cooperative Leadership Scholarship is awarded annually to a student who has demonstrated outstanding leadership and service to the community. It is named in honor of the late Congressman English, a strong supporter of electric cooperatives.



Rukaya Alrubaye

## WISH LIST continued from page 5

This effort is needed if we are going to address the national need for more electricity.

Let’s face it, a lot of things on America’s Christmas list require electrical power. Every new app on your iPhone, hotel and flight reservations made online, pictures stored in the cloud, series streamed on Netflix, video games played on Xbox, selfies or videos posted to social media all require data centers.

Data centers require a lot of power. The advent and growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has only accelerated this need for power, and so has the desire to bring jobs and manufacturing back to America. There is a clear and present need for more always-available power generation in our country.

Clearly big tech companies have figured this out.

Google is signing deals with Kairos Power for new small modular reactors (SMRs). Microsoft has made a deal to restart Unit 1 at Three Mile Island. Amazon is investing in SMR technology with X-energy. Meta (Facebook) was close to a nuclear deal when the project was canceled due to discovery of a rare bee species on land it intended to use for the project.

Why are all these tech companies suddenly abandoning their all-renewables-all-the-time approach from the past? The answer is simple: The amount and reliability of power needed is unachievable any other way, and nuclear still addresses their carbon goals.

So, what is on your Christmas wish list? Whatever it is, I hope that you get what you wish for. We wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy holiday season this year.



# Arkansas Living website wins international award

Arkansas Living recently won a silver Davey Award for Best Digital Communication for its website, [ArkansasLivingMagazine.com](http://ArkansasLivingMagazine.com).

The international Davey Awards — named for David who defeated the giant, Goliath — honor the creative work of smaller agencies. Arkansas Living’s website, redesigned in 2023, was developed in collaboration with Powerful Web.



Powerful Senior Project Manager Caleigh Pickard, who led the development of the website with the Arkansas Living team, has been involved with electric cooperatives since high school, when she was a Youth Tour delegate representing First Electric Cooperative of Jacksonville.

Arkansas Living, the statewide magazine of the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, celebrated its 78th anniversary in November. Delivered monthly to more than 420,000 homes and businesses, it has the largest circulation of any state publication.



## Where Is It?

Welcome back to our hidden object game, “Where Is It?”

In the November issue, we hid a Thanksgiving gravy boat.

Joked one reader who found it in an Arkansas Food Hall of Fame story photo on page 15: “I discovered the gravy boat in the Mount Nebo Chicken Fry picture — talk about a ‘saucy’ surprise!”

In a random drawing of correct answers, five winners were selected to receive Arkansas Living mugs:

**Jasmine Bluecreek-Clark, Magazine (Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative)**

**Ernest Jordan, Bearden (Ouachita Electric Cooperative)**

**Kerri Bree, Fayetteville (Ozarks Electric Cooperative)**

**Kenneth Crisco, Searcy (First Electric Cooperative)**

**Retta Stuart, Lynn (Craighead Electric Cooperative)**

For December, we’ve hidden this reindeer and, in the spirit of Christmas, we’ll be giving out 10 mugs for the winners of our “reindeer games.” For a chance to win via random drawing, enter by Dec. 15 through the “Where Is It?” link on the homepage of [arkansaslivingmagazine.com](http://arkansaslivingmagazine.com), or go directly to [arkansaslivingmagazine.com/where-is-it-contest/](http://arkansaslivingmagazine.com/where-is-it-contest/).

Or mail in entries to:

Where Is It  
Arkansas Living  
P.O. Box 510  
Little Rock, AR 72203.

Include your name, address and electric co-op (nonmembers also are eligible), plus the correct page number.

*\* If your magazine arrives after the deadline, submit your entry by the 15th of the following month. We’ll send a prize to a randomly selected latecomer! October’s winner was: **Gracelyn James, Marble Falls (Carroll Electric Cooperative)**.*



- Arkansas has at least 17 Christmas tree farms. It can take as long as 15 years for a Christmas tree to grow to a height of 6 feet.
- The gangster movie Kevin McCallister watches in “Home Alone” is fake and was filmed specifically for the Christmas classic.
- Humans have difficulty walking in a straight line without a visual reference. When blindfolded, people gradually walk in a circle.
- LEGO has an underground vault with more than 8,000 sets dating back to the 1960s.



- Only one in 10,000 people have perfect pitch, the ability to name or imitate any musical note they hear.
- In Japan, it is customary to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken for Christmas dinner.
- In Spain, it’s a New Year’s Eve tradition to eat 12 grapes at midnight — one for each strike of the clock.



- A full moon rises at sunset, and a new moon rises at sunrise. A first-quarter moon rises at noon, and a third-quarter moon rises at midnight.
- “My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?” — Bob Hope, actor





COURTESY OF BATESVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Illuminating Batesville

*The 'Christmas Capital of Arkansas' shines brightly*



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

BY JACK SCHNEDLER

**B**atesville bursts with pride each holiday season as the “Christmas Capital of Arkansas.”

That bold assertion is amply affirmed by the Independence County seat’s cornucopia of seasonal events and activities, highlighted by the White River Wonderland show. This after-dark extravaganza features millions of twinkling lights that create a scene of yuletide merriment along the riverfront.

“There are a lot of places around the state that have lights,” says Chris Hill, communications director for Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center. “But what makes Batesville unique is that our millions of lights are on display free, interwoven with a number of other holiday-themed attractions, creating a tapestry of nostalgia and tradition.”

Batesville’s star attraction, White River Wonderland, transforms the 35-acre Riverside Park into a dazzling display with millions of holiday lights.



LEFT Visitors can glide into the holiday spirit at a synthetic ice skating rink with views of Batesville's White River Wonderland.

## Big glow-up

The city's White River Wonderland ([whiteriverwonderland.com](http://whiteriverwonderland.com)) began in 2007 with a few small light displays at the 35-acre Riverside Park. In 2022, the month of activities was proclaimed "Attraction of the Year" by the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. Last year, the events were named "Festival of the Year" for the eight-county Ozark Gateway Region.

Hill says that Batesville's holiday extravaganza is more than a local event: "Last year, of the more than 99,000 visitors to White River Wonderland, 28% came from outside Independence County, and 9% were from outside Arkansas."

A recently created source for holiday visitors is a free app from the City of Batesville Advertising and Promotion Commission. The Batesville Area app can be downloaded at app stores or at [discoverbatesville.com/media-center/newsroom/experience-batesville-app](http://discoverbatesville.com/media-center/newsroom/experience-batesville-app). Hill calls it "the go-to tool for discovering local attractions, planning weekend getaways or finding the best dining and shopping spots."

Visitors can tour White River Wonderland at no charge on foot or in their vehicle. Hill points out "a drive-thru light tunnel and two walking bridges make incredible spots for selfies, family photos and even marriage proposals. Also great for photographs are themed face-in-the-hole props featuring Santa, snowmen and other holiday scenes."

A fee is charged for viewing the lights from a Ferris wheel, tourist train or horse-drawn carriage. The 70-foot-tall rotating wheel will operate only from Dec. 13-21, offering panoramic vistas of the million-plus lights below.

The train rides are "great for all ages, and children love them," Hill says. "The cars are open-air, pulled behind a custom-built tractor. They are handicap-accessible and feature an on-board speaker to hear the music as the lights dance."

## Festive events

Complementing the light displays is an array of special events. Open and operating through Dec. 30 is a synthetic ice skating rink ➤



When not at the North Pole, Santa and Mrs. Claus can be seen at Pocket Park in downtown Batesville.



