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DECEMBER 2023

# Living

MAGAZINE

## Special DELIVERY

Residents share their thoughts on the tradition of sending Christmas cards

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WELCOME

## CHRISTMAS card communication

Time for a family photo. Time to update your address lists. Time to summarize anything and everything that's changed in your lives this year. Yes, you guessed it; it's time to send out holiday greeting cards.

I remember when Jolene and I were first married, and we couldn't wait to send out Christmas cards with an update letter. The same was true after each of our three children were born. But after nearly three decades of doing this, it became a chore. As such, I began to wonder if it had become tedious for others as well. Is this holiday practice as popular as it once was? Are people still typing up letters and hand-writing cards?

I used to look forward to this time-honored tradition, especially reading about what was new in the lives of friends or family members whom we don't touch base with regularly. But, if I am being honest, I don't think I looked through all the cards and letters in recent years. And if the letter took multiple pages, well, forget it.

Then, something changed. In the past few years, we haven't received as many. In conversations with others, I learned that a growing number of folks are relying on social media sites for the purpose of Christmas communication. Or they gave up in general. Or, maybe, they just took me off their list.

Truth be told, we skipped the entire Christmas card tradition a few years back. We had a hectic few months leading up to the holidays, and we just didn't get it done. Even so, life went on as normal. But, as you might guess, we returned to the task the following year.

So, here we are, just weeks from Christmas, and the pressure is on. We will gather a photo from a recent family get-together. We will update our list of addresses. And we will mail out the cards. Also this year, I will relax in my easy chair with my slippers on my feet and a cup of cocoa in my hand and read all the cards and letters. At least that's the plan.

Be sure to check out this month's cover story to learn how other residents are handling their Christmas communication this year.

Thanks for reading. ■



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# Special DELIVERY

Residents share their thoughts on the tradition of sending Christmas cards

By Chantel Boyd

Those who remember the days before social media, when long-distance phone calls cost money and letter-writing was commonplace, likely remember lining fireplace mantels and shelves with Christmas cards they received. Often containing a thoughtful note or special message, the cards were a cherished piece of communication with family and friends. But, as with many other traditions, the practice of mailing Christmas cards has been usurped by modern technology. Many now depend on email messages, texting or a one-message-for-all post online. When it comes to Christmas cards, the population has fallen into two camps: those who still value giving and receiving them and those who consider the effort — and postage — not worth it.

For Becky Thrapp, making and sending Christmas cards is part of the holiday festivities.



## FEATURE

### A personal touch

Becky Thrapp sends Christmas cards to dozens of people each Christmas and has been doing so for more than four decades.

"I make and send Christmas cards to about 45 people," she says. "I love making them and feel it's more personal."

Though Becky has been sending cards for decades, it was only about a decade ago when she decided to start making the cards instead of buying them.

"I've been sending cards for 42 years but have only made them for the last 10 years," she says.

Though this thoughtful gesture of handmaking and writing Christmas cards takes much time and effort, Becky views it as manageable. It's a festive part of the season for her.

"The time it takes me depends on the cards I decide to make that year. It takes at least a full day or two to make them," she says.

Once the cards are made and filled out, Becky addresses them while watching TV. But a few lucky loved ones get an extra special gift along with their cards.

"I only write letters for a few people — my aunts that live out of state. I give an update on my family and grandkids," she says.

The cards Becky makes are one of a kind for her loved ones.

"I do a lot of mixed media projects, so if I find papers I like, I make my cards out of them. Or, I use embossing folders, dies and stamps."

Becky's holiday schedule helps her decide how unique each card is.

"I usually make them all different, but, if I'm running late, I'll devise a design and do an assembly line to get them done, which is what I did last year," she says, adding that she still changes some things so no two are alike. "I switched up colors and the greetings, so they weren't identical."

The recipients of Becky's cards tell her they like them.

"They usually want to know how long it takes, but that varies by year and card," she says. "Some people really enjoy receiving the cards. Some of them save them as well."

Becky's cards don't have a theme, per se, but she enjoys a vintage-looking card with a nostalgic feeling.



Kelley Wood Davis takes Christmas seriously by sending out hundreds of holiday cards.

"I love old Santas, which I'm using on many of the cards this year," she says.

Last year, when her assembly line was going, she jazzed up the background behind the



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Santas.

"I did glitter trees last year on my assembly line. I must put some glitter on my cards as well. But it's not the type that comes off, like on store-bought cards," she says.

Becky recommends this tradition her family has practiced for years.

"Our families have always sent cards, which is one of the traditions I enjoy doing. It's a good way to reach out to family and friends I haven't talked to for a while," she says.

