

A Capitol Christmas

Shining state tradition endures

Page 8

Plus:

Goodwill in Guatemala
Grapette: Pop Pioneer
Ozarks to Olympics
Merry Morsels



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COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE



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ON THE COVER

Each December, crowds gather to watch the Arkansas State Capitol come aglow. This year's lighting ceremony begins at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 6.

Photo Courtesy of Arkansas Secretary of State



LISA DOUGLAS

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ROB ROEDEL

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President and CEO

Vernon "Buddy" Hasten

Chief External Affairs Officer

Bill Gossage

Senior Director of Corporate Communications

Rob Roedel

Editor

Jennifer Christman Cia

Associate Editor

Nancy Moore

Advertising Coordinator

Lana McLeod

Editorial Assistant

Rachel Blocker

Graphic Designer

Dixie Rogers

Copy Editor

Denise Dorton

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Arkansas Living
1 Cooperative Way, Little Rock, AR 72209
(501) 570-2311 Email: arkansasliving@aeci.com
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 510, Little Rock, AR 72203
Advertising Department: Lana McLeod
(501) 570-2312 Email: advertising@aeci.com

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A Toast to Tradition

BY JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

A favorite part of editing Arkansas Living is preparing, styling and photographing one of our Reader Recipes. It's something I make time to do every month, and it always brings me joy — and a giant mess. You should see my kitchen by the time I'm done!

Still, it's worth every dirty dish and sticky spoon piled in the sink, because it connects me to the heart of our readers and the warmth of sharing something cherished and homemade.

This month's dreamy, ice-creamy White Christmas Punch, contributed by Taylor Smith of Tyronza (see page 34), gave me the perfect excuse to hoist out my late grandmother Kit's heavy crystal punch bowl, with its hefty little mugs and delicate ladle. (Yes, that's her holly plate under the sugar cookies on that page, too!)

I don't have specific memories of Kit, a gracious entertainer, using the punch bowl. But I know she treasured it, along with her many dishes and her love of collecting that she passed on to me.

Once a staple at every holiday, shower and open house, punch bowls like hers brimmed with something foamy, fizzy and festive. Now they're usually tucked away in attics, dulled with dust and longing for another chance to shine.

I'm embarrassed to admit that Kit's beautiful bowl had been buried in the back of the buffet since my last move 10 years ago. Washing it, drying it and seeing its luster return felt like a small act of restoration of both the glass and the memories.

There's something meaningful about bringing pieces like this back, not just for their sparkle, but for what they represent. When we use our sentimental treasures — Mom's mixing bowl, Aunt's candleholders, Grandpa's carving knife — we're setting a table that includes the loved ones we miss most this time of year.



Grandmother Kit's punch bowl sparkles again, ready to stir up a little Christmas cheer.

This Christmas, reach for something that reminds you of those who made the holidays special. Hang the time-worn ornaments. Savor the gloriously fattening family recipe. Share the stories that make you smile — and pour yourself a little punch while you're at it.

Cheers,

Jennifer

Jennifer Christman Cia
jennifer.cia@aeci.com



Christmas Lights in Guatemala

BY VERNON "BUDDY" HASTEN

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



A month ago, I took a trip to rural Guatemala to participate in a village lighting ceremony. It was both humbling and inspirational.

The Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas participate in the National Rural Electric Cooperative

Association (NRECA) International program, and this year, our mission was to Guatemala. NRECA International's mission is to improve the quality of life of rural people around the world by providing them access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

I think of it more simply — electric cooperatives brought light and opportunity to rural America, and now we are sharing that light and those values with the world. Since 1962, NRECA International has brought electricity to more than 220 million people in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and Arkansas has been a part of that program.

Over the last decade, co-ops from across America have sent 567 lineworkers to Guatemala, building 155 miles of line and bringing electricity to more than 2,500 homes. Arkansas alone has contributed 87 of those lineworkers and 30 miles of line.

This year, the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas sent 16 lineworkers — Operation Razorback — to a remote village in Guatemala with no access to electricity. We built electric lines to connect that village and bring them electricity for the first time in their lives. Our lineworkers spent three weeks in the jungle building six miles of electric line to bring electricity and opportunity to some of the poorest people on earth.

Our lineworkers had no access to bucket trucks or modern equipment, but rather they built this system the

old-fashioned way — by climbing wood poles and using trucks or manpower to pull the lines up on the poles. The local villagers were given the mission to clear a path in the jungle for the electric lines, and they did so with machetes, axes and saws. All of this was no easy task. It was hot, humid, hard work — true sweat equity.

Power and purpose

Seeing what they accomplished, I could not have been prouder to be part of the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas. Our lineworkers were amazing ambassadors of our nation, our state and our organization. This experience is truly



The Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas recently sent 16 lineworkers to assist a remote village in Guatemala.



La Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad (EMRE) honors President and CEO Vernon "Buddy" Hasten for Arkansas' role in helping bring first-time electric power to families in Guatemala.

transformative and in some cases, life-changing. Even with the hot and hard work in rough living conditions, every one of these lineworkers told me that they really wanted to come back in 2027 when we do our next project.

I know our lineworkers love their jobs, being the heroes that keep the lights on in rural Arkansas. They take great pride in restoring power after hurricanes and storms, and in seeing the relief on people's faces when the lights come

back on. However, there is something even more powerful and significant about seeing the joy and hope in someone's face who is seeing the light for the first time. It is that feeling and that sense of purpose and accomplishment that make every one of these lineworkers want to come back.

I toured the village with our lineworkers, and it was like ➤

entering a time machine and going back 100 years. Homes with dirt floors, no running water, women washing clothes in the river, villagers bathing in the river and women hauling water to their homes and cooking over wood fires with no chimney and smoke filling the rooms.

Everything is accomplished with manual labor, and almost all the people's time and energy is expended just to survive. It is humbling to stand in the home of a family that has almost nothing, knowing that you have almost everything back home. The only difference is that you had the good fortune of being born in the most amazing country in the world. I also toured their church, which was the pride of the village and much nicer than their homes. As I stood in the middle of the village looking down the main dirt road, it hit me that this would be the first year the village would be able to hang lights to celebrate Christmas.

Heritage and hope

The tradition of Christmas lights began in 17th-century Germany, where families attached lit candles to their Christmas trees to symbolize the light of Christ in the world. Putting a star on the top of the tree symbolized the Star of Bethlehem, which led the Magi to the birthplace of Jesus. Putting an angel on top of the tree symbolized the angels who announced the birth of Jesus.

As German immigrants came to America, this tradition spread with them. Thomas Edison made this tradition much safer by inventing electric lights. In 1882, his partner, Edward H. Johnson, created the first string of lights for a Christmas tree, with 80 red, white and blue bulbs. In 1895, President Grover Cleveland decorated the White House Christmas tree with electric lights, and in 1923, President Calvin Coolidge lit the national Christmas tree with over 3,000 lights. In 1938, Arkansas Secretary of State Crip Hall started lighting the State Capitol dome on the first Saturday of December.

(Read the heartfelt reason behind this tradition in our cover story on page 8.)

As the cost of lights and electricity decreased in America, this tradition spread to homes across the country. Today, Americans purchase 150 million Christmas light sets every year, and it is estimated that over 80 million homes are decorated with lights every Christmas season. A fun electrical fact: Christmas lights account for 6% of the nation's electric load each December.

Standing on a dirt road in Guatemala, I realized that this year, when they say "Feliz Navidad" to each other, they, too, will be able to hang Christmas lights, and Arkansas had a part in spreading that light and joy to the world. 🌍



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP President and CEO Vernon "Buddy" Hasten shares candy and smiles with children.

Over the last decade, Arkansas has sent 87 lineworkers to build 30 miles of line through projects with NRECA International.

Future lineworkers in the making try on the crew's hard hats during the lighting project.

In this rural village, meals are still prepared in kitchens with dirt floors, using traditional methods. With electricity, everyday tasks will become a little easier.

Without access to bucket trucks or modern equipment, lineworkers climb poles to manually pull power lines.

PHOTOS BY CHANCE ALLMON



Cooperatives join forces to fight hunger

On Nov. 7, employees from Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc., Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation and First Electric Cooperative joined forces for the Newsradio 102.9 KARN United We Feed Food Drive benefiting the Arkansas Foodbank.

Monetary donations totaled \$2,600 — plus a \$5,000 check from First Electric's members through their Operation Round-Up program.