White River Wonderland can be viewed by vehicle or by foot, and admission is free.



Catch a classic holiday movie at the historic Melba Theater in downtown Batesville.





with views of the holiday lights. Dec. 6 brings a self-guided Main Street Art Walk, sponsored by the Batesville Area Arts Council and Lyon College arts students.

Runners can take part Dec. 7 in Hope for the Holidays 5K and half-marathon races. Dec. 7-8 are the dates for the Holly Volley Christmas Youth Volleyball Tournament, sponsored by Playmaker Sports Academy, at Batesville Community Center.

On Dec. 11, Old Independence Museum's annual Christmas Crafts Day will welcome Santa Claus as its guest celebrity. On Dec. 14, the Kiwanis Christmas parade will step off at 6 p.m. on Main Street in Batesville's historic downtown.

A jolly occasion set for Dec. 12 is the Main Street Wassail Walk. A number of downtown merchants will serve this traditional

yuletide beverage of mulled cider spiced with ginger, cinnamon and cloves. Main Street Batesville is the sponsor.

The Melba Theater, in a Main Street building with roots dating to 1875, is continuing "A Very Melba Christmas," with its popular annual showing of movies with holiday themes. The schedule can be viewed at [melbatheater.com](http://melbatheater.com).

To amplify the pride Batesville takes in proclaiming itself "Christmas Capital of Arkansas," the city has trademarked that designation to claim sole use of the jolly seasonal title. ➤



COURTESY OF BATESVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



COURTESY OF BATESVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

**COUNTER CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE**

Take the whole family for a ride on the custom-built White River Express.

Experience the enchantment of a horse-drawn carriage ride through a twinkling tunnel of lights with loved ones.

The display is fully walkable, featuring illuminated trails throughout the park and a magical castle.

Two walking bridges with tunnel lights provide the ideal backdrop for perfect selfies.



NANCY MOORE



COURTESY OF BATESVILLE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



## MORE LIGHT-TASTIC DISPLAYS

Here is a sampling of other notable light displays in Arkansas. Most are now underway and will continue at least through Christmas Eve. Some have admission fees. Details are available at the listed websites.

**Blytheville's Lights of the Delta**, [lightsofthedelta.com](http://lightsofthedelta.com). This driving tour on the periphery of a former Air Force base passes close to 60 illuminated displays on 40 acres.

**Fayetteville's Lights of the Ozarks**, [experiencefayetteville.com](http://experiencefayetteville.com). Fayetteville's historic downtown square is all aglow and decked out with Christmas cheer through Jan. 1.


**Hot Springs' Garvan Woodland Gardens Winter Garden Festival**, [garvangardens.org](http://garvangardens.org). This walking route passes twinkling lights in the 210-acre botanical venue.

**Jonesboro's Christmas at the Park**, [christmasattheparknea.com](http://christmasattheparknea.com). It's an unforgettable holiday experience with over 400,000 lights and 450 festive displays.

**Little Rock Zoo's GloWild**, [littlerockzoo.com](http://littlerockzoo.com). The zoo's display of silk lanterns that depict animal species has extended its run to 45 nights, continuing through Jan. 5.

**Mountain Home's Coulter Celebration of Lights**, [asumh.edu/lights](http://asumh.edu/lights). Enjoy the enchanting campus of Arkansas State University-Mountain Home, and experience thousands of twinkling lights and beautiful displays through Dec. 29.

**Pine Bluff's Enchanted Land of Lights and Legend**, [explorepinebluff.com](http://explorepinebluff.com). Visitors can drive past 250 scenes, some of them animated, in Pine Bluff Regional Park.

**Sherwood's Enchanted Forest Trail of Lights**, [cityofsherwood.net](http://cityofsherwood.net). It is necessary to reserve online ahead of time to drive the illuminated circuit in this Little Rock suburb. 

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# Dashing through the Dough

*Ludwig's Bakery whisks up German, Christmas traditions*



STORY AND PHOTOS BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

Specializing in German treats, Ludwig's Bakery has certainly "stollen" hearts in Arkadelphia.

Stollen, after all, is a German bread studded with candied fruits and nuts, and one of Ludwig's most sought-after delights at Christmastime.

Arkadelphia — the Clark County city with a population of about 10,000 and the headquarters of South Central Arkansas Electric Cooperative — might seem like an unlikely location for a German bakery. And owner Lorraine McSwain, who founded the business in March 2020, would agree.

"When we opened, all of a sudden, these Germans started coming out — from all over the place," she says with a laugh. "I had no idea there were so many Germans in the area."

Who knew so many Arkansans would be familiar with and hungry for the goodies McSwain — maiden name: Ludwig — enjoyed her whole life?

After a long restaurant career, McSwain, who relocated to Arkansas from Dallas to care for her mother, heard about a bakery that was for sale on Arkansas 7.



Ludwig's Bakery, located in downtown Arkadelphia, specializes in German baked goods.

McSwain began envisioning a business like the original Ludwig's Bakery that her German-born grandparents owned in South Dakota in the 1920s. Those are black-and-white photos of them on the wall above the entrance coffee station.

"I couldn't stop thinking about it," she says. "And, you know, it's funny how God has a way of directing you. I just said, 'If this is meant to be, every door will open for me.' And that's exactly what happened. Everything just fell right in place, and here we are."

## The "amerikaner" dream

And "here we are" is now on Eighth Street in downtown Arkadelphia in a larger, more prominent location. Having outgrown its former space, Ludwig's — which handles catering, including jobs for nearby Ouachita Baptist University — relocated in August.

But McSwain knows the "spritzgeback" — or German chocolate-dipped butter almond cookie — could have crumbled a different way completely for Ludwig's. She points out, "We opened March 7, 2020. A week later, COVID, and the whole country shut down. But we made it through that year — just grab-and-go business."

The bakery's popularity is evident as weekday afternoon customers come in and study the sweets inside Ludwig's glass cases. In addition to German indulgences like an



Customers can walk in or place orders for Ludwig's baked goods, which are made from scratch and baked fresh daily.

appetizing “apfelkuchen,” or apple cake, there are plenty familiar selections, made from McSwain’s recipes, too — cinnamon rolls, poppy seed and blueberry muffins, soft ginger cookies and maple snickerdoodles. There are even some savory selections, like garlic cheddar muffins and “bierocks,” or freshly baked beef rolls. Ludwig’s Saturday brunch includes sausage gravy and biscuits and crepe-like German pancakes, which are filled with strawberries, dusted with powdered sugar and topped with whipped cream.

While we’re on the subjects of community support and German pancakes, one customer walks in with a receipt in hand and makes his way to McSwain. He’s not here to complain that he was overcharged; he’s here because he was *undercharged*. His Saturday receipt for breakfast seemed too low, so he — also a small business owner in town — has returned the following Wednesday to pay the difference and make things right.

Another key to Ludwig’s success is the care and heritage baked into every “nussecken” or “amerikaner” — that’s German nut bar or frosted cake-like cookie, respectively. Everything is made from scratch and freshly baked; there’s no surplus of “roggenbrot,” or German rye bread, in the back. If you want something like a holiday pie — everything from apple, to pumpkin to chess — call ahead to place an order.

“Growing up, mom always had something freshly baked every single day. There’s a custom in Germany called ‘kaffeeklatsch’ — every afternoon around 3 p.m., you sit down and have coffee and pastries,” McSwain says.

“So, it’s nostalgic for me.”

The family legacy continues as Michaela, McSwain’s daughter, relocated with her family from Dallas and now works at the bakery. “I couldn’t do it without her,” or her other five employees, McSwain says. Especially during the holiday season, when the bakery’s business is especially bustling.