## Hundreds of cards

Kelley Wood Davis takes Christmas seriously by sending out hundreds of holiday cards. But Kelley isn't just sending out cards for Christmas. She is sending them out throughout the year.

She gets out her box of supplies, nicknamed "Big Box of Joy," and her unicorn address book, fills her favorite mug with coffee, and starts writing. She sends them to people near and far.

"I send all sorts of cards all year round, not just holiday cards," she says.

Each week, Kelley checks the family calendar she created on Google years ago, her church's celebration calendar, and social media to get the week's worth of "glad tidings."

Kelley writes a short message on each card, signs and addresses it, seals the envelope with a sticker, stamps it, and puts it out to be mailed. She makes a point to spread cheer throughout the year.

"Once a month, I send a card out to my 'young adults' — young people either away from home at college, in internships, or in the armed forces that are in my circle of family and friends," she says.

Though this commitment takes time and effort, Kelley sees it as something other than work.

"I have always loved mailing things to people," she says.

Even the worn box holding Kelley's supplies is gift related.

"I got it as a gift 16 years ago. Even then, I was mailing cards. It's always been packed full," she says.

Last Christmas, Kelley sent out more than 250 Christmas and holiday cards, requiring her to use 13 books of stamps, several pens, and many stickers to seal the packages of joy. She started stocking up on cards in September.

"Since I don't have a matched collection of Christmas cards, I just send what I feel would be right for the recipient," she says.



Maria Hackett likes sending a specific type of Christmas card — a photo collage — to her friends and family members.

Kelley enjoys the reaction she gets when sending the cards.

"People are ecstatic that I take the time to do this for them, especially since not many do it anymore," she says.

Though Kelley is the only one of her group of friends taking the time to write and send out cards, the others help her gather supplies and keep her box full.

"I have the means and the time to do this, so I do it every week, making sure others have some joy. And, I have fun doing it," she says. "But friends do help by buying me books of stamps to help cut down the cost or give me cards and stickers."

Every week of the year, Kelley sends out joyful hellos. During the Christmas season, she sends out even more.

"The whole process of mailing out weekly cards takes about an hour each week. During Christmas last year, I spent probably about two weeks of evenings working on my card project," she says. "I want everyone who gets my cards to have something tangible to know that someone else is thinking about them."

"These cards are good news," she continues. "They are connections made in kindness. They are time taken to make sure someone else is remembered. They are a moment to do some good in this world."

Though she realizes this is a dying art, Kelley is committed to keeping it alive.

"I know not everyone likes to handwrite a card and address it and put it in the mail. But I have done it since I was a small child, just barely old enough to even try to write. The socially awkward, introverted part of me prefers

this to phone calls or face-to-face greetings."

Kelley sends letters so often, even the post office employees are moved by her generous heart.

"I am known by name at the post office. I hope that they enjoy delivering them, too."

## Photos are key

Maria Hackett likes sending a specific type of Christmas card — a photo collage — to her friends and family members.

"I like to send photo holiday cards because they are fun to customize, and family and friends enjoy the photos," she says.

It's an option that has been popular for the last several years. It is a way to update friends and family members without creating the family Christmas letter favored by previous generations. And, it's quick and easy.

"It probably takes about an hour to assemble the cards online," Maria says.

The most significant time commitment for Maria is perusing the online templates available for users to choose from. Most websites and apps have several to sort through.

"Most of the time I spend is split between looking at the designs they have available and looking through photos to find the ones for the card," she says.

Because Maria sends about 160 cards a year, the biggest time commitment and expense is putting the cards in the envelopes, addressing them and stamping them, which she says takes a couple of hours.

Maria includes her family photos and pictures of her furry family members in the



cards. When she did not include her pets one year, her friends and family were concerned.

“Every year, we include our pups on the cards. In 2016, I left them off because I couldn’t find a good picture,” she says. “That year, everybody asked us what happened to the dogs. They’ve been back on the card ever since.”

Like most people, Maria sees the value in receiving mail that is not a bill or junk mail headed to the recycle bin. Though some people have given up the tradition of sending cards for Christmas, Maria has embraced this newer version of photo cards and sends them to help keep the holiday spirit alive.

“Sending the cards is something special I do for others. They can know that someone put thought into putting together the card and thought to send them the card they put together,” she says.

Maria highly recommends anyone who wants to get into the holiday spirit to send cards, too, and not just distribute a digital version.

“Anyone could design a card and just post it to social media and call it a day, but for you to get a card in the mail — that means something.” ■



Look closely at Maria Hackett’s photo cards, and you’ll notice they include the family’s dogs. When the dogs were omitted one year, friends and family wondered what had happened to them.