Escorted by three First Electric bucket trucks, AECE/AECC President and CEO Vernon "Buddy" Hasten rolled up in true cooperative style with truckloads full of nonperishable food donated by employees.

"Because we are Better Connected, Together, the efforts and kindness of the more than 2,300 electric cooperative employees throughout Arkansas make a significant impact on Arkansans and greatly benefit the communities we serve," Hasten said.

Arkansas electric cooperatives contributed \$7,600 and truckloads of food to the Arkansas Foodbank to help feed families across the state.



CHANCE ALLMON



CHANCE ALLMON



CHANCE ALLMON

Where Is It?

Welcome back to our hidden object contest, "Where Is It?"

In November's issue, we hid a sweater in the Gardening with Janet column about fall foliage. Joked one correct reader: "Page 30, lower right picture of sweet gum leaves. ... Talk about branching into fashion."

Winners selected in our drawing to receive an Arkansas Living mug were:

Lillian Moore, Pochontas (Clay County Electric Cooperative)

Sidney Odom, Cabot (First Electric Cooperative)

Steve Sabatini, Springdale (Ozarks Electric Cooperative)

Dee Ann Rothrock, Clinton (Petit Jean Electric Cooperative)

Wendy Thompson, Bearden (nonmember)

For December, we've hidden this nutcracker. And finding him will be a tough nut to crack! Enter by Dec. 15 via the "Where Is It?" link on the homepage of arkansaslivingmagazine.com, or go directly to arkansaslivingmagazine.com/where-is-it-contest/.

Or mail 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: Lorna Roush, Clarksville (Arkansas Valley Electric Cooperative).



TRIVIA

- Grover Cleveland was the first president to have a Christmas tree with electric lights in the White House.
- When typing on a standard QWERTY keyboard, your left hand does 56% of the typing.
- Before alarm clocks became popularized, people would pay "knocker-uppers" to knock on their windows.
- Alligators and crocodiles do not typically die from old age, but from disease, starvation, accident or falling prey to another animal. They exhibit negligible senescence, meaning their organs show little decline as they age. Some have lived for more than 90 years.
- Elephants can create "purring" sounds, low frequency noises created by exhaling air, to communicate with one another.
- Gatorade was created by the University of Florida College of Medicine for the football team, the Gators, after the assistant coach inquired about why the football players were losing so much weight.
- Lake Ouachita is the largest lake in Arkansas, covering over 40,000 acres.
- The term Christmas hails from the Anglo-Saxon English (450 to 1150 A.D.) phrase "cristes maesse," which is the equivalent of Christ's Mass.
- "Christmas, my child, is love in action. Every time we love, every time we give, it's Christmas." — Dale Evans, actress



A Capitol Christmas

Shining state tradition endures



Festive fireworks will light up the sky as the Arkansas State Capitol sparkles to life during the Dec. 6 lighting ceremony.

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE

BY JACK SCHNEDLER

Fireworks bursting above the freshly lighted Arkansas State Capitol on Dec. 6 will celebrate the Christmas season. This joyous tradition began modestly 87 years ago, when strips of red and blue lights were hung from the domed landmark's cupola.

Now the Arkansas State Capitol Lighting Ceremony is a grand event drawing a rapt audience the first Saturday each December to marvel at the Capitol's dazzling display of lights. That colorful scene is followed by the fireworks, which can rival the state's best Independence Day pyrotechnics.

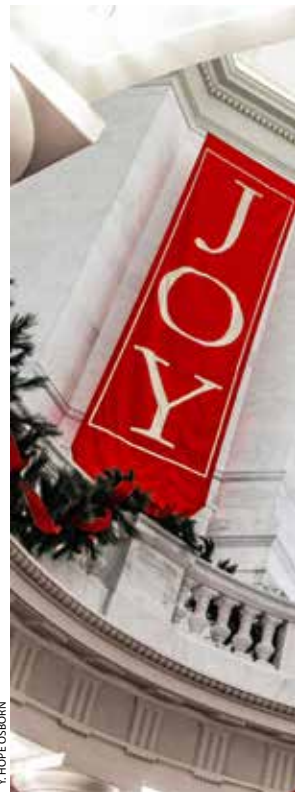
Legacy of light

A heartwarming act of kindness in 1938 by then Secretary of State Claris "Crip" Hall inaugurated the yearly event, as explained by Samantha Boyd, director of communications for Secretary of State Cole Jester's office.

"Crip Hall wanted to do something special for the patients at Arkansas Children's Hospital, which sits south of the Capitol," Boyd says. "He had suffered from polio as a boy and understood what the children were undergoing as they faced life-threatening diseases. So, he wanted to



Visitors are dazzled by the Capitol's sparkling Christmas decorations, turning the annual visit into a joyful family tradition.



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE

Y. HOPE OSBORN

lift their spirits during the holiday season with the display of lights.

“In step with Secretary Hall’s example, we continue this tradition of keeping love, kindness and compassion in our hearts. When we light the Capitol, the children across the way can partake of the fun as they gather around the windows to watch.”

In 1941, the Capitol illumination took place on Dec. 10, just three days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In proceeding with the ceremony amid wide public anxiety, Hall explained that “in such unusual times, the people of Arkansas need to have a little reassuring normalness,” as reported by David Ware, now the state historian and Arkansas State Archives director.

With combat raging in December 1942, the Capitol lighting was more subdued. The

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE



COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE



ABOVE Located in the Capitol rotunda, the 25-foot-tall Christmas tree is decorated by members of the Secretary of State’s staff.

LEFT It takes employees three to five days to decorate the interior and exterior of the Capitol.



The Arkansas State Capitol rotunda shines with holiday spirit.

Nativity scene featured nontraditional figures that included a soldier, a sailor, a Marine and a Red Cross nurse standing guard over the Holy Family.

As global conflict continued in 1943, the Capitol’s exterior went unlighted. A 16-foot fir sent by Arizona’s governor was set up in the rotunda. The traditions were restored in December 1945, once the war ended. That set the stage for the celebrations in the decades ahead.

The late Jennings Osborne, a Little Rock businessman and philanthropist, installed one of his spectacular light shows at the Capitol from 1995 to 2002. He bedecked the building for the holidays with “what seemed like millions of white lights,” according to Ware. “The dome lights were in constant motion, gaining the nickname ‘Disco Dome.’ It was said to be especially enjoyed by the patients at Arkansas Children’s Hospital.” ➤

Still shining bright

One 21st-century change in the State Capitol's holiday practice is the use of an artificial tree rather than a live evergreen in the rotunda. The faux tree, standing 25 feet high, is decorated by members of the Secretary of State's staff.

"It's a very special time for the dozen or so people who do the decorating," Boyd says. "It's also a lot of hard work. There are nearly 7,000 lights on the tree alone, along with more than 500 ornaments and more than 600 feet of garland. It takes three to five days to get all the decorating done, including the putting up of 77,487 lights on the Capitol's exterior. That's the exact number, an awesome total."

The Dec. 6 lighting ceremony is set to begin at 5:30 p.m. outside the State Capitol, with Jester and a representative of Easter Seals flipping a large switch. The event's mistress of ceremonies will be Daniela Dehaghani, multimedia journalist at Little Rock's KATV Channel 7. The musical performer will be singer Hannah Banks, an attorney in Jester's office.

Following the fireworks, visitors can come inside the Capitol to admire the Christmas decorations, see Santa Claus in his workshop, view the first-floor exhibit gallery on the history of Santa Claus or watch wood carving by Charlie Huie. The 2025 Capitol Christmas ornament will be for sale in the gift shop.

Through the end of December, the building will be open for extended hours: 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday and 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Saturday. Some 180 school choirs from across the state will perform during the two-week "Sounds of the Season" program of carols and other holiday songs.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Santa makes a merry stop at the Arkansas State Capitol Lighting Ceremony, spreading cheer and delighting children with holiday magic.

Festive photo ops throughout the State Capitol create picture-perfect moments worthy of every holiday Instagram feed.

Dressed in festive holiday attire, a visitor strikes a merry pose among twinkling reindeer and sparkling décor.

An aerial view of the State Capitol is the kind of magical sight usually reserved for Santa and his reindeer on Christmas Eve.

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS SECRETARY OF STATE



Gleaming ornaments sparkle under the Capitol's glow.

The glow of goodwill

Visitors entering through the building's bronze doors will pass under a lighted word posted in 1986 by Secretary of State Bill McCuen to mark the 45th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack. In bold capital letters, it spells "PEACE."