Describing Tannenbaum time at Ludwig’s, McSwain says, “First we’re going to get a big shipment from Germany with a bunch of German chocolates and imported goods for Christmas. We’ll have ‘lebkuchen,’ which is German



Lorraine McSwain opened Ludwig’s Bakery to pay homage to her German-born grandparents.

gingerbread — it’s usually coated in chocolate and holds all kinds of goodies in it, nuts and usually crystallized ginger. It’s very good. We’ll have ‘stollen,’ which is a Christmas bread; that’s very traditional. We’ll have rum balls and ‘speculaas’ — which is a spicy cookie. We’ll have linzer cookies, which are very well-known and very German.”

Just as Arkansans appreciate McSwain’s sweets, she appreciates the sweetness she has been shown during five years in business.

McSwain says, “It’s been a really, really great experience because there are so many wonderful people that support us in the community, and it’s so much more fulfilling than I really ever thought that it could be.”

*Ludwig’s Bakery is located at 105 S. Eighth St., Arkadelphia. Visit [freshbakedbyludwig.com](http://freshbakedbyludwig.com) or call (870) 260-4501. The bakery is typically open from 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday; holidays could affect these hours.*



A “spritzgebäck” is a chocolate-dipped German butter cookie and a year-round treat at Ludwig’s.



During the pandemic, Ludwig’s grab-and-go business kept the bakery afloat. Today, customers can dine in at a new, larger location for baked goods and brunch on Saturdays.





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# Christmas Curtain Call

*Theaters stage holiday shows around the state*

BY WERNER TRIESCHMANN

Perhaps you've been dazzled by Christmas displays and spent cozy nights gathered 'round the Christmas tree. If you are still looking to make more holiday memories, put on some nice clothes, get out of the house, and see a festive show.

Theater companies and arts centers around the state are ready to meet this need. December offers several chances to check out stage musicals and Christmas comedies. Yes, a production of "A Christmas Carol" is on the schedule as well as two different takes on "A Christmas Story." Check out the list below or call your nearest local theater, and get ready to make your holiday that much merrier.



THEATRESQUARED

See Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" at Fayetteville's TheaterSquared until Dec. 24.

Fayetteville's powerhouse, award-winning theater company, TheatreSquared (T2), is staging its original adaptation of Charles Dickens' "**A Christmas Carol**" for the sixth year in a row and the final time for the foreseeable future.

"We're doing something else next year," says T2 Artistic Director Bob Ford, co-writer with Amy Herzberg of the play adaptation. "We're not ready to announce it, but it will be Christmassy."

Herzberg, T2 associate artistic director, says their adaptation considers how "Dickens empathizes profoundly with children and revels in family. He trains our eyes on the forgotten corners of humanity. His characters are indelible."

Ford and Herzberg's "A Christmas Carol" opens in a Victorian library on Christmas Eve, days after Dickens' novel was released. Pretty soon the world of Ebenezer Scrooge is brought to life as a librarian reads the new novel to a young girl waiting on

her parents. Ghosts, dance, song and stage magic are part of TheatreSquared's holiday production.

*"A Christmas Carol," through Dec. 24, TheatreSquared, Fayetteville. Tickets: \$20-\$71. (479) 777-7477. [theatre2.org](http://theatre2.org).*

For ages, Little Rock's Murry's Dinner Playhouse has provided the rare combo of dinner and a show under one roof and for one price. This year, Murry's holiday show is "**White Christmas**," a musical comedy adaptation from the classic film of the same name. Music? Laughs? Cocktails? A buffet? Irving Berlin's popular songs, including "White Christmas?" Not bad for a night out.

*"White Christmas," through Dec. 31, Murry's Dinner Playhouse, Little Rock. Show only tickets: \$32. Dinner and show tickets: \$42-\$46. (501) 562-3131. [murrysdp.com](http://murrysdp.com).*



COURTESY OF MURRY'S DINNER PLAYHOUSE

Dream of a "White Christmas" at Murry's Dinner Playhouse in Little Rock.



COURTESY OF ARGENTA CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

There's no putting your arms down at Argenta Contemporary Theatre in North Little Rock's "A Christmas Story the Musical."



COURTESY OF BICOASTAL PRODUCTIONS

Have a “Blue Christmas” with Elvis and friends during the “One Christmas Night in Memphis Tribute” at the Russellville Arts Center.

and 1950s rock ‘n’ roll.

“One Christmas Night in Memphis Tribute,” 6 p.m. Dec. 7, Russellville Arts Center, Russellville. Tickets: \$25-\$35. (479) 498-6600. [russellvillecenter.net](http://russellvillecenter.net).

The Fort Smith Little Theatre is one of the state’s most prominent, long-running community theaters. For the Christmas season, the theater has a rare offering: a brand-new play. “**A Hall & Mark Christmas**” is the story of a “big city businesswoman (Hall) who returns home for her least favorite holiday — Christmas — and connects with an old flame (Mark).” The creators promise “wholesome jokes, Christmas carols and a little romance.”


“A Hall & Mark Christmas,” Dec. 12-14, Fort Smith Little Theatre, Fort Smith. Tickets: \$7. (479) 783-2966. [fslt.org](http://fslt.org).

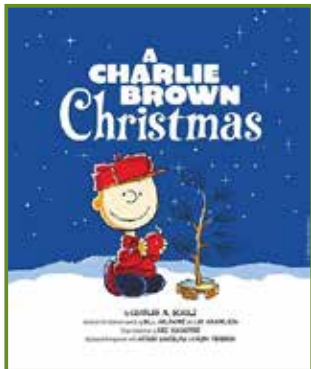
If you are up in Northwest Arkansas and have a craving for “**A Christmas Story**” experience, Rogers’ Victory Theater is producing the film adaptation without the music. You may or may not be encouraged to shout, “You’ll shoot your eye out, kid!” along with the cast.

“A Christmas Story,” Dec. 20-22, Victory Theater. Tickets: \$20.25-\$28.50. [arkansaspublictheatre.org](http://arkansaspublictheatre.org).

NOTE: Performances for Victory Theater shows, including “A Christmas Story,” are being held at The Medium, 214 S. Main St., Springdale, while repairs are being made at the Victory Theater due to tornado damage.

Started by a junior theater student at Arkansas State University, Jonesboro’s Spotlight Theatre is a brand-new company with a grand total of three productions to its name. “**A Charlie Brown Christmas**” is Spotlight’s first Junior Musical Theatre Intensive and promises to bring to life the beloved animated TV Christmas special with Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus and the rest of the “Peanuts” gang.

“A Charlie Brown Christmas,” Dec. 13-15, Spotlight Theatre, Jonesboro. Tickets: \$10. [spotlighttheatrear.com](http://spotlighttheatrear.com). 



COURTESY OF SPOTLIGHT THEATRE

Good grief! Don’t miss “A Charlie Brown Christmas” Dec. 13-15 at Spotlight Theatre in Jonesboro.

It was 1983 when the film, “**A Christmas Story**,” was released and, in the years since, Ralphie and his desire for a Red Ryder BB gun have become fixed in Christmas lore. The popularity of “A Christmas Story” has resulted in a traditional play and musical adaptation for the stage. North Little Rock’s Argenta Contemporary Theatre tackles its version starting on Dec. 4.

“[The musical] really honors the movie,” Director Anna Kimmell says. “It’s a really creative script. Ralphie has this big imagination, and we get to see that in these dream sequences that become big production numbers. The boy we have playing Ralphie is a standout. Audiences are going to love him.”