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# REASONS to utilize a trust

Last month, we outlined the basics of a trust as part of the estate-planning process. With that in mind, we will explore examples of why trusts are often utilized in an estate plan.

## • Avoidance of

**probate:** The most common reason trusts are utilized for estate planning is to avoid probate (the process of settling an estate for someone who passes away). The state of Iowa has a series of laws which govern how probate estates are handled. While the laws of probate in Iowa are detailed and efficient, utilizing the probate court also comes with costs to the estate. For example, the estate will pay costs to the court for going through the probate process. Additionally, Iowa law sets rules and guidelines for fees for estate attorneys and fiduciaries (those who handle the administration of the estate). While attorney and fiduciary fees are still necessary in utilizing



a trust, the costs of the administration (court costs, attorney fees and fiduciary fees) are often significantly reduced.

• **Beneficiaries who lack financial expertise:** Trusts are often utilized in estate plans in situations where there may be a concern that a beneficiary (perhaps a spouse or child) may not have the financial savvy or experience to handle assets they stand to inherit. Rather than your beneficiaries inheriting all of your assets at once, a trust can allow you to distribute funds in smaller, consistent increments. This can provide a steady income stream to beneficiaries while also preventing them from spending the money all at once on an unwise financial transaction.

• **Assistance in managing financial affairs:** You may reach a point in your life where you would benefit from assistance in managing your financial affairs. Establishing a trust can allow your trustee to manage your investment portfolio, collect and disburse money on your behalf, pay your bills, and make distributions to you and your beneficiaries. The

trustee, who can be another person or corporate fiduciary such as a bank trust department, will be directed by the provisions of the trust in which you've already outlined your directives/wishes. This shifts the burden of handling your financial affairs away from you. Additionally, if you choose a trustee with investment knowledge and expertise, your investment portfolio may benefit as well.

Keep these points in mind when considering a trust, and remember that trusts are versatile and can be tailored to meet individual needs and objectives. ■

For more information, please contact Nathaniel Tagtow with City State Bank Trust & Investments at 515-981-1400. Not FDIC insured. Not deposits or other obligations of the bank and are not guaranteed by the bank. Are subject to investment risk, including possible loss of principal. City State Bank does not provide tax or legal advice. Each taxpayer should seek independent advice from a tax professional. These materials are based upon publicly available information that may change at any time without notice.

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# NAVIGATING winter hazards

How memory care communities provide a safe haven for individuals with dementia.

Winter's icy landscapes and chilly temperatures pose unique challenges for older adults — and especially for individuals with dementia. Characteristics of the season can make cognitive difficulties even more concerning and can compromise the safety of those living with memory-related conditions. Fortunately, memory care communities stand as beacons of support, offering a protective environment to ensure the wellbeing of residents during the colder months. Some communities offer short-term stays to help those struggling with memory loss stay safe when temperatures drop.



These are some of the concerns faced by those with memory loss during the winter months:

- **Slips and falls:** One of the primary concerns during winter for individuals with dementia is the increased risk of slips and falls. Icy sidewalks and snow-covered pathways can be treacherous, especially for those with impaired mobility and compromised spatial awareness. Falls can result in serious injuries, further compromising the individual's overall health. At a memory care community, there's no need to shovel sidewalks or driveways, and staff are onsite 24/7 to assist with things like safe transfer to and from vehicles.

- **Seasonal depression and isolation:** Reduced daylight and colder temperatures can contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression, which can be particularly challenging for individuals with dementia. Memory care communities actively combat this issue by organizing activities, creating a sense of community, and ensuring residents remain engaged. Social interactions are abundant and help individuals maintain cognitive function and emotional wellbeing.

- **Changes to routine:** Winter weather can disrupt regular routines, causing confusion and distress for individuals with dementia. Dementia-related conditions such as sundowning — a state of confusion that most often occurs in the late afternoon and lasts into the night — is even more of a concern as daylight hours are minimized and it gets dark much earlier. Memory care communities counteract this by providing a structured and consistent daily schedule. From meals to recreational activities, residents benefit from a predictable routine that minimizes confusion and enhances their sense of security.

With their specialized care and commitment to residents' wellbeing, memory care communities offer a warm and secure environment where individuals with dementia can thrive even in the face of winter's adversities. ■

Information provided by Holly Turner, Executive Director, The Homestead at Holland Farms Senior Living, 2800 Sunset Drive, Norwalk, 515-981-1888, [www.HollandFarmsLiving.com](http://www.HollandFarmsLiving.com).