That gentle word, says Boyd, "illuminates our State Capitol during the holidays to remind us of the precious goal we all share for peace in the world and love to our neighbors."

ARKANSAS STATE CAPITOL LIGHTING CEREMONY

500 Woodlane St., Little Rock

Dec. 6, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Free lighting ceremony and fireworks

littlerock.com/events/annual-festivals-events/state-capitol-lighting



More Metro Merriment

The Big Little Rock Holiday Parade starts at 3 p.m. Dec. 6. It's the first half of the festive doubleheader that wraps up with the evening's Arkansas State Capitol Lighting Ceremony.

"Candy Cane Christmas" is the theme of the annual parade beginning at Broadway and West Markham streets. Its decorated floats, marching groups, horseback riders and other participants head east on Markham and finish in the River Market District near Interstate 30. Details can be found at littlerock.com/events/annual-festivals-events/the-big-little-rock-holiday-parade.



COURTESY OF LITTLE ROCK CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



COURTESY OF LITTLE ROCK CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

From 3-5:30 p.m. Dec. 6, families can visit **Santa Claus at the Statehouse Convention Center**, 101 E. Markham St., and take their photos with the bearded purveyor of Christmas gifts.

The 47th annual **Arkansas Craft Guild Christmas Showcase** is also happening. Hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Dec. 5 and Dec. 6, and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 7. For sale will be a variety of crafts made by

members. See details at arkansascraftguild.org.

The North Little Rock Elks Christmas Parade is scheduled to start at 2 p.m. Dec. 14. It will travel along Main Street from 22nd Street to Washington Street. Visit elks1004.org/parade. 



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Pop Pioneer

Grapette's formula still fuels innovation 85 years later

BY CHRIS HOOTEN

Tyndle Fooks did not dawdle after graduating from Camden High School in 1918.

In seven dizzying years, Fooks (pronounced Folks) studied at a business school in Kentucky, took a bookkeeping job there, jumped into the timber business with his dad back in Camden, briefly attended Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, operated a sawmill in Louisiana, established and ran a wholesale lumber company in Memphis, married Gulnare Thornton of Camden, and upon returning to Camden in early 1925, purchased a service (gas) station. As if to say, "For my next logic-defying venture ...," one year later, Fooks sold his successful service station to buy another business he knew nothing about, a struggling soft drink bottler down the street.

Fooks, however, again proved a quick study. He would not be deterred by the economic crash of 1929 or the Great Depression of the next decade, as creditors wondered if they would ever get payment, much less the interest. They got both. Fooks developed multiple flavors of soft drink concentrate, peddled them regionally and, by 1934, topped \$100,000 in sales. By the end of the 1930s, "Fooks Flavors" numbered 150 and sold nationwide with grape as the most popular.

Then 38, Fooks spied a sweet opportunity. He would

conduct thousands of experiments to develop and perfect his own grape-flavored soda and bottle it in Camden, the headquarters city of Ouachita Electric Cooperative. In May 1940, he launched Grapette locally, and by the end of the decade, Grapette skyrocketed to the



ABOVE Grapette celebrates a fizzy milestone with 85 years of grape expectations.

LEFT In May 1940, Grapette launched in Camden and before 1950 had 200 bottlers nationwide.

No. 7 soft drink company in America, with 200 bottlers nationwide.

Oil-and-gas man Paul May, a longtime friend of Fooks, also franchised production plants and introduced Grapette to seven countries in Central and South America, where a large share of Grapette sales remain to this day.

"It was the heyday of Grapette after World War II," says Grapette International sales and marketing director David Rice, a grandson of Paul May. "The country was booming, and Grapette really took off. There aren't 200 bottling plants left in the entire country today."

While Fooks' experimentation yielded the ultimate grape soda, his innovations turned Grapette into an international sensation. The clear-glass bottle required half the glass of similar pop bottles, weighed and cost half as much and cooled twice as fast in the open coolers of grocers. Grapette checked every box for route salesmen, retailers and consumers.

After a heart attack at 68, Fooks sold Grapette to a New York company that agreed to keep running his plant in Camden. That company sold to the maker of NuGrape, a competitor that retained but buried the Grapette trademark the next 22 years by shipping just enough of the Grapette label (not the Fooks formula) to remote parts of the country. Grapette International, however, opened a new Hot Springs plant in the early 1970s. The Grapette flavor returned as part of the Sam's Choice lineup in the late 1980s at Walmart. Grapette soda, with the reacquired trademark, completed the comeback in 2005 at select Walmart stores determined by the retail giant.



COURTESY OF OUACHITA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



BEN BRACKEN

Grapette route salesmen circa 1955 (from left) Henry Young, Albert Edwards, Louie Riley and C.R. Tuberville.

Mixing it up

Grapette International remains customer-driven and innovative, Rice says, and thanks to the relationship with Walmart, has returned to its “Fooks Flavors” roots.

“That really started this century,” Rice says. “In late 1999, we started making a sports drink powdered mix for Walmart. The whole reason we moved from Hot Springs to Malvern then was because we needed more space for significant production, and it was close to Interstate 30. We bought all new equipment to make and package powdered mixes.”

Less than three years later, Rice says, the product was discontinued.

“That was a lesson learned 25 years ago,” Rice says. “We realized we’re just one phone call away from potentially being out of a job. The more we can diversify and reach a basic, if not expert, level and in a lot of different applications, the more opportunities we have.”

Fooks would surely marvel at the more than 1,000 flavors in Grapette’s catalog. Its lab can tailor a flavor for each customer in multiple categories, including powders, concentrates and finished products. Grapette International manufactures private label energy drinks, sports drinks, syrups for fountain drinks or slushes, even popsicles.

All for human consumption and ... a four-legged vegetarian.

Delectable deer dust

Thirteen years ago, C&D Wildlife of Delbarton, West Virginia, introduced a deer attractant and mineral lure called Lethally Addicting. Its scientific formula contains vitamins and minerals to promote antler growth, immune function and reproductive health. The powder soaks into the soil, and one jug will sustain a hunting (or watching) spot for a year. Deer lick the soil, absorb the minerals and excrete the undigested dirt.

When C&D Wildlife called Grapette looking to make its deer dust delectable, Grapette added more than fruit flavors. It quickly took over the management, production and shipping of Lethally Addicting, and select Tractor Supply Co. stores loaded their shelves.

“The deer can’t get enough of it,” Rice says. “It’s crazy. They will dig a bathtub-sized hole trying to get more. In the past three years, hunters (using



Grapette branched out from bottles to bucks with grape-flavored deer attractant.



Grapette bottles and cans have changed throughout the decades, as has the original sugar-based formula that today contains high-fructose corn syrup.

Lethally Addicting) have harvested two of the biggest bucks in West Virginia history. The base of the antler is like a child’s arm.”

Imagine that. Deer, with our largest herds in South Arkansas, love Grapette-flavored calcium, sodium, phosphorus and magnesium.

It’s been almost 100 years since Fooks first experimented with new flavors for soft drink concentrates in Camden, and that innovative spirit still drives Grapette International. Eighty-five years after its 1940 debut, Grapette’s legacy still fizzes — proof that Fooks’ Arkansas-born ingenuity endures.

“These are exciting times,” Rice says, “to be the new generation to run Grapette, expand relationships, come up with new products and sales avenues we had never considered. I can look back one day and know we also left a legacy.”



Employees Beau Purifoy (left) and Daniel Halter bottle Grapette concentrate.

Hooked on Books

Page-turner picks for anglers, hunters and hikers who'd rather be outside



STORY AND PHOTOS BY CARLTON AND LEIGH WING

Christmas shopping for an outdoorsman or outdoorswoman is pretty easy: fishing lures, camo and pocketknives are always welcome. This column goes beyond the usual gear gifts and offers a few great reads from the road less traveled.