“A Christmas Story the Musical,” Dec. 4-22, Argenta Contemporary Theatre, North Little Rock. Tickets: \$28-\$48. (501) 353-1443. [argentacontemporarytheatre.org](http://argentacontemporarytheatre.org).

The Russellville Arts Center is bringing in a different type of holiday diversion with “**One Christmas Night in Memphis Tribute**.” The show is an evening of impersonators of legendary musicians Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis gathered together singing their hits. They’ll also perform favorite holiday songs, including “Jingle Bell Rock,” “White Christmas,” “Run, Run, Rudolph,” “Blue Christmas” and many more.

Powered by a rockabilly band, the show is 90 minutes of country, gospel



COURTESY OF FORT SMITH LITTLE THEATRE

Fort Smith Little Theatre premieres “A Hall & Mark Christmas” Dec. 12-14.



# Saucy Secrets

*Best barbecue bets off the beaten path*

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAT ROBINSON

It may surprise you to know that Arkansas has more than 350 barbecue restaurants. They range from long-established mainstays to brand-new upstarts, from brick-and-mortar edifices to mobile food trucks. One thing is certain: Arkansas loves barbecue.

For the past year and a half, I've delved deeply into communities all across the state to suss out every single restaurant that has barbecue as its claim to fame. I can happily say all 75 of Arkansas' counties have at least one purveyor of barbecue.

I've discovered regional styles and preferences, namely pulled pork in the Arkansas Delta, pork steaks in northeast Arkansas, brisket in northwest Arkansas and stewed brisket in southern Arkansas. And I met and chatted with more than 100 pitmasters.

The result: a book just released called "The Arkansas Barbecue Traveler: A Roadside Companion for Hungry Wanderers," a guide to every barbecue restaurant I have found in The Natural State. It will be followed by "The Arkansas Barbecue Classics," a book that will dive into the history of barbecue in Arkansas and the stories from the oldest barbecue restaurants in the state.

In the course of my research, I found a great number of barbecue restaurants that haven't made the news yet. These are all places where the smoked meats are magnificent, but outside of those communities, they're just not well-known. I'm happy to share these places that should be considered on your next road trip. They're here in alphabetical order, and they're all outstanding.

**AR Tillery's Barbecue** (Bella Vista). Rod Tillery moved his family from Oregon during the pandemic, and this year followed a dream and started a mobile barbecue operation. Tillery is using tri-tip instead of brisket and showcases it alongside candied pork belly bites, smoked chicken and the outrageous but craveable Artillery Shells — jalapeños stuffed with smoked beef and cheese, wrapped in bacon, smoked and doused in barbecue sauce. *Find the truck out front of Lowe's or in Blowing Spring Park, or see where the trailer will be today at [ARTillerysBBQ.com](http://ARTillerysBBQ.com); (541) 270-0578.*



Beau's Bayou Smokehouse

covered in pulled pork with cheese, beans, jalapeños, green onions and moonshine barbecue sauce. The chicken is succulently sublime. *414 Mena St., Mena, search for Bearded Guy Barbecue and Eats on [Facebook.com](http://Facebook.com); (479) 208-5928.*

**Beau's Bayou Smokehouse** (Farmington). Beau McManus combines his south Mississippi upbringing and his training in Florida kitchens with Arkansas Ozark cuisine to create a thick menu of smoked meats and sides at his one-man concession in a gas station parking lot. Sausages, brisket, pulled pork and ribs are all accented with his unique sides, like an addictive blue cheese coleslaw, new potatoes cooked in Cajun boil and a too-good-to-be-true mac and cheese. On top of all that, he makes cheesecakes in different flavors that you'll come back for time and time again. *243 Main St., Farmington; [Facebook.com/BeausBayouSmokehouse](http://Facebook.com/BeausBayouSmokehouse); (479) 871-5373.*

**Bearded Guy Barbecue and Eats** (Mena).

This family-run operation on the northwest side of downtown Mena opened in September 2003 and became an instant hit. A menu with great brisket, pulled pork and chicken leg quarters, the star on this menu may be The Mess, fries



Bearded Guy Barbecue and Eats



BigMac's Barbecue

**BigMac's Barbecue** (Hope). Margaret McLaughlin's booming startup on the north side of town has quickly become Hope's barbecue mecca. With pitmaster Doug Ozment working the smoker, the eatery's quickly racked up all the local awards for best restaurant, boss and waitress, and keeps folks coming in the door with smoked brisket, ribs, turkey, sausage and pulled pork. If that isn't enough, catfish is also available, and you can get your fries, potatoes, nachos and mac and cheese loaded up with barbecue any time. 2703 N. Hazel St., Hope; search for *BigMac's Barbecue* on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com); (870) 722-8011.

**Brothers Meethouse** (Bentonville) Rob Nelson's much-anticipated oversized barbecue joint just opened in October. After more than seven

years of intense barbecue research, Nelson's worked out a menu with pitmaster Alex Glass to conjure an OZQ (Ozark barbecue) menu with something for everyone. The brisket is marvelous, the belly bites are already a favorite, but do yourself a favor and try that smoked turkey — it's extraordinary! 405 SE Fifth St., Bentonville; [Facebook.com/BrothersMeethouse](https://www.facebook.com/BrothersMeethouse); (479) 553-7199.

**FlavorSmith's Craft Barbecue** (Fayetteville). Billy Ray Smith's newly opened joint at the location of Fayetteville's beloved The Beer Keg has quickly gained notice and traction in a city already well-stocked with barbecue joints.



FlavorSmith's Craft Barbecue

His tiny shop and smokehouse knocks out briskets, jalapeño cheese sausages, ribs, pulled pork and turkey at a satisfyingly quick rate to keep up with the sudden demand. You absolutely must try the banana pudding. 50 E. Township St., Fayetteville; search *FlavorSmith's Craft Barbecue* on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com); (479) 879-1902.



Brothers Meethouse

**Harold's Bar-B-Q and Catering** (Corning). One of the older restaurants on this list, Harold's doesn't have much of a following outside of Corning, yet. But when word of The Shenanigator gets out, it will. A stunning stack of smoked meat begins with a thick slice of smoked and fried bologna, then a hefty amount of pulled pork, then slices of barked smoky brisket, all topped with lettuce, tomato, onion and barbecue sauce on a seedless bun. You'll want your photo taken with this one! 1108 W. Main St., Corning; [Facebook.com/HaroldsBBQCorning](https://www.facebook.com/HaroldsBBQCorning); (870) 857-2223.

**L&Y Barbecue and Carwash** (Crossett). Barbecue at a carwash? More like a carwash at a barbecue. The family that opened a barbecue joint in this gas station kept having folks walk in and tell them they needed to open a carwash. Peer pressure won out. Now you can have your smoked ribs, sausage or chicken dinner while your car receives a complete detail and wash — a good one, as I can personally attest! 1034 Arkansas 133, Crossett; [Facebook.com/GreatBBQCrossett](https://www.facebook.com/GreatBBQCrossett); (870) 305-1101. ►



**Links at Chaffee Crossing** (Fort Smith). Kim Flanagan runs the front, and Terry Flanagan is in the back — working the smoker and delivering juicy brisket, ribs, pulled pork and cheese for epic mac and cheese. Great smoked meats are brought to the table with sides made from longstanding family recipes. Kim did factory work and Terry worked for the gas company before both retired to take over the concession on the golf course at Fort Chaffee in 2018. This is one of those spots you have to know about, as it's tucked back off the highway a fair bit, but well worth it. *11701 Custer Blvd., Fort Smith; Facebook.com/LinksAtChaffeeCrossing; (479) 226-3126.*