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# RAILROADS of Warren County

The first tracks into Warren County were laid in 1871 by the Des Moines, Indianola and Missouri Railroad Co. Towns along the line were: Carlisle, Summerset Junction and Summerset, terminating in Indianola. The following year, 1872, the Des Moines, Winterset & Southwestern Railroad Co. was built west from Summerset Junction through Spring Hill, Lothrop, Martensdale, Bevington and on to Winterset. Passenger service to Winterset ended in July 1926, and the tracks were abandoned in 1958. These two railroads remained independent until 1876, when both were purchased by the Iowa Southern & Missouri Northern Railroad Company. The IS&MN was eventually consolidated into the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company in 1880. The CRI&P was purchased by the Chicago & NorthWestern in 1980, which was then purchased in 1995 by the Union Pacific. The tracks into Indianola were abandoned in 1998. Soon after, it was turned over to Warren County to become the Summerset Trail.

In 1878, another railroad, the Chariton, Des Moines & Southern Railroad (owned by the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad) entered the county, building from Indianola Junction on the CBQ mainline west of Chariton to Indianola. This line was built through Lacona, Milo, Ackworth then turned west to enter Indianola. This line was abandoned by the CBQ and tracks pulled up in 1961. The ROW is now the McVay trail.

The following year, 1879, the Des Moines and Knoxville Railway (also part of the CBQ) built from Knoxville to Des Moines, following the Des Moines River valley along much of the route. Touching the northeast corner of the county, along the south bank of the Des Moines River, this line went through Clarkson and Ford. The construction of Red Rock Dam and Lake affected tracks of both the CBQ and the Wabash railroads. This led the Corp of Engineers to combine the CBQ and Wabash tracks and build a new bridge in 1968 crossing the Des Moines River south of Runnels. The CBQ tracks west of Swan were abandoned.

Two years later, yet another railroad was built along the west side of the county. In 1881, the narrow gauge Des Moines, Osceola and Southern built from Des Moines to Canesville, Missouri. As the contract was based on mileage, some strange alignments were built in order to increase the profits of the construction company. It became the Des

Moines and Kansas City Railroad company in 1885, then the Kansas City, Des Moines & St. Paul in 1886. In 1896, this line became part of the CBQ and was standard gauged. Towns served in Warren County included Norwalk, Prole, Martensdale, Wick, St. Marys and New Virginia. Built as narrow gauge railroad with rails 3 feet apart, the line was standard gauged to 4-feet 8½-inches by the CBQ.

Railroads were not done building in the county. In 1888, the Chicago, St. Paul & Kansas City Railroad built from Orillia toward Kansas City, going through Orillia, Cumming, Lida, Churchville, Martensdale and Conger. This line became the Chicago Great Western in 1892.

Finally, in 1913, the Saint Paul and Kansas City Short Line Railroad Company built their "short line" from Des Moines to Kansas City. This line went through Carlisle, Hartford and Beech following the Des Moines River in the northeast corner of the county. It incorporated into the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific in 1948. The CNW became owner in 1980 and then the UP in 1995.

There was a proposal for an interurban line from Des Moines to Indianola, according to the "Street Railway Journal," Nov. 18, 1905. A proposal was discussed at a city council meeting. Four different companies showed interest, and a right of way was considered from about the present day Des Moines Airport to Indianola. Nothing was ever built.

In Indianola, the depots of the Rock Island and the CBQ were half a block apart. The RI depot was on the northeast corner of Howard and Detroit, while the CBQ depot sat on the southwest corner of Howard and First. The Warren County Model Railroad Club is currently building a model of the Indianola railroads in the basement of the Warren County Historical Building at the county fairgrounds. The club meets on Thursdays. ■



## NEWS BRIEF

# THANKSGIVING dinner rolls

Chef Ryan Binney (center), who leads the DMACC Baking and Pastry Arts Program at the College's Newton Campus, is flanked by current DMACC Baking and Pastry Arts students, from left, Christina Oakley of Des Moines, Cruz Castruita of Des Moines, Carter Bixby of Norwalk and graduate of Norwalk High School, and Pari McCaslin of Bondurant, during order pick-up for the program's Fourth Annual Thanksgiving Dinner Roll Fundraiser.

Students who complete the Iowa Culinary Institute® (ici) at DMACC's Baking and Pastry Arts diploma program, which launched in 2020 and is offered exclusively at the DMACC Newton Campus, graduate as skilled baking artisans who are prepared to begin working or to continue on to earn a two-year culinary degree. The one-year program accepts new students every fall. To learn more, visit [baking.dmac.edu](http://baking.dmac.edu). Photo by Lisa Schmitz for DMACC. ■





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# ARE YOU prepared for the rising tide of taxation?

Imagine this: You're on the cusp of your long-awaited retirement when suddenly someone in Washington determines you belong in a different tax bracket. If you've been investing your money in a 401(k) or traditional IRA, that scenario could mean you end up with significantly less money to fund your retirement than you had anticipated.