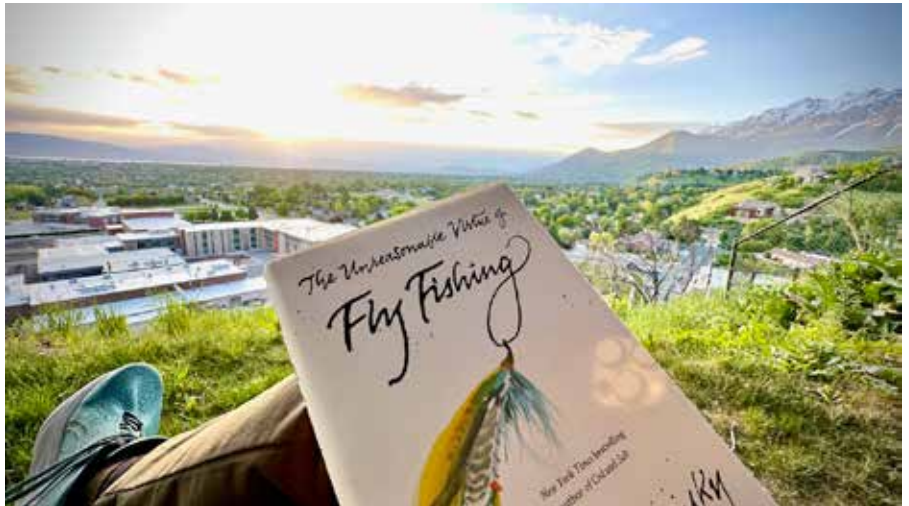
At times when bad weather or a tough work schedule can make it difficult to get outside, books offer a short escape to some well-written prose. The outdoors is a favorite topic of some of the top writers in the world. Here are some titles we recommend:

1. **"St. Tom's Cathedral"**
by **Bryan Hendricks.**

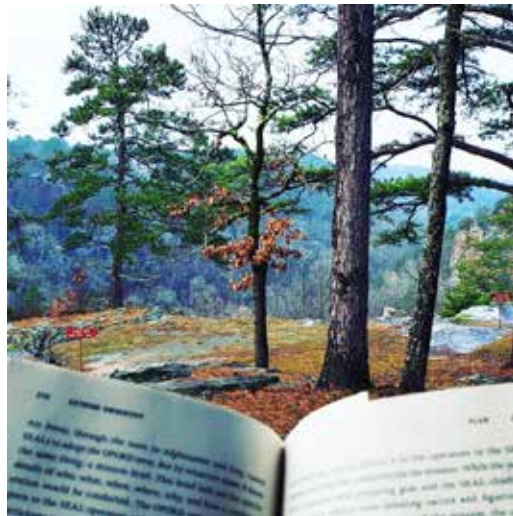
Hendricks weaves narratives about life into stories from the woods. The best part about this book is that you don't have to be a turkey hunter to enjoy every page. While Hendricks addresses the fun and humor of the unpredictable side of the outdoors, he also instills hard-earned wisdom about the choices we make in life. Hendricks, a writer for the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, is one of the few full-time outdoors editors in the country. We are lucky to have him.

2. For the younger audience, **"Hatchet"** by **Gary Paulsen.** We read this to our sons in their pre-teens and enjoyed the fictional adventure of a young man placed into a sudden survival setting. It was compelling to think of how we would handle such a situation and discuss the options. It was also a really fun parent-child read.

3. We recommend **any books by Patrick McManus.**



A great catch for Christmas, Mark Kurlansky's "The Unreasonable Virtue of Fly Fishing" will reel in readers who love the outdoors.



Books make great gifts and inspiration for future adventures.

This longtime outdoors writer brings the wit that makes readers look forward to mishaps in the outdoors! At times, his humor provides such intensity you won't be able to see the pages through your tears of laughter.

4. **"The Unreasonable Virtue of Fly Fishing"** by **Mark Kurlansky.**

A surprise hit from last year, this book covers the history of the art form of fly fishing as well as the majesty of the motion. It is impossible not to learn from this book while being fiercely entertained.

5. **Books by photographer and writer Tim Ernst,** the author of many Arkansas books to help hikers and lovers of our state's natural beauty. "Arkansas Hiking Trails" is a gold standard.

This list is certainly not complete, but it might tide your outdoors enthusiast over until their next cast, climb or campout.

Carlton and Leigh Wing host the "Arkansas' Great Outdoors" weekly television series. Visit facebook.com/arkansasgreatoutdoors/. 

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— Robert F., Richardson, TX

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An Olympic Feat

Natural State native trailblazes way to 2028 Games

BY BOB ROBINSON

How did an Arkansan go from volunteering to build mountain bike trails at Devil's Den State Park to being hired to design and construct the course for the Games? Yes, you read it right — that's the 2028 Olympics, to be held in Los Angeles, California.

Nathan "Woody" Woodruff, a member of Ozarks Electric Cooperative, began riding mountain bikes while attending Fayetteville High School. By graduation, he was volunteering his time to build trails and organize bike events.

Wheels in motion

In 2006, he was attending the University of Arkansas, working on a master's degree in teaching and running a small lawn and landscaping company. During this timeframe, the Walton family donated land in Bentonville for the creation of bike trails. With his experience in trail construction and landscaping, Woodruff's name was passed on to the Waltons by a local bike shop as someone to talk to about building the bike park. The Waltons were impressed by the young man and gave him carte blanche in the design and development of Bentonville's popular Slaughter Pen Trail System.

It was at that time, Woodruff first conceived the idea of making a living by building trails, and Progressive Trail Design (PTD) was born. Following Slaughter Pen, he landed another big project in Sugar Land, Texas. Other bike trail projects followed.

PTD has created many trails that make up Arkansas mountain bikers' list

of favorites — from technical jump runs like the iconic "Drop the Hammer" at Coler Mountain Bike Preserve, to Railyard's beginner-friendly features, suited for young riders to develop their skills. PTD knows how to build trails that bring a smile to the faces of all riders because, as Woodruff says, "We build trails because we love to ride."

As PTD expanded its trail crew and honed skills, Woodruff decided it was time to grow the business. He joined the Professional Trailbuilders Association, which provided access to resources and opportunities to bid on projects nationwide. They soon began landing projects in Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota and other communities across the U.S.

Today, employing about 30 employees and an extensive network of subcontractors, PTD has expanded its operations internationally. They have built trails and bike parks in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, Italy, Canada and Costa Rica.

Ride of a lifetime

"Olympic Mountain Bike Race Site For 2028 Has Been Chosen," read a headline on Aug. 16, 2025. Bonelli Park in San Dimas, California, had been selected to host the race.

"The 2028 Olympic mountain bike course has been changed from Bonelli Park in San Dimas, California, to Pacific Palms Resort, located in the City of Industry," read a second



COURTESY OF PTD



BOB ROBINSON



heading, just weeks later. It continued, “The reason for the change was not revealed.”

Spoiler alert! An Arkansas trail construction company may have had something to do with the change of venue.

About three years ago, Woodruff and his PTD team were deep into a trail master plan for Pacific Palms Resort. This put them squarely in the neighborhood of the official venue for the 2028 Olympic mountain bike race. Pacific Palms engaged PTD to develop a concept for the Cross-Country Olympic (XCO) course at their location. That plan was presented to Olympic organizers and ultimately helped solidify Pacific Palms as the official venue.

“The fact that we were already on the ground in the City of Industry made the difference,” Woodruff says. “But it was our track record over the last 18 years — showing how we design trails that challenge elite riders and still feel natural to the land — that sealed the trust.”

With the Pacific Palms Resort area situated in the heart of the San Gabriel Valley, PTD is well-qualified to capitalize on the site’s natural topography and hilly landscape to construct a network of trails featuring elements that challenge the world’s top mountain bikers. The course is part of a broader site improvement plan and will remain as a legacy of the 2028 Games.

In the years after the 2028 Olympics, West Coast mountain bikers will continue to enjoy the quality craftsmanship that’s defined the past two decades of trailbuilding here at home. And in every curve and climb, there’s a little piece of Arkansas built in. 

Today, employing about 30 employees and an extensive network of subcontractors, Progressive Trail Design has expanded its operations internationally. They have built trails and bike parks in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, Italy, Canada and Costa Rica.



COURTESY OF PTD

ABOVE Arkansan Nathan “Woody” Woodruff and his Bentonville-based company were awarded the contract to design and construct the mountain bike trails for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

BELOW FROM LEFT TO RIGHT Nathan “Woody” Woodruff chases former professional road racing cyclist Lance Armstrong in a mountain bike competition.

Progressive Trail Design’s iconic “Drop the Hammer” jump at Coler Mountain Bike Preserve in Bentonville.

The Coal Basin mountain bike trail in Redstone, Colorado, was designed and constructed by Progressive Trail Design. Made of wood and steel, “The Hub” is a launch point for exhilarating downhill bike runs at Coler Mountain Bike Preserve.

Nathan “Woody” Woodruff uses an excavator to create bike trails.