Lorado Grocery and Grill

**Lorado Grocery and Grill** (Jonesboro). Brandon and Mika Pugsley run this third-generation operation that began as a tiny convenience store and deli and evolved into a country one-stop with epic pulled pork sandwiches, wraps and plates throughout the week. On Fridays and Saturdays, the Pugsleys pull out all the stops with smoked pork steaks, chicken halves and racks of ribs, and the house stays packed all night long. *31 Arkansas 168 W. north of Jonesboro; LoradoGrill.com; (870) 275-4654.*



Pig Barn BBQ

**Pig Barn BBQ** (Fort Smith). David Waits left factory work to start up his barnyard-themed food truck on the south side of Fort Smith. With juicy brisket, tender chicken and smoky pulled pork, he can't go wrong. Folks come for the good stuff but also for the ridiculous Brisket Cheddar Honey Bun Sandwich, an ample portion of shredded brisket covered in melted cheddar and barbecue sauce between two whole jumbo honey buns. Outrageous, but he'll sell a half dozen every day. *9101 US 71 S., Fort Smith; Facebook.com/PigBarnBBQ; (479) 252-4000.*

**Pork-N-Stuff** (Piggott). Brittany Owens may hail from the Kansas City area, but she's learned the pitmistress skills to become an extraordinary Arkansas Delta barbecue ace. This spot on the east side of town is known for its ribs and for pork steaks so tender, you can cut them with a plastic fork. Drop in, place your order and write your name on the wall — it's all right! *1259 E. Main St., Piggott; Facebook.com/PorkNStuffPiggott; (870) 634-6374.*



Pork-N-Stuff



Prime Country Meat Market

**Prime Country Meat Market** (Horatio). It started out with a processing facility, then a meat market. Then in 2023, it started offering all sorts of on-site smoked meats, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, with a varying menu that covers everything from brisket and ribs to prime rib, tri-tip, and even pork belly cinnamon rolls. *223 Main St., Horatio; Facebook.com/PrimeCountryMeatMarket; (870) 832-4805.*



Sammy J's BBQ

**Sammy J's BBQ** (Heber Springs). A cousin to the famed Johns family of Blytheville, Sammy Johns is bringing Arkansas Delta barbecue to Heber Springs. His hickory-charcoal-smoked pork shoulders are meted out to sandwiches, nachos and plates and served along with a thin vinegar sauce and coleslaw for that classic flavor. Opened in the summer of 2024, Sammy J's is a standout with a difference in the north-central Arkansas town. *2020 Arkansas 25B, Heber Springs; search for Sammy J's BBQ, LLC on Facebook.com; (501) 365-3243.*


**Southern Unorthodox** (Blytheville). Matthew Huffman grew up on the same street as the folks who run Kream Kastle and Dixie Pig. He's making a name for himself in a town best known for pig sandwiches by breaking out with brisket, smoked pork belly and whatever he feels compelled to create each

day. Look for the long black food trailer, usually parked in the used car lot east of the viaduct, or follow where he is on Facebook; *search for Southern Unorthodox on Facebook.com; (870) 623-3469.*

**The Swamp** (England). Brian and Tina Hawkins took over this Cajun restaurant and added marvelously smoked briskets, pork butt, chicken halves and gator sausages for an all-encompassing blend of menu items that will please everyone in your party. The Louisiana notes like fried oyster and fried shrimp sandwiches and gumbo just enhance the experience. *223 N. Main St., England; Facebook.com/SwampOfEngland; (501) 842-1414.*



The Swamp

smoked meats and an impossibly creamy mac and cheese to cement their position as one of the region's best new barbecue eateries. *327 E. Emma Ave., in the Mothership Building in Springdale. Facebook.com/@yankabillysmokehouse; (833) 468-2867.* 

**Yankabilly BBQ** (Springdale). Aaron and Renee Kemper have created the little yellow trailer that could, producing gorgeously



Southern Unorthodox



Yankabilly BBQ



**Submit your recipes for a chance to win "The Arkansas Barbecue Traveler!"**

Arkansas Living will give away six copies of Kat Robinson's new book, "The Arkansas Barbecue Traveler: A Roadside Companion for Hungry Wanderers." For a chance to win, submit any favorite personal recipe to us by Dec. 31 at [arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submissions/submit-a-recipe/](https://arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submissions/submit-a-recipe/) to be entered in our drawing.



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: *Donna Chadick and her Christmas city*

Donna Chadick of Humnoke, a retired educator and a First Electric member for over 60 years, finds joy in her very own “Winter Wonderland.”

After a house fire in 1985 left her family with nothing but memories, Chadick sought happiness in a new way. She received a ceramic holiday church resembling the local Methodist Church from her mother-in-law, with whom she was very close. This church marked the beginning of what has now become the most unique and intricate Christmas display in Jefferson County.

With over a thousand pieces to be displayed, Chadick begins her set-up the week before Labor Day and spends multiple



First Electric member Donna Chadick proudly displays her festive Christmas city.

Although her collection might seem complete, Chadick can still find the perfect spot for new pieces given to her by friends and family. Each additional piece brings a little joy with more memories to add each coming year. To build on the memories, she will add the date and name of the individual who gifted the piece to the bottom. After the Christmas season has passed and a new year has begun, Chadick carefully stores each precious piece until it is time to build her Christmas city once again.



weeks perfecting its appearance. While walking through her winter wonderland, you will find Santa’s Village, a farming community, Times Square, the local school and so much more! It is a Christmas city built on the memories acquired year after year.

When we asked Chadick what inspired her to build her collection, her answer was quite simple, “I LOVE Christmas!” She truly brings the magic of Christmas to life through each one of her unique and special pieces, aligned to create what once was a small village and now an entire city.

**Merry Christmas**

Our offices will be closed in observance of Christmas on December 24 and 25. Normal business hours will return on December 26.

Crews will be on hand in the event of an outage. To report an outage, please call 888-827-3322.

# Capital credits returned to members in December

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## Who receives a capital credit refund?

When the Board of Directors reviews the financial position, they look at margins from multiple years. The retired year determines who will receive a capital credit refund, and any person who was an active member during those years could receive a refund, even if they are no longer a member. Again, the refund amount would be based on a percentage of the member's total accumulated capital credit balance. Members with a refund of more than \$50 will receive a check, while those getting less than \$50 will see their refund as a bill credit.



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# Merry Christmas!

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– J. Fitzgerald, VA



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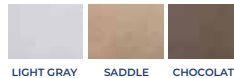
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Keynotes provided by Lisa Chase, The University of Vermont, Extension Professor: Natural Resources Specialist and Director of the Vermont Tourism Research Center

- Working Together to Embrace the Natural State - January 31
- The Most Interesting Things You've Learned - February 1

Again in 2025, we are hosting the  
Arkansas Grown & Made Market on Saturday, February 1.

The conference will include workshops for our partners:

- Arkansas State Horticulture Society
- Arkansas Association of Grape Growers
- Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association
- Arkansas Farmers Market Association
- Arkansas Agritourism Association
- Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts
- Arkansas Pecan Growers Association
- Mid America Strawberry Growers Association
- University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture

**For more information, go to  
[arkansasgrown.org/arkansas-grown-conference-expo](https://arkansasgrown.org/arkansas-grown-conference-expo)**





# Snapshots from our readers



Ivy is towing home tree-mendous cheer. Chris Martinez, Fayetteville.



Moo-y Christmas from twins Miss Kay and Sister. Wendy Savage, Hermitage.



Beckhym and his best friend, LoLo. Jordan Cleveland, Ratcliff.



Owen admiring the glow of old-fashioned lights. Rita Madson, Rogers.