Tax rates are already set to go up in 2026. If Congress takes no action, taxes will revert to pre-2018 levels on Jan. 1, 2026. This could mean anywhere from a 1% to 5% increase in marginal tax rates. And with the national debt-to-GDP ratio ballooning to its highest point in seven decades, we could be nearing a point where our leaders are forced to finally address the issue. The government can either reduce the deficit by a combination of increased tax revenue and decreased spending, or it can default on any number of its obligations. A default could be disastrous and result in higher interest rates, higher prices on consumer goods and inflation.

Are tax rate hikes imminent? Many believe that, because the national debt has reached such enormous levels — \$33.6 trillion (as of October 2023) — tax rate increases are likely since the debt needs to

be paid off with tax revenue.

You can't necessarily count on tax rates to stay the same as they are currently in retirement, but you don't have to sit back and watch. There are strategies you can implement now that could lower your taxable income in the future.

One potential strategy is to invest in currently taxed assets to avoid future tax liability. Or you may want to look into potentially tax-free income options such as life insurance, a Roth IRA or municipal bonds.

Tax decisions, like any retirement strategy, should be made with a clear understanding of the rules, the impact on your tax situation, and how the strategy fits into your overall retirement vision. Your retirement planner and trusted tax preparer should work to help you get it right.

Every Dec. 31 that goes by that you don't have a long-term tax plan is a missed opportunity. It's time to get ahead of taxes and the potential seismic shift in taxation. ■

Information provided by Loren Merkle CFP®, RICP®, Certified Financial Fiduciary®, Merkle Retirement Planning, 1860 S.E. Princeton Drive, Grimes, 515-278-1006.

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## EL NINO winter?

### How to manage your HVAC comfort in a mild winter

The mild winter weather is advantageous for your heating system because you do not have to change the temperature on your thermostat. After all, lower-output systems can provide adequate heat.

However, this convenience can quickly vanish if you do not utilize some best practices with your home and system during episodes of warmer weather.

Here are some best practices to maximize your home and business comfort this winter.

- **Reduce the temperature by a few degrees.**

Setting your thermostat a few degrees lower in the winter won't make a difference if the weather outside is mild, but the output of your heating system will be less, which will save you money on electricity or fuel.

- **Consider purchasing a programmable thermostat.** If your heating system still gets monitored by a bi-metal or mercury temperature sensor, an intelligent thermostat will improve



the performance of your HVAC system. It automatically determines when the heater will circulate up or down, allowing you to save energy and avoid the need for furnace repair. The most fundamental model enables a 24-hour cycle, while more advanced forms allow for a seven-day process with different configurations.

- **Make sure the air vents aren't blocked.** If you wish to get the best air circulation, make sure your home's air vents never remain obstructed by furniture or decor. It may necessitate some heavy work and possibly rearranging furniture in the room, but the benefits of efficient airflow may be well worth the effort.

- **Replace your air filter regularly.** A new air filter is essential for most HVAC systems every three months, and it's crucial to replace it on time. In addition, obstructed air filters impede airflow, making it even more complicated for your furnace unit to heat the home effectively.

- **Open to the south, close to the north.** Unlock the drapes, shutters and blinds that encompass any south-facing windows during the winter days to help more heat and warmth

come into your rooms. Cover all other window frames with drapes or curtains. Non-south-facing windows obtain only a few hours of sunshine per day, and, if left uncovered, they allow heat to escape through the thin glass and gaps in the window casing.

- **Avoid heating drafts at all costs.** Check for gaps under gates, around the windows, through upper-floor doors, and even through power outlets for a shiver-inducing atmosphere. You'll not only remain warmer, but you'll also save nearly 10% on your overall energy bill by eliminating these drafts.

- **Consider a high efficiency ductless heat pump for consistency and lower energy costs.** Do you find yourself raising the temps on your thermostat just to keep a space upstairs more comfortable? This is common and a real drain on your home's efficiency. A ductless heat pump installation is the perfect solution. It will provide consistent comfort throughout your home and even lower your utility bills. ■

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# INSURE your home-based business

A home-based business may not be covered under your home insurance policy. More than half of American businesses are homebased, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration. But setting up headquarters in your home doesn't mean your homeowner's insurance will adequately protect your operation.

"A typical homeowner's policy provides about \$2,500 of coverage," says Loretta Worters, vice president of communications for the Insurance Information Institute. That usually will cover equipment — but it won't offer liability protection or cover you for lost data or income.

Do your research to protect yourself and your home business. That includes having the right type and amount of insurance coverage.