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Bioptic Drives glasses allow drivers to continue to drive when they struggle with seeing road signs. These glasses have small telescopes that allow drivers to see road signs and traffic lights. They can also be used by grand parents to see grandchildren playing soccer and other sports.



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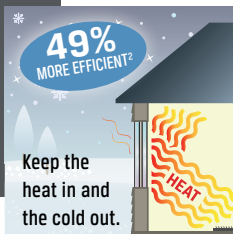
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Member-Owned, Member-Rewarded

First Electric returns capital credits to members

Giving credit where credit is due — capital credits, that is! Member-owned — that's what First Electric is! As a member, YOU own a portion of this cooperative, which means you benefit from the excess revenue in the form of capital credits each year. That's what sets electric cooperatives apart from investor-owned utilities. Since First Electric operates at cost, any surplus is allocated back to members as capital credits.

We have been doing this since the 1940s, returning more than \$153.7 million. This month's distribution of capital credits will increase that amount.

So, how do capital credits work?

Members use electricity provided by the co-op, and their usage and payments are tracked each year. Those payments are used within the cooperative. Anything left over after fulfilling financial obligations is referred to as margins. These margins are allocated back to you — the member — in proportion to the amount of electricity you purchased. The First Electric Board of Directors reviews the co-op's financial position each year and determines the amount of capital credits to refund.

Who receives a capital credit refund?

When the Board of Directors reviews the financial position, they look at margins from multiple years. The retirement year determines who will receive a capital credit refund; any person who was an active member during those years may 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 with a refund of less than \$50 will receive a bill credit.



Light Up the Holidays with First Electric!

Do you love decorating your home for Christmas? Show off your holiday spirit in First Electric Cooperative's Outdoor Christmas Light Contest!

Members are invited to submit photos of their holiday light displays for a chance to win first, second or third place prizes. Whether your style is classic white lights, colorful inflatables or a front yard that can be seen from miles away, we want to see your creativity shine.

It's a fun way to celebrate the season, share joy with your neighbors and spread cooperative cheer across our communities.

How to enter:

- Complete the form and upload your photo to firstelectric.coop.
- Photos must be submitted by end of business day on Monday, Dec. 15.
- The top three finalists will be posted at [facebook.com/FirstElectric](https://www.facebook.com/FirstElectric) the week of Dec. 15.

Winners will receive:

- First place - \$100 Amazon gift card
- Second place - \$75 gift card
- Third place - \$50 gift card

Let's light up the holidays together. We can't wait to see your displays sparkle!



HOW TO REPORT AN OUTAGE WITH FIRST ELECTRIC

When bad weather strikes or lights go out unexpectedly, First Electric Cooperative makes it easy to report an outage and stay informed as crews work to restore power safely and efficiently.

Here's how to report an outage:

- **First Electric app or website:** The fastest and most convenient way. Log in through the First Electric app or at firstelectric.coop and select Report an Outage.
- **Automated phone system:** Call 800-489-7405 (option 2) anytime, day or night. If the system recognizes your number, it will include your outage and alert dispatchers.
- **Text notifications:** Members enrolled in text alerts can report an outage or receive restoration updates by replying OUT to 332237.
- **Don't report through social media.** While Facebook and other platforms are great for updates, they aren't monitored 24/7 and can delay restoration if used to report an outage.

During widespread outages, crews work around the clock to restore power as quickly and safely as possible. **Be sure your contact information is up to date so your outage can be identified and processed quickly.**

At First Electric, reliability and member service are always our top priorities — because when the lights go out, we're already on the way to bringing them back on.



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rick.love@fecc.coop
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robert.maertens@fecc.coop
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john.roland@fecc.coop
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Operation Razorback brings power and hope to Guatemala

For three weeks this fall, a group of Arkansas electric cooperative linemen traveled thousands of miles from home — and decades back in time — to bring electricity to families in the remote Guatemalan village of Entre Ríos.

Among the volunteers were First Electric Cooperative Crew Chief Matt Goetz and Journeyman Lineman Rhett Turner, who joined 15 other linemen from across the state for Operation Razorback, a mission coordinated by NRECA International. Together, the crew built new power lines through rugged, mountainous terrain to deliver electricity to homes that had never before had access to power.

Located in El Quiché, near Guatemala's border with Mexico, Entre Ríos is an agricultural region known for its production of coffee, tea, cacao, pepper, cardamom and palm oil. Until now, residents relied solely on daylight for work and study — but that changed when the lights flickered on for the first time this October.

Each home received a 50-amp breaker panel equipped with two light switches, four light bulbs, and two outlets — a modest but life-changing service compared to U.S. homes, which typically feature 200- to 320-amp panels. For perspective, the local primary lines carry just 19.9kV, while American residential systems run at 7,620 kV.

Beyond the work, Matt and Rhett found joy in connecting with the community. The pair handed out candy and soccer balls to local children and even joined a pickup game at a nearby school — one that will be electrified in November by a Texas cooperative team.

"When asked if I'd volunteer again, I didn't even have to think about it," said Matt, who began his linework career in 2007. "I don't do this job for a paycheck. I do it to help people and restore lives — and this trip really spoke to me, especially because of the children. They were so excited they even asked us to sign their shirts at the lighting ceremony."

Arkansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. and Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation President Vernon "Buddy" Hasten visited the crew in Guatemala to celebrate the project's success and thank the team for their hard work and dedication. "These missions remind us how blessed we are in the United States," said Hasten. "Bringing light to those who have never had it is one of the most meaningful things we can do."

Operation Razorback marks another milestone in Arkansas cooperatives' ongoing partnership with NRECA International. Since 2013, Arkansas co-op linemen have brought the gift of light to more than 2,500 rural families in Bolivia and Guatemala — proving that the cooperative spirit truly knows no borders.



Arkansas electric cooperative lineworkers spent three weeks in Guatemala bringing power to rural communities through Operation Razorback.



CHANCE ALLMON

First Electric Journeyman Lineman Rhett Turner receives a certificate of appreciation for his work helping to bring electricity to the Guatemalan village of Entre Ríos.



CHANCE ALLMON

First Electric Crew Chief Matt Goetz receives a certificate of appreciation for his work helping to bring electricity to the Guatemalan village of Entre Ríos.

FINISHING STRONG IS OUR FOUNDATION

As the year ends, we celebrate every Arkansan who gave, volunteered, and dreamed with us. Because when we build together, our communities grow stronger for generations to come.

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Snapshots from our readers



Hadley Grace giving Santa an earful!
Lisa Douglas, Texarkana.



Jack has decided he loves the holidays!
Stephanie King, Camden.



Ronan reading a Christmas bedtime story.
Kim Sparks, Ozone.



Collyns is chilling with her snow-mies.
Karen Olsen, Rogers.



Lottie is a winter-white Christmas princess.
Hope Mulanax Photography, taken at Willow Brooke Farm.



Presley says, "I've been good, Santa, so I need 563 treats, please."
Marcy Busby, Ennis.



The tiniest bucket truck getting ready to save the day! Heather Walston, Hatfield.



Waiting on Santa.
Charlotte Stone, Glendale.



Jaylah's first Christmas.
Paige Skinner, Van Buren.



Jojo is feline festive.
Ron Johnson, Warren.

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.

Plant Presents

Help festive plants flourish past the holidays



BY JANET B. CARSON

December is a month for giving and receiving gifts. Holiday plants are always a good choice, and with a little know-how, they can live long past the holiday season. While the red poinsettia is the traditional holiday plant, today they come in a wide range of colors and sizes — and there's a whole host of other flowering plants to choose from, too.

When receiving a holiday plant, you need to know something about care to ensure it lasts as long as possible.

As a general guideline, keep blooming plants in a cool room, with bright, indirect light to help the flowers last as long as possible. Extremely warm rooms can cause flowers to fade quickly. Make sure you have an even supply of water, but avoid overwatering, which is the most common mistake. 