Paisley is all dressed up to meet Santa.  
Alesha Layman, Farmington.



Jaiden got a new sister, Clover, for Christmas last year. Courtney Ellis, Beebe.



A water sprinkler, Christmas lights, three days of single-digit temps and a good snow. The prep would have been for nothing if a little girl was not willing to take pictures in the zero-degree temps that night. The results, well, unreal. Ava is an icy diamond princess. Jason Diamond, Norfolk.

Share your photos with your fellow Arkansas Living readers! Please submit high-resolution photos with detailed information about the pictures (who took it, where, who is in it, etc.) to: [arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submit-a-photo](http://arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submit-a-photo).



# Cultivating Cheer

*Holiday gifts for the gardener*






BY JANET B. CARSON

The holiday season is here, and it is a busy time of year. Gardening chores seem to take a back burner, as we are busy decorating, cooking, celebrating and shopping.

Picking the right gift for the right person can be daunting. If you have gardeners on your shopping list, here are some great ideas.



Plants	Tools	Reading material	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A bag of spring-blooming bulbs</li> <li>An amaryllis bulb</li> <li>A hardy tree or shrub</li> <li>Houseplants</li> <li>Herbs</li> <li>Seed packets</li> <li>A bonsai plant</li> <li>A poinsettia</li> <li>An orchid plant</li> <li>A gift certificate to a favorite nursery</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Top tool of the year: handheld miniature chain saw.</li> <li>Battery-operated tools that use the same battery pack: weedeaters, edgers, blowers, etc.</li> <li>Extra battery pack and/or charger</li> <li>Collapsible rake</li> <li>Pruning shears/loppers</li> <li>Shovels or hoes (large or handheld)</li> <li>Hose or sprinkler</li> <li>Wheelbarrow or cart</li> <li>Tiller, mini or large</li> <li>Lawnmower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garden book on a favorite topic like:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arkansas native plants</li> <li>• Raised beds</li> <li>• Wildflowers</li> <li>• Pollinators</li> <li>• Canning and preserving</li> <li>• Houseplants</li> <li>• Herbs</li> <li>• Vegetable gardening</li> <li>• Rose gardens</li> <li>• Gardening with kids</li> </ul> </li> <li>Subscription to a gardening magazine</li> <li>Garden journal</li> <li>Plant app. Picture This and Plant Snap are two good ones.</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garden gloves. No gardener ever has enough!</li> <li>Yard art, gazing balls, wind chimes, metal work, garden flags</li> <li>Rain gauge or weather station</li> <li>Birdfeeders, birdbath or birdhouses</li> <li>Trellis or plant stakes</li> <li>Containers of all sizes</li> <li>Raised bed garden kit</li> <li>Indoor hydroponic garden</li> <li>A load of compost or bags of good soil</li> <li>Garden fertilizer</li> </ul> 



While some of these items will apply to any type of gardening, it would help to know something about the type of gardening your recipients do, so you can personalize the gifts. Are they vegetable gardeners, flower gardeners, container gardeners or do they do it all? You also have a wide price range to choose from, from a major gift to a stocking stuffer.

*Happy gardening and happy holidays!*



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# Ho-Ho-Ho-liday Delights

*Whip up these festive, Santa-approved dishes*

RECIPES AND PHOTOS  
BY JULIANA GOODWIN

## Mocha Pecan Squares

Makes 12-16 bars.

- |   |     |                            |
|---|-----|----------------------------|
| <b>Crust</b>                              | 2   | eggs                       |
| 1 (15.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix       | 2   | tablespoons cocoa powder   |
| 1 large egg, beaten                       | 3   | teaspoons instant coffee   |
| 1 stick unsalted butter, melted           | 3   | tablespoons butter, melted |
| <b>Filling</b>                            | 3/4 | cup pecans, chopped        |
| 1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk | 2/3 | cup chocolate chips        |

Heat oven to 350.

**For crust:** In a medium bowl, mix together cake mix, egg and butter. Press into a greased 13x9 pan.



**For filling:** In a separate medium bowl, beat together sweetened condensed milk, eggs, cocoa powder, coffee and butter until combined. Pour on crust.

Sprinkle on pecans and chocolate chips.

Bake for 30-36 minutes until set. Allow to cool before slicing.

## Pimento Cheese Shrimp Dip

Makes 6-8 servings.

- |  |       |   |
|--|-------|---|
| 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened | 2 2/3 | cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided                               |
| 1 (4-ounce) jar diced pimentos, drained    | 1     | cup canned corn, drained  |
| 1/2 cup mayonnaise                         | 1     | (12-ounce) bag extra small shrimp, peeled and tails removed, thawed |
| 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder                 |       | Tortilla chips or baguette slices for serving                       |
| 1/4 teaspoon onion salt                    |       |   |
| 1/4 teaspoon smoked paprika                |       |   |

Heat oven to 400.

In a medium bowl, stir together cream cheese, pimentos, mayonnaise, garlic powder, onion salt and smoked paprika until well-combined. Stir in 2 cups cheddar cheese. Stir in corn and shrimp, and place in a casserole dish. Top with



remaining cheese.

Bake for 15-20 minutes or until bubbling. Serve with tortilla chips or baguette slices.



## Cranberry Orange French Toast Casserole with Cranberry Syrup

Makes 8-10 servings.

### Casserole

- Butter for pan
- 1 loaf French bread, sliced
- 7 eggs
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1/3 cup heavy cream
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- Zest from half an orange

- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

### Cranberry syrup

- 1 1/2 cups cranberry juice
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cinnamon stick
- Zest from half an orange
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 4 teaspoons water

**For casserole:** Heavily butter a 13x9 pan. Layer most French bread slices in pan, filling in holes and overlapping when necessary. You will not use all the bread.

In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, half-and-half, heavy cream, sugar, vanilla extract, cinnamon and orange zest until well-combined. Evenly pour on bread, turning slices so they are soaked.

Sprinkle dried cranberries and evenly drizzle butter on top. Allow to rest for 30 minutes while preparing syrup. Heat oven to 350.

Bake casserole for 40-45 minutes or until set.

**For cranberry syrup:** In a saucepan, bring cranberry juice, sugar, cinnamon stick and orange zest to a boil for 5 minutes. Reduce to a simmer for 10 minutes or until mixture reduces slightly.

In a small bowl, mix together cornstarch and water until smooth. Add cornstarch slurry to syrup, and bring to a boil to thicken. Remove from heat and cool.

Remove cinnamon stick before serving with casserole.



*This month's web exclusive recipe:*

## Cranberry Orange Cardamom Cookies

More recipes on our website:  
[arkansaslivingmagazine.com](http://arkansaslivingmagazine.com)

*Juliana Goodwin is a food columnist, cookbook author and avid traveler. If you have a question, email [julianalovesfood23@gmail.com](mailto:julianalovesfood23@gmail.com).*



# Sweeten the Season

*Cookies 'yule' love this Christmas*

## Peanut Butter Turtle Bars

Makes between 24-30 bars, depending on slicing.

Nonstick cooking spray	2	cups pecan halves
1/2 cup sugar	1	(11-ounce)
1/2 cup brown sugar,		package caramels,
firmly packed		unwrapped
1 stick butter,	2	tablespoons half-
softened		and-half or milk
1/2 cup creamy peanut	1	teaspoon vanilla
butter		extract
1 egg	1	(11.5-ounce
		package) milk
1 1/4 cups self-rising flour		chocolate chips

Heat oven to 375. Spray a 13x9 pan with nonstick cooking spray and set aside.