## Option 1: Homeowner's policy with business property increased limit.

Most homeowner's policies will cover some



business personal property such as a desk or merchandise held as samples up to a set limit. This coverage is intended for business use while the property is on the residence premises. You can add an endorsement to your homeowner's policy to increase coverage on business use while property is on the residence premises. You can add an endorsement to your homeowner's policy to increase coverage on business personal property and liability for protection in the event someone — say a delivery person — is injured on the property.

You might consider this option if you:

- Only plan to have less than your policy's limit worth of business property kept at your home-based business location.
- Don't invite customers to your home-based business location.
- Only have a small amount of personal property intended for business use outside your home.

## Option 2: Business insurance policy.

While your homeowner's insurance policy comes

with liability protection for incidents that happen inside your home, this coverage does not extend to home-based business-related activities. For example, if a customer comes to your home to exchange payments for goods or services and suffers an injury, they may not be covered. This coverage gap can easily be fixed with a business insurance policy, which also provides loss of income coverage.

You might consider this option if you:

- Offer services in your home, such as tax preparation or hair services, which may require additional specialized liability coverage.
- Plan to have more business property kept at your home-based business location than your policy limit.
- Rely on the income from your business to support your household. ■

Lane Insurance would be happy to help examine your risks and suggest the best coverages for you and your family. Feel free to request a quote online at [laneinsurance.com](http://laneinsurance.com) or give us a call at 515-981-4614. Information provided by Mike Lane, Lane Insurance Agency Inc., 1225 Sunset Drive, Norwalk.

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## RECIPE

# MAKE 'eggstra' special holiday memories

*(Family Features)* Creating memorable moments and special meals with friends and family during the holiday season doesn't have to be overwhelming. While these festivities are often a favorite moment each year, the planning and preparation can be a bear for hosts. To help take some stress out of hosting duties, start with what you likely already have on hand, like eggs.

Whether it's served as an appetizer or light dessert, this savory-with-a-touch-of-sweet recipe can become part of your family's most cherished traditions, made possible by eggs. Remember, all it takes is the egg carton already in the refrigerator to be the "host or hostess with the most-est" and make memories with those who matter most.

Discover more benefits and recipes that go beyond expectations at [IncredibleEgg.org/invaluableegg](http://IncredibleEgg.org/invaluableegg). ■

## Popovers with cranberry butter

*Recipe courtesy of Shereen Pavlides (@CookingwithShereen) on behalf of the American Egg Board*

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 45-50 minutes

Yield: 6 popovers

### POPOVERS:

- 1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 1/3 cups whole milk
- 4 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons avocado or vegetable oil
- nonstick cooking spray

### CRANBERRY BUTTER:

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons cranberry sauce
- 1 pinch salt
- **To make popovers:** In large bowl, whisk flour, salt, milk and eggs until silky smooth. Add oil and whisk to combine. Transfer to pourable pitcher, cover and refrigerate at least six hours, or overnight.
- Heat oven to 375 F.
- Place 6-cup popover pan in oven 10 minutes.



- Remove pan and spray with nonstick cooking spray. Stir batter, divide and pour into cups, filling each 3/4 full.
- Bake until puffed high and cooked through, 45-50 minutes.
- **To make cranberry butter:** In medium bowl, mix butter, cranberry sauce and salt until well combined.
- Remove popovers from oven and serve with cranberry butter.

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**SCAN TO REGISTER!**

## SENIOR LIVING

By Edencrest at the Legacy

# HOLIDAY visits to older family members may reveal problems

The holidays are a time to gather with family, whether with those you see every day or those you seldom see. These are joyous times, filled with happy traditions and reminiscing.

When visiting elderly family members, you might notice they have slipped and are frailer. Parents or grandparents could have joint pain that prevents them from standing to prepare meals or do laundry. They may have become isolated or can't get out in an emergency. Sometimes, elderly loved ones become unsteady on their feet and are a fall risk. You might notice that the elderly caregiver can no longer provide home health care without suffering from stress and illness. Cognitive challenges can be harder to recognize but are also risky.

### Per the Alzheimer's Association, there are 10 warning signs of dementia:

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life — different than forgetting names or appointments but remembering them later.
2. Challenges in planning, solving problems or concentrating.
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks, such as driving to a familiar location, household chores, managing a budget or remembering rules of a favorite game.
4. Confusion with time or place.
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
6. Problems speaking or writing, such as following a conversation.
7. Misplacing things and putting them in an illogical place.
8. Poor judgment, especially with personal hygiene or dealing with money.
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities, ceasing to do hobbies.
10. Changes in mood and personality, such as becoming confused, suspicious, depressed, fearful or anxious.