Cyclamen



Holiday Cactus

PLANT	BLOOMS	CARE
Amaryllis	Bulbs can be purchased as loose bulbs, potted blooming bulbs or wax-coated and flowering. Depending on how quickly you want a flower, choose a plant with flower buds but not fully open so they last longer.	Once plant has finished blooming, continue to care for it as a houseplant and enjoy flowers again next year.
Anthurium	Glossy green foliage with spathe blooms in red, white or pink. The flowers can last for months.	Unless you own a greenhouse, it can be difficult to rebloom.
Bromeliad	Many options for colors; some have colorful foliage while others have showy blooms. Color will last for months.	Mother plant often dies after bloom, but will produce pups or babies at the base to grow more plants.
Cyclamen	Small clusters of red, pink or white blooms. With bright light and even moisture, it can bloom for 6-8 weeks.	As the foliage begins to die back, withhold water for a few months. After a rest period, gradually begin to add water. When you see signs of new growth, increase water and sunlight and it can rebloom.
Holiday Cactus	Flowers can be red, pink, white or orange. The plant can bloom for a month or longer.	After bloom, put it in a cool room with bright sunlight during the day, but darkness at night. It may rebloom this year. Then, move it outdoors in the summer, and bring it back inside for flowers next year.
Kalanchoe	Thick, waxy foliage with clusters of red, yellow, orange, pink or white flowers. If you don't overwater or underwater, the plant can bloom for months.	Keep the plant in a room with natural daylight and not a lot of lights at night, and it can freely rebloom.
Orchids	A wide range of flower colors and sizes to choose from. Each plant can bloom for 2-3 months with minimal care.	Depending on variety, reblooming can be easy or difficult. Don't overwater, and give them bright indirect light.



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Merry Morsels

Shareable crowd-pleasers showcase holiday sparkle

RECIPES AND PHOTOS
BY JULIANA GOODWIN

Chicken Artichoke Pesto Wreath

Makes 10 servings.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1/2 cup mayonnaise | 1 1/3 cups rotisserie chicken breast, chopped |
| 2 tablespoons pesto sauce | 1 cup Italian-style shredded cheese |
| 2 green onions, sliced | 2 (8-ounce) packages crescent rolls |
| 1/3 cup chive or regular cream cheese, softened | Optional garnish with parsley and cherry tomatoes |
| 2/3 cup artichoke hearts, chopped and liquid squeezed out | |

Heat oven to 375.

In a mixing bowl, stir together mayonnaise, pesto sauce, green onions and cream cheese until well-combined. Add in artichokes, chicken and cheese.

Line baking sheet with parchment paper. Place crescent rolls with widest part of roll in center of sheet. Make a sun shape with dough, overlapping each slightly. One package should create a half circle, and second package should



complete it. Aim for center hole to be 5-6 inches. Spread mixture in a circle on rolls. Fold each over and tuck in to close pastry.

Bake for 15-20 minutes until golden brown. If desired, garnish with parsley and cherry tomatoes. Serve immediately.

Chocolate Swirl Mini Cheesecakes

Makes 12 servings.

- | | |
|---|---|
| Crust | 1/2 cup sugar |
| 22 chocolate cream-filled cookies | 2 large eggs, at room temperature |
| 3 1/2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted | 1/3 cup sour cream, at room temperature |
| Filling | 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened | 12 teaspoons chocolate syrup, divided |

Heat oven to 325.

Fill 12 muffin tins with paper liners. Place cookies in food processor and grind into crumbs. Stir together cookie crumbs and butter. Evenly press mixture into bottom of muffin tins. Bake for 6 minutes. Set aside.

Beat cream cheese and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time and beat in between. Quickly beat in sour cream and vanilla extract.



Divide mixture between cupcake liners. Add 1 teaspoon chocolate syrup on each, and use a toothpick to swirl it into cream cheese. Bake for 20 minutes or until set. Cool completely before refrigerating.

Note: It is critical that your ingredients are at room temperature to help prevent lumps in cheesecake.



Crab and Corn Dip

Makes 6-8 servings.

- | | | | |
|--------|--|-----|--|
| 1 | tablespoon olive oil | 1/8 | teaspoon pepper |
| 1 | large stalk celery, minced | 1 | (6-ounce) can crabmeat, drained |
| 2-inch | chunk white onion, minced | 1 | cup corn, drained |
| 1 | (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened | 1/3 | cup mayonnaise |
| 1/2 | teaspoon smoked paprika | 1 | cup shredded Colby Jack cheese, more for top |
| 1/2 | teaspoon garlic powder | 1 | green onion, sliced |
| 1/2 | teaspoon onion salt | | Tortilla chips, vegetables or crackers for serving |

Heat oven to 375.

In a skillet, heat olive oil and sauté celery and onion until tender. Set aside.

In a mixing bowl, stir together cream cheese and smoked paprika, garlic powder, onion salt and pepper until combined. Stir in cooked vegetables, crab, corn, mayonnaise and cheese. Sprinkle a little extra cheese and green onions on top.

Bake for 15-20 minutes until golden. Serve with tortilla chips, vegetables or crackers.



This month's web exclusive recipe: Pumpkin Crumble Bars

More recipes on our website:
arkansaslivingmagazine.com

Juliana Goodwin is a food columnist, cookbook author and avid traveler. If you have a question, email julianalovesfood23@gmail.com.



Festive Flavors

Beverage and bites make spirits bright

White Christmas Punch

Makes 25 servings.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 (20-ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained (like Dole) | 48 ounces ginger ale |
| 1 (64-ounce) container vanilla ice cream (like Blue Bell) | 24 ounces pineapple juice (like Dole) |
| | Optional garnish: Fresh cranberries, rosemary or mint |

Freeze crushed pineapple about 1 hour before serving. Scoop ice cream and place in bottom of punch bowl. Add crushed pineapple. Pour ginger ale and pineapple juice, alternating 1 cup at a time, until the punch bowl is half full. Stir or blend until frothy. Repeat until bowl is full and punch reaches desired frothiness. Garnish with cranberries, rosemary or mint if desired.

Taylor Smith, Tyroneza

Holiday Cheeseball

Makes 10-12 servings.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened | 1/4 cup green pepper, chopped |
| 1 (20-ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained | 2 tablespoons white or yellow onion, finely chopped |
| 2 cups pecans, chopped (divided) | 1 teaspoon seasoned salt |
| | Crackers for serving |

In a large bowl, mix cream cheese with pineapple. Add 1 cup pecans, green pepper, onion and seasoned salt. Chill for 30 minutes. Form into ball and roll in remaining pecans.

Chill until ready to serve with crackers.

Note: You can also add bacon bits and/or red bell pepper. This is a family favorite and on the list of "must-haves" for a holiday get-together! It will soon become your family favorite as well.

Barbara Allen, Benton, Louisiana

Cranberry Blondies

Makes 12 bars.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 2 sticks butter, softened | 1 teaspoon baking powder |
| 1 cup sugar | 1/4 teaspoon baking soda |
| 1 cup brown sugar, packed | 1/2 teaspoon salt |
| 2 eggs, slightly beaten | 1 cup walnuts, chopped |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract | 1 (10- to 12-ounce) package whole fresh cranberries |
| 2 cups all-purpose flour | |

Heat oven to 350. Grease a 9x13 pan and set aside.

In a mixing bowl, cream together butter, sugar, brown sugar, eggs and vanilla extract with an electric mixer. Add flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt, and mix until well-blended. Fold in walnuts and cranberries with a spatula or large spoon. Mixture will be very thick.

Spread evenly into prepared pan. Bake for about 40 minutes or until knife comes out clean. Cool slightly before cutting to serve.

Note: Fresh cranberries are easy to find during the holiday season, typically through December. They can also be frozen and thawed for later use. These bars are delicious during the holidays or any time of the year.

Cathy Hathcoat, Fayetteville



JENNIFER CHRISTMAN CIA

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Online: arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submit-a-recipe

Entries must include your name, phone, address and origin of recipe.

White Corn & Rotel Dip

Makes 4-6 servings.

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 can (11-ounce) white shoepeg corn, not drained | 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese |
| 1 can (10-ounce) Original Rotel, not drained | Tortilla chips for serving |

Add all ingredients to a microwave-safe dish (do not stir). Microwave on high in 2-minute increments, stirring after each, until hot and creamy. Serve warm with tortilla chips.

Note: Substitute your favorite Rotel variety — Mild, Mexican, Extra Hot, etc.

JoJo Kittell, Little Rock

Grandma's No-Bake Cookies

Make 2 dozen cookies.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 cups sugar | 1 tablespoon vanilla extract |
| 1 stick butter | 3 tablespoons peanut butter |
| 3 tablespoons cocoa powder | 2 1/2 cups quick oats |
| 1/2 cup milk | |

In a heavy-bottomed pan or cast-iron skillet, combine sugar, butter, cocoa and milk. Bring to a rolling boil for 3 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in vanilla extract, peanut butter and oats, mixing well. Drop by spoonfuls onto wax paper and allow to cool.