In a large bowl using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat together sugar, brown sugar, butter, peanut butter and egg, scraping bowl sides often, until creamy (1-2 minutes). Reduce speed to low, add self-rising flour, and beat until dough forms (2-3 minutes).

Press dough evenly in bottom of prepared pan. Sprinkle pecan halves evenly on dough, gently pressing down. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until crust is lightly browned around edges.

Add caramels and half-and-half to a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until smooth (6-11 minutes). Stir in vanilla extract.

Evenly drizzle caramel on pecans, and sprinkle top with chocolate chips. Allow to cool completely before cutting into bars.

*Sheryl Little, Cabot*

*Notes: I originated this recipe about 10 years ago. As soon as my family tried it, it became an instant hit. These bars freeze very well.*



## Old-Fashioned Gingersnaps

4 cups flour	3 sticks butter, softened
2 teaspoons baking soda	2 cups sugar, divided
1 teaspoon salt	1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon cinnamon	1/2 cup molasses
1 teaspoon ground ginger	2 eggs
1 teaspoon ground cloves	1/2 cup sugar for rolling

Heat oven to 375.

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, ginger and cloves.

In a separate large bowl, beat together butter, 1 1/2 cups sugar and brown sugar with an electric mixer on medium speed. Add molasses and eggs, and mix until well-incorporated. Reduce mixer speed, and slowly add in flour mixture until well-combined.

Scoop out dough, and roll into 1-inch balls. Roll dough balls in remaining sugar to coat.

Place on greased or parchment-lined cookie sheets at least 1 inch apart. Bake for 9-11 minutes. Allow to cool for a minute before transferring to wire racks to finish cooling.

*Melissa Williams, Alexander*

*Notes: I make these every Christmas, usually starting Dec. 1. It makes the house smell like the holidays. My Aunt Viv first shared this recipe with me, and I loved it from the start.*

*It's great to make the dough ahead of time and freeze it into balls. Once frozen, put frozen dough balls in a freezer bag. Before baking, allow them to thaw for about 5 minutes. Slightly flatten dough with fingertips on prepared cookie sheets. Bake at 375 for 10-13 minutes.*

## Christmas Cake Mix Cookies

Makes about 15 cookies.

1 (15.25-ounce) box white cake mix	2 eggs
1 stick butter, melted	Red and green candies (like M&M's)

Heat oven to 350.

Add cake mix, butter and eggs to a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer (or by hand) until well-combined.

Stir in red and green candies. Drop dough onto parchment-lined cookie sheets. (I prefer a Pampered Chef baking stone.) Bake until cookies are set, about 10 minutes, depending on oven.

*Marla Davis, Wynne*

*Note: Cake mix flavors and candy colors can be changed for season.*

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### Featured this month *By Victor Fleming*

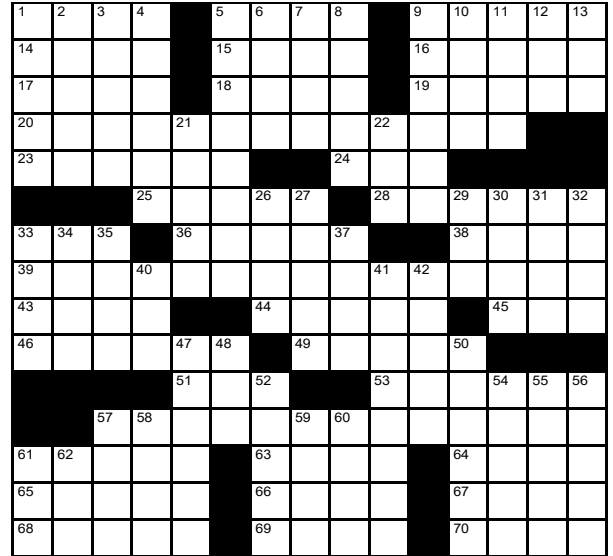
#### ACROSS

- 1 "The Drew Carey Show" character
- 5 Ambulance workers, in brief
- 9 Act moody
- 14 Air freshener target
- 15 When doubled, a fish
- 16 Concerto finale, often
- 17 "De \_\_\_\_" ("Gracias" follower)
- 18 Lead-in to "fall"
- 19 Maureen Dowd pieces
- 20 Catch a presentation of this
- 23 \_\_\_\_ grits
- 24 Actress McClanahan
- 25 Barely burn
- 28 Brain teaser
- 33 1 or 11 in blackjack
- 36 "Lovergirl" singer \_\_\_\_ Marie

- 38 Bang shut
- 39 Watch an organization's this
- 43 "Aquarius" musical
- 44 Descendant
- 45 Lair
- 46 Avoid capture
- 49 Early Mongolian
- 51 "I'm \_\_\_\_ ears!"
- 53 Disorderly one
- 57 Be sure your kid makes this
- 61 Hold off
- 63 Reid of acting
- 64 11-time Pro Bowl tackle Willie ... or Willie's mom Andree, who sat on the Arkansas Supreme Court and Court of Appeals
- 65 Deliver addresses
- 66 Barely makes, with "out"
- 67 "While you're \_\_\_\_ ..."
- 68 Biblical king
- 69 "I \_\_\_\_ my case"
- 70 Business card nos.

#### DOWN

- 1 Calendar page



- 2 \_\_\_\_ potatoes
- 3 Computer add-on
- 4 Shiraz residents
- 5 Item left unguarded by a goalie
- 6 "The Sabbath" painter Chagall
- 7 "\_\_\_\_ she blows!"
- 8 Shankar's instrument
- 9 In need of a fix
- 10 Cowhand's cord
- 11 Unique person
- 12 Like 2025, but not 2024
- 13 Uno plus uno
- 21 Condo divisions
- 22 Actor's reminder
- 26 Beats
- 27 Verb for the General Assembly
- 29 Mideast map abbr.
- 30 "\_\_\_\_ to help"
- 31 Cobbled together
- 32 Prayer-ending word
- 33 Pine (for)
- 34 \_\_\_\_ Addams (The New Yorker cartoonist's signature)
- 35 Singer Clapton
- 37 Atlas section
- 40 Lyricist Gershwin
- 41 Tuesday special at Black Angus
- 42 Diarist Nin
- 47 Arranged in groups of two, with "up"
- 48 Ernie of golf
- 50 Find very funny
- 52 Bottle capacity
- 54 Certain investment, for short
- 55 Dot-com commerce
- 56 Loads and loads
- 57 A long way off
- 58 Verb for the governor
- 59 Accept without complaining
- 60 Cinco less dos
- 61 Outburst from Homer
- 62 "Prior to," poetically

CROSSWORD ANSWERS ON PAGE 41

Email feedback to [judgevic@gmail.com](mailto:judgevic@gmail.com)

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# Savoring Siloam Springs at The Park House Kitchen + Bar



STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY ROB ROEDEL

Siloam Springs is a historic city in northwest Arkansas, named for the purported healing powers of the spring water feeding Sager Creek. Across from the creek, in the city's revitalized downtown area, sits The Park House Kitchen + Bar, a favorite downtown gathering and dining location.

The Park House building was constructed in 1897 and operated as The Park Hotel. In 2018, Alma Sanchez and her fiancé, Wesley Nicholson,



Owner Alma Sanchez opened The Park House Kitchen + Bar in Siloam Springs in 2018.