Ashley Jones, Rector

Mexican Wedding Cookies

Makes 4 dozen cookies.

- | |
|--|
| 2 sticks butter, softened |
| 3/4 cup powdered sugar, more for coating |
| 1 teaspoon vanilla extract |
| 2 1/4 cups self-rising flour |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt |
| 3/4 cup pecans, chopped |

Heat oven to 400.

In bowl of stand mixer, combine all ingredients.

Remove dough from bowl and roll into 1/2-inch balls. Place balls on ungreased cookie sheets, pressing each one down flat. Bake for 10-12 minutes. Remove cookies from baking sheets.

Place extra powdered sugar in a bowl or bag; add cookies a few at a time and coat well.

Notes: My mother made these every year for Christmas. After she passed, I continued making these cookies for my family.

Patti Dunlap, Hardy

NEW RECIPE CONTEST: Spring Forward!

Arkansas Living is giving away four rechargeable digital kitchen scales, perfect for precise cooking and baking (and for weighing portions when diet season inevitably rolls around — big, fat sigh)!

To enter: Submit your favorite spring recipe (think easy entrées, breezy brunch dishes, fresh salads, lively sides, picnic picks and fruit-filled desserts) by Jan. 15 via our website: arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submit-a-recipe.



Bundle Up

Keep warm and cut costs this winter

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Q: What can I do now to manage my winter energy bills?

A: Just as you pull out your winter gear before you need it, prepping your home for the cooler weather is a great idea.

The following steps can be taken now to use less energy at home as the winter chill sets in. They also help lower strain on the electric grid during extreme winter weather when energy use is at its peak in your community.

First, let's consider your home's layers. Just like layering up those winter flannels, fleeces and down jackets with waterproof, wind-stopping shells, gloves and hats, your home needs layers, too. Air sealing and insulation protect your home from the elements while locking in the warm air to keep you cozy. The same applies to hot weather, making air sealing and insulation a year-round efficiency upgrade.

To offset the costs, federal tax credits for energy-efficiency upgrades are available through Dec. 31, 2025. Homeowners can claim a total of 30% of the cost of installation, up to \$3,200. Tax credits are available for insulation, heat pumps, air conditioning systems and more. There's even a tax credit for electrical panel upgrades, which might be needed to accommodate new energy-efficient equipment. Visit energystar.gov for more information.

When it comes to do-it-yourself projects, there are a few upgrades you can handle. Lock in savings with window cleaning and maintenance. Make sure sash locks and window cranks are in good working order and cleaned of any dirt and leaves. Debris can keep them from closing snugly. I find the crevice tool attachment on my vacuum cleaner, combined with a small, dry scrub brush or an old toothbrush, works great. The locks should pull the top and bottom window sashes together tightly. For casement windows, the locks should pull the window tightly to the frame.



Filters should be checked every three months and replaced if needed.



Check all windows to ensure a tight lock and seal to reduce outdoor air from seeping into your home.

Although it might not seem like a significant difference, reducing airflow through and around windows can make your home more comfortable in the winter. Replacing broken or nonfunctional sash locks can be a reasonable DIY project, but it's best to avoid doing it when the winter winds are blowing. Also, use caulk to seal all gaps around the window trim. If you have operable storm windows, make sure they close.

If you have a forced-air heating or air conditioning system, replace the filter. First, turn the system off to check it. If your filter is dirty, leave it in place until you have a replacement. Running your system without a filter can send any dust or dirt in the ductwork directly into the components and damage your equipment. Make a note of the filter's size on your shopping list or take a picture of the filter with your phone so you can reference it when running errands.

Also, stocking up on filters can save you money. I bought a 12-pack of filters for \$72 — \$6 each. A similar filter sold separately was \$10. Don't see a bulk pack at your local hardware store? Ask at the customer service desk. They may be able to order them for you.

This winter, look for opportunities to protect your home from the elements and maintain your equipment before the cold of winter.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops. 



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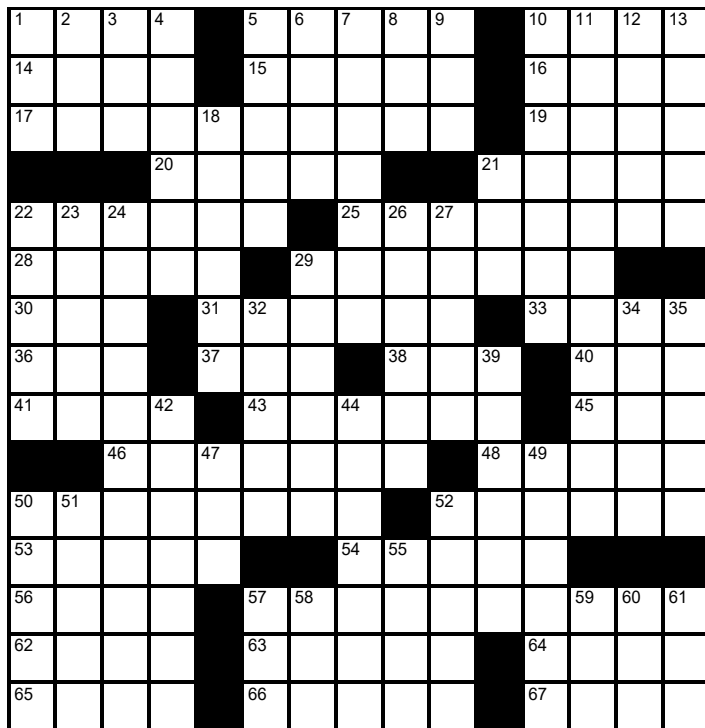


CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Wintering in Natural State Places *By Victor Fleming*

ACROSS

- 1 More ____ for your buck
- 5 Called, as a crow
- 10 Lie adjacent to
- 14 Buckeye's state
- 15 Cat-____-tails
- 16 Boggy places
- 17 See Christmas Capital of Arkansas here
- 19 Home-loan agcy.
- 20 Go on a buying spree
- 21 Ancient Asian
- 22 What's raised by a raise
- 25 Pillows
- 28 Online meet-up
- 29 Sharp, sudden change of direction
- 30 Golfer Se Ri



- 31 Franklin of soul music
- 33 Bergman collaborator Nykvist
- 36 "Act your ____"
- 37 With 38-Across, see Christmas at the Warehouse here
- 38 See 37-Across
- 40 U.N. agcy. that won the 1969 Nobel Peace Prize
- 41 Big name in denim
- 43 Singer Gordon ____ aka Sting
- 45 King or emir (abbr.)
- 46 Receive by will
- 48 "There's ____ chance ..."
- 50 Kind of hammer
- 52 Goddess of wisdom and war
- 53 Canaries, to Carlos
- 54 Berth choice
- 56 "Moby Dick" whaler
- 57 Soak in this town's warm thermal waters
- 62 Brand of toy bricks
- 63 "Love Story" star
- 64 Hawaii's "Valley Isle"

- 65 Belgian river
- 66 Brutish
- 67 ____ Ed. (gym class)

- 24 Check out this town's state park that's named for a body of water

- 26 1960s U.N. head
- 27 "Blank" look

- 29 Make certain
- 32 Visit anew
- 34 "Murphy Brown" houseman
- 35 "____ Rae"
- 39 Lunar depression

- 42 About to be a mother
- 44 Business meeting records
- 47 Some computers and calculators, for short

- 49 Peel 'em and eat 'em
- 50 Onion bagel alternative
- 51 "... ____ dust to dust"
- 52 Answer a Help Wanted ad

- 55 11th graders' exam (abbr.)

- 57 Luv
- 58 "... sat ____ tuffet ..."
- 59 "Count me out"

- 60 Late former Governor Jim ____ Tucker

- 61 Family gal

DOWN

- 1 Hope or Newhart
- 2 "Eureka!" alternative
- 3 Future louse
- 4 Argues with
- 5 Author Stephen R. ____
- 6 Has ____ (knows someone)
- 7 Davidson College athlete
- 8 Big picture? (abbr.)
- 9 "Fiddle-de-____!"
- 10 Catered gatherings
- 11 Check out the latest at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in this town
- 12 Take away staff and crew
- 13 Autocrats of yore
- 18 Bed covering
- 21 Cal. column
- 22 Part of a flower
- 23 "Time is money," e.g.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS ON PAGE 41

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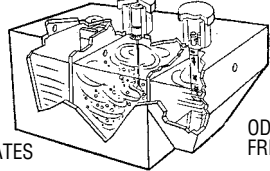







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Flock to Lady Birds

Southern comfort meets Tex-Mex magic at Sheridan cafe



STORY AND PHOTOS BY ROB ROEDEL

Lady Birds Cafe in Sheridan is quickly becoming a favorite place for Arkansans to enjoy homemade Southern comfort food, Tex-Mex favorites and classic American dishes.