## THE EATING ESSENTIALS

### The Park House Kitchen + Bar

201 W. University St., No. 2665  
Siloam Springs  
(479) 373-3731  
[facebook.com/TheParkHouseKitchenandbar](#)

#### Hours of Operation

Monday: 11 a.m.-9 p.m.  
Tuesday-Friday: 11 a.m.-10 p.m.  
Saturday: 9 a.m.-10 p.m.  
Sunday: 10 a.m.-3 p.m.



opened the renovated structure as The Park House Kitchen + Bar. The renovation included removing walls on the first floor to improve natural light and the line of sight, so diners could enjoy the pristine, relaxing views of the creek and park. The couple also added an outside patio and a stage for music performances, which take place Thursday through Sunday evenings.

Alma was raised in Hardy and worked in a country cooking restaurant while she was growing up. She has 12 siblings, which meant that every meal was like cooking at a restaurant. She attended college to be a teacher, but always kept a job in the service industry. In the end, she decided to follow her passion of running her own restaurant. "It has been a challenge, but I truly love what I do," she said. Her young daughters, Natalie and Lucy, can often be seen helping at the restaurant.

I could tell that Alma has a deep passion for downtown Siloam Springs, as she talked about the outstanding business partnerships that exist. She said that Siloam Springs is a very family-focused city, and her restaurant participates in every event possible.

The menu at The Park House reflects Alma's creativity with food. She delivered a new favorite treat to my table — Avocado Fries. The avocado slices, panko-breaded and lightly fried to a beautiful golden brown, had just the right amount of crispness and were served



The Park House Kitchen + Bar's Chicken and Waffles are served with jalapeño maple syrup for a sweet and spicy kick.

with house-prepared chipotle ranch dressing.

Next, she served some Reuben Eggrolls that were out-of-sight good. However, my favorite appetizer was the Pimento Cheese Fritters with homemade pepper jelly glaze. The hush-puppy-like fritters were filled with freshly made pimento cheese, breaded and fried to perfection; the jelly enhanced the flavor experience.

Alma developed an incredibly unique menu item while pregnant — the Blackberry Bacon Grilled Cheese Sandwich. A craving that has become one of the restaurant's most popular selections, the sandwich features



A pregnancy craving led Alma Sanchez to create the unique and flavorful Blackberry Bacon Grilled Cheese Sandwich.



The Park House Kitchen + Bar is located in a renovated building that dates back to 1897.


to a variety of burger options, The Park House offers wraps, including a Roasted Veggie Hummus Wrap with roasted vegetables, spring mix, hummus, goat cheese, basil pesto and balsamic glaze. Served on a croissant, and featuring toasted almonds and lettuce, the signature Chicken Salad Sandwich is a local favorite.

Desserts include Carrot Cake and an outstanding Dutch Apple Pie. I tried the Turtle Brownie Sundae, a warm brownie, candied pecans and a scoop of vanilla ice cream, topped with caramel sauce, chocolate sauce, whipped cream and a cherry. It was as good as a sincere hug from an old friend.

I loved the savory and sweet Chicken and Waffles with a jalapeño maple syrup that elevated the dish to a whole new level. Better yet, the Chicken and Waffles are available for dinner and brunch. Brunch and

grilled sourdough bread, homemade blackberry jam, melted Swiss cheese, crispy bacon and fresh jalapeños. You may be skeptical, but you will like it, just like I did.

The delicious Jalapeño Popper Burger included lean ground beef, bacon, fresh sliced jalapeños and cheddar and goat cheeses. In addition

breakfast are offered on the weekends with specialties like the Monte Cristo Sandwich, Huevos Rancheros and an impressive lineup of morning specialties. 

Dining recommendations? Contact Rob Roedel at [rob.roedel@aecc.com](mailto:rob.roedel@aecc.com).

## CROSSWORD ANSWERS

for puzzle on page 38

S	L	E	T		T	S	E	R	D	O	R	E	H
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# Calendar



Lights of the Delta



Capitol Lighting Ceremony



Arkansas Pecan Festival



Wreaths Across America

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

## Dec. 1-27

### Lights of the Delta

Blytheville, [lightsofthedelta.com](http://lightsofthedelta.com)

## Dec. 1-31

### Christmas at the Park

Jonesboro, [christmasattheparknea.com](http://christmasattheparknea.com)

## Dec. 5

### El Dorado Christmas Parade

El Dorado, [goeldorado.com](http://goeldorado.com)

### Hamburg Holidays Parade

Hamburg, [cityofhamburg.com](http://cityofhamburg.com)

## Dec. 6

### Jonesboro Christmas Parade

Jonesboro, [downtownjonesboro.com](http://downtownjonesboro.com)

### Oaklawn Opening Day

Hot Springs, [oaklawn.com](http://oaklawn.com)

## Dec. 6-8

### Arkansas Craft Guild Annual Christmas Showcase

Little Rock, [arkansascraftguild.org](http://arkansascraftguild.org)

## Dec. 7

### Arkansas Pecan Festival

Keo, [facebook.com/keopecanfest](https://facebook.com/keopecanfest)

### Capitol Lighting Ceremony

Little Rock, [littlerock.com](http://littlerock.com)

### Cabot's Celebrate the Season

Cabot, [cabotparks.com/267/Cabots-Celebrate-the-Season](http://cabotparks.com/267/Cabots-Celebrate-the-Season)

### Downtown Joy Fest

Jonesboro, [downtownjonesboro.com](http://downtownjonesboro.com)

### Merrytime in Magnolia

Magnolia, [magnoliachamber.com](http://magnoliachamber.com)

### Searcy Christmas Parade

Searcy, [experiencesearcy.com](http://experiencesearcy.com)

## Dec. 7-15

### Three Trees Cowboy Church Drive-thru Live Nativity

Wynne, [threetreescowboychurch.com/live-nativity](http://threetreescowboychurch.com/live-nativity)

## Dec. 9

### Hot Springs Christmas Parade

Hot Springs, [hotsprings.org](http://hotsprings.org)

## Dec. 13-14

### Christmas and Candlelight

Historic Washington State Park, [arkansasstateparks.com](http://arkansasstateparks.com)

## Dec. 14

### Wreaths Across America

Little Rock National Cemetery, [facebook.com/WAALITTLE ROCK](https://facebook.com/WAALITTLE ROCK)

### Bentonville Christmas Parade

Bentonville, [downtownbentonville.org/event/parade](http://downtownbentonville.org/event/parade)



# Merry & Bright

Written by Kelli Hilburn, Better Beginnings Program Administrator

Holidays and winter break usually mean extra family time. We hope your family has lots of fun playing, learning and making memories.

Learning? Oh, yes! Research tells us children learn best through play. Every experience is an opportunity for learning.

## Merry

In the season of gifting, choosing toys can be a real challenge. Make your gifting more merry with a few simple guidelines.

Safety first. Abide by the recommended age on the packaging. These indicators are based on safety as well as your child's ability to enjoy the toy. Always inspect toys for sharp edges and removable small parts.

Less is more. The less a toy does, the more opportunity your child has to create and learn from it. A truck is usually just a truck. A block can be anything.

Get toy suggestions and learn more about age-appropriate toys in our free family resource, *Choose the Right Toys*, on our website.

## Bright

You are an important part of your child's development.

Through play, you help your child learn communication skills and start them on the path to learning. When you focus your attention on your child, you show them how important they are and help them develop self-esteem. Your presence brightens their day.

## The best gift

Give your child the best gift – a solid foundation for learning and success in life through quality early care and education.

Click the orange banner at ARBetterBeginnings.com to find star-rated Better Beginnings' quality early childhood educators who prepare children for kindergarten with positive experiences, research-based curriculum, and learning through play.

**Happy Holidays!**



Scan the code or click the *Parents and Families* tab on our homepage to locate the *Family Resource Library*.



Better Beginnings is administered by the Arkansas Department of Education.



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