I could taste the love and quality that the kitchen staff put into the food. Lady Birds is housed in a classic red brick building in a historic area of Sheridan. The décor features exposed beams, a welcoming country

charm and lighting that provides a cozy, relaxed dining experience. The staff is friendly, attentive and ensures that guests feel right at home. I fell in love with the restaurant's overall vibe.

The portions are very generous, so come hungry. The attention to presentation detail for each dish was a testament to the professionalism and pride of the staff.

My first item to try was the Philly Cheese Steak Egg Rolls. The wonderful flavor let me know that the egg rolls were made from scratch with fresh ingredients, not the frozen version. The combination of shaved steak, bell peppers, onions and cheese rolled in Lady Birds' special wontons blended into a flavor explosion of goodness. A whole new dimension was added by dipping the egg rolls in a white cheese sauce.

Each item that I sampled included a special twist of culinary creativity, including the Spinach Artichoke Dip. I couldn't nail down that unique flavor in the dip, topped with panko breadcrumbs ... so, I just enjoyed sampling it with the fresh pita chips.

The menu includes some top-notch Tex-Mex offerings. I especially liked the Firecracker Tacos. The three large golden-brown fried shrimp



Lady Birds Cafe has top-notch Tex-Mex offerings like the Firecracker Tacos with fried shrimp.



The Caribbean Salmon is served with cilantro rice, grilled vegetables and a flavorful side of shrimp, onions and pineapple.

were tossed in Lady Birds' spicy cream sauce and garnished with lettuce, red cabbage, pico de gallo, cheese, sliced avocado and radish. The warm flour tortillas that held this slightly spicy creation guaranteed that each bite featured the perfect mix.

If you are craving some seafood, try the Caribbean Salmon. The wild-caught salmon was seasoned and cooked to perfection. I loved the sautéed grilled shrimp, onions and pineapple chunks that

were included on the plate. The serving also included cilantro rice and grilled vegetables.

The Fried Catfish Plate was served on a very large metal tray. The "plate" included



The Spinach Artichoke Dip has a unique flavor with a twist of culinary creativity.



Lady Birds Cafe servers are warm and attentive, making every guest feel right at home.

THE EATING ESSENTIALS

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three well-seasoned, hand-breaded fried catfish fillets accompanied by fries, hush puppies, coleslaw, green tomato relish, fried corn on the cob and borracho beans. My order also included eight large, hand-breaded fried shrimp. Not only was the serving large, but each item was also large in Southern flavor.

If you are looking for a good Country Fried Steak, then Lady Birds can fix your craving in a big way. My steak was covered with a rib-sticking, white cream gravy that provided extra country comfort to the steak. The 19 options of side dishes ranged from deviled eggs to cornbread salad to potato salad. I selected homemade



Located in a historic building in downtown Sheridan, Lady Birds Cafe welcomes guests with country charm and hearty, down-home favorites.

mashed potatoes with cream gravy, French cut green beans and macaroni and cheese to round out my plate.

A variety of salad selections are offered. The Chef Salad arrived beautifully arranged, with vibrant layers of shredded iceberg lettuce, juicy tomatoes, savory ham and turkey and slices of

hard-boiled egg. Crisp purple onion, smoky bacon and a generous sprinkle of shredded cheese added both color and flavor, all brought together by a creamy, freshly made ranch dressing.

Owner Kim Marquez, who is originally from Sheridan, bought the building, remodeled it and opened the restaurant about three years ago to be closer to her daughter and granddaughter. She loves birds, thus the restaurant name and the theme of the décor.

"I love making people happy with

food," she said. "People love Lady Birds because the food is delicious and we have something for everybody."

Lady Birds Cafe is a Sheridan favorite for good reason. With hearty meals, a cozy setting and a menu that caters to a wide range of tastes, it's a place where you won't leave hungry — and you'll likely come back for more. 

Dining recommendations? Contact Rob Roedel at rob.roedel@aecc.com.



The Fried Catfish Plate, loaded with all the fixings, is so generous it's served on a metal tray rather than a platter.



The Country Fried Steak is served with a choice of sides — and with 19 delicious options, the hardest part is deciding.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS for puzzle on page 38

S	Y	H	P	M	A	T	Y	S	A	N	A	R	S	E	R	Y
S	N	I	R	I	L	A	L	E	N	O	A	L	E	G	O	L
S	G	I	N	P	R	I	S	O	H	A	B	A	H	A	B	A
A	N	E	R	P	E	R	U	P	S	A	S	L	A	I	S	L
M	A	H	A	T	A	N	E	E	P	E	R	B	A	L	L	B
R	L	D	R	A	R	E	N	E	S	U	M	S	I	L	E	L
O	L	O	I	L	C	A	R	C	D	E	S	D	E	S	A	G
E	N	S	V	E	S	A	H	A	T	A	R	E	A	R	E	P
S	N	O	I	H	U	R	S	C	U	N	A	R	Y	S	A	L
A	R	A	T	A	T	R										
A	M	A	F	E	L	L	E	L	L	I	V	S	S	E	S	B
S	F	E	N	E	I	N	E	I	N	O		O	I	O	H	O
B	U	T	A	B	U	D	E	A	W	E	D	C	A	W	G	B



Calendar



2025 Delta Cultural Center Holiday Bake-off

COURTESY OF DCC HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE



Arkansas Pecan Festival

COURTESY OF ARKANSAS PECAN FESTIVAL



Searcy Christmas Parade

COURTESY OF CITY OF SEARCY



Freedom Frosty 5K

COURTESY OF KATE AUSTIN PHOTOGRAPHY



39th annual Christmas and Candlelight

COURTESY OF HISTORIC WASHINGTON STATE PARK

Through Dec. 22

Christmas at the Park

Jonesboro, christmasattheparknea.com/schedule

Through Dec. 27

Lights of the Delta

Blytheville, lightsofthedelta.com

Through Jan. 1

Lights of the Ozarks

Fayetteville, experiencefayetteville.com/experience/lights-of-the-ozarks

Dec. 4

El Dorado Christmas Parade

El Dorado, facebook.com/ElDoradoChamberofCommerce

Hamburg Holidays Parade

Hamburg, tinyurl.com/HamburgParade

Dec. 5

Jonesboro Christmas Parade

Jonesboro, downtownjonesboro.com

Mena Christmas Parade and Festival

Mena, visitmena.com/events

Dec. 5-6

Cabot's Celebrate the Season

Cabot, cabotparks.com/267/Cabots-Celebrate-the-Season

Dec. 5-7

47th annual Arkansas Craft Guild Christmas Showcase

Little Rock, arkansascraftguild.org/christmas-showcase

Dec. 6

Arkansas Pecan Festival

Keo, tinyurl.com/PecanFestival

2025 Delta Cultural Center Holiday Bake-off

Helena, tinyurl.com/DCCBakeOff

Freedom Frosty 5K

Bentonville, runbentonville.com/race-series/frosty-5k/

Searcy Christmas Parade

Searcy, experiencesearcy.com

State Capitol Lighting Ceremony

Little Rock, littlerock.com/events/arkansas-state-capitol-lighting-ceremony-2025/

The Big Little Rock Holiday Parade

Little Rock, tinyurl.com/LRHolidayParade

Dec. 6-7 & 13-14

Three Trees Drive Through Nativity

Wynne, threetreescowboychurch.com/live-nativity

Dec. 11-13

Huntsville Cookie and Cocoa Crawl

Huntsville, facebook.com/cookiecrawl

Dec. 12

Oaklawn Opening Day

Hot Springs, oaklawn.com

Dec. 12-14

39th annual Christmas and Candlelight

Washington, arkansasstateparks.com/events/39th-annual-christmas-and-candlelight

Dec. 13

Living Windows and Lighted Christmas Parade

Calico Rock, calicorockmuseum.com

Wreaths Across America

Little Rock National Cemetery, facebook.com/WAALITTLE ROCK

Find more events at arkansaslivingmagazine.com/around-arkansas.
Submit events at arkansaslivingmagazine.com/submissions/submit-an-event.

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