When your family member experiences several of these conditions, it may be time to consider moving your loved one into senior care. This might be the right time to have an honest discussion with other family members about your senior family member's health and his or her ability to remain safe and fulfilled. This is also a great time, when all the family is together, to visit one or more assisted living communities and identify one or two that can best serve the needs of your loved ones. Not all assisted living communities provide memory care for residents with dementia. Not all provide all meals or housekeeping. All do provide assistance and support for older people needing that extra support. Even if your loved ones are stable at this point, looking at other living options provides helpful information. ■

Information provided by Edencrest at the Legacy, 2901 Cedar St., Norwalk, 515- 250-2806, [welcomelg@edencrestliving.com](mailto:welcomelg@edencrestliving.com).

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## CHRISTMAS: What's it all about?

Christmas traditions are growing in number every year, and these include everything from watching the Great Christmas Light Fight on TV, to Black Friday shopping, to even skipping it altogether and heading to a warm climate. One of the oldest traditions in our culture is sending Christmas cards to family and friends, which is the theme for this issue.



According to reliable statistics, Americans send 1.5 billion Christmas cards every year, spending around \$2 billion on those cards. As you can see, this isn't just a fun tradition, it's a billion-dollar business. When asked why they send these cards, the most popular response was to make someone feel good. Given that the Christmas season can be difficult for a lot of people, I certainly can't see anything wrong with trying to make others feel good at Christmas, and I hope and pray we all take it upon ourselves to do that.

In the end, what we all need most is to understand the message of the Christmas season.

Christmas centers around the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ, but what no one knows for sure is when Jesus was born. We know neither the exact date nor the exact year of his birth (scholars estimate between 4 and 6 B.C.). We don't know these things because the Bible doesn't tell us. It only gives us the details surrounding Christ's birth. Apparently, these are the things God not only wanted us to know but to focus on — not a date or a year. Prophecies made hundreds of years before his birth foretold of a baby boy born of a virgin in the city of Bethlehem who would become the only hope for sinful mankind. Every aspect of Jesus' birth fulfilled one of these ancient prophecies. No human being could have planned and carried out such an event. The author behind the Christmas story is none other than God himself. But why did he do it, and why should any of us care?

Christmas should be important to me, to you, to all of us, because it's the celebration of an act of love. Christmas is about God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. The true meaning of Christmas is this: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus was God's gift to us as the punishment for our sin. God is the ultimate gift-giver. The first "Black Friday" took place the day Jesus gave himself for us and died on a cross so that everyone could have their sins forgiven and receive eternal life by believing in Jesus and what He did. Christmas can be life changing when we take it to heart and trust in Jesus for eternal life. How about you? Is Jesus personal to you because you've put your trust in Him or is He a baby in a picture on a Christmas card? There's a big difference. Don't miss the real meaning of Christmas this year. ■

Pastor Rob Jones is the senior pastor of Fellowship Community Church in Norwalk. The church was founded under his leadership in 1995.

## Q: Is it normal to gain weight after your workout?

**A:** Yes, it is normal. The thing to remember as you are embarking or going through your fitness journey is that nothing is linear. In a perfect world, every weigh-in would show progress, but, unfortunately, that is not the case. Progress is going to fluctuate, and that is completely OK. There are multiple reasons as to why your weight might have gone up instead of down. First off, when you start lifting weights or start lifting heavier, your muscle fibers have to break down to grow back stronger. In doing so, your body must take on more water to help with the healing process. The same thing happens with inflammation. The stress that your body goes through in your workout causes inflammation, and your body must once again take on water to help with the healing process.



Now, let's talk about muscle mass. It takes a couple of months for your composition to start changing regarding your muscle going up and fat going down. While yes, your fat mass is going down, you might not see it on the scale quite yet. This is because muscle is denser than fat, so it weighs more, but it takes up less space. Your clothes will start fitting better even when the scale might not be moving as fast as you wanted. The biggest thing I would tell you is not to get discouraged. Progress is happening behind the scenes when you first start out. Keep going, take it day by day. Just imagine taking this next year for yourself and where you will be this time next year. ■

Information provided by Dani McManus, certified personal trainer/head coach at Anytime Fitness in Norwalk. To submit a question for future articles, contact her at [norwalk@anytimefitness.com](mailto:norwalk@anytimefitness.com).

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## MAYORS MOMENT

It felt like Thanksgiving came early this year and it also felt like Metro Waste Authority's (MWA) yard waste season pick up ended early too. Quite a few of us still have bags of yard waste we'd like to get rid of. Well, I've got good news for you. MWA will be picking up yard waste on your regular trash collection day from January 1 until January 12. You will want to get your yard waste bags, along with your Christmas tree, out to the curb, on your regular trash collection day, the first two weeks of January. Otherwise, you'll have to wait until spring when MWA starts their Compost It! season.

I hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving this year. My wife and I loved hosting our family and had a great time eating some delicious food and reminiscing.

### The Season of Giving

Christmas is, in my opinion, a time to give back and share those blessings we've received throughout the year. I encourage you to find someone to bless with a gift of kindness this holiday season. There are quite a few opportunities to do this right here within our community. You can donate to the Norwalk Food Bank, fulfill a need hanging on one of our Norwalk church's giving trees, and put money in a Salvation Army kettle when you're shopping.



Tom Phillips, Mayor

Want to make an immediate impact? You can also help someone out with their water bill. All it takes is a quick call to the Norwalk Water Department or stop by City Hall. It's amazing when we give to others, the joy and blessing we receive is sometimes greater than we could have even imagined.

### Assistance is Available

If you find yourself struggling financially this winter and unable to cover your utility bill, rent or mortgage, know that you have a few options to help you make it through this tough time. From United Way's 211 program, to IMPACT Community Action Partnership, to IowaMortgageHelp.com, there are many ways you can receive assistance. I encourage you to be proactive and stop by Norwalk City Hall. We have several brochures with helpful information and staff is available and more than happy to help guide you through your options.

### Happy Holidays

I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. With all the hustle and bustle of the season, don't forget to pause for a moment and really enjoy your family and friends this holiday season.

### Seasons' Greetings!

Mayor Tom Phillips

See what  
happening at  
the Norwalk  
Easter Public  
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## Stormwater Winter Tips

As we move from fall rains to winter snow and ice, there are still practices everyone can do to prevent excessive stormwater runoff. Salt and other deicing chemicals are two of the most widely used agents during snow and ice seasons. Sodium Chloride and rock salt are the most common de-icing products, but Calcium Chloride has more benefits. Calcium Chloride does not have the chemical additives that rock salt has; it is less harmful to vegetation, and only one-third as much is needed. It also works well at low temperatures (25 degrees F).

Here are a few tips that everyone should practice.

- Buy the right blend. By having a product that best suits your climate and average low temperatures you will use less of it.
- Keep walkways shoveled in the first place as snow quickly becomes ice when walked on.
- Pre-treat walkways before a storm hits. You will use less deicer in the end.
- Mix salt with sand. You will use less to melt ice and gain traction provided by the sand.
- Store ice-melt in air tight containers to maintain maximum effectiveness.

## Keep Storm Drains Clean

Leaves, grass, or other yard debris should never be blown or placed in the street or near storm drains, ditches, or waterways. This could clog storm sewers or culverts and cause flooding! Also, did you know decaying yard waste uses the oxygen in the water harming aquatic plants and wildlife? It can also cause foul odors and unsightly waterways. Not to mention it is against City Code to place yard waste of any kind in the street.

### Please help by doing the following:

- Bag or mulch your yard waste to keep our storm sewer clean and unobstructed
- Learn more about yard waste disposal by visiting [WhereItShouldGo.com](http://WhereItShouldGo.com) and searching for Yard Waste
- Don't blow grass or leaves into street; if it happens clean up when finished
- Limit lawn chemicals
- Pick up pet waste
- Help clean storm drain in your neighborhood to reduce chances of flooding

If you have a storm drain in your neighborhood that ever looks like this, take the initiative, and clean it off. You will help yourself and all your neighbors!



If you must use de-icing chemicals, follow these suggestions:

- Control application of chemical deicers, a little goes a long way, avoid applying to much.
- Limit chemical applications near environmental sensitive areas, such as drinking water cells.
- Sand can be used as a substitute to salt to assist with traction on driveways.

Consider using salt substitutes that are less harmful to the environment and to concrete walkways, including Calcium Chloride and Calcium Magnesium Acetate

There you have it. Some easy practices everyone can do to help reduce stormwater run-off. Please remember what goes down the storm drain ends up in our drinking glass.



## Employee Spotlight Jack Haller, Police Officer



Officer Jack Haller graduated from Urbandale High School. Thereafter he attended Grand View University to play baseball and major in Business Administration/Finance. Jack started with the NPD in April of 2019 attending the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy--was Top Scholastic Graduate. He worked various patrol shifts until April of 2023 when Jack transferred to Special Services as the department's Community Impact Officer/Investigator. In addition, he has worked for the Suburban Emergency Response Team (SWAT) since September of 2020. Jack is a Firearms Instructor, Chemical Munitions Instructor, Field Training Officer, and assists with instructing Metro-Wide active shooter training (RAID--Rapid Attack Immediate Deployment).

Prior to working for the City, Jack was a Special Needs Paraeducator at Grandwood Education Center in Woodward, IA and a baseball coach. Outside of work, Jack enjoys spending time with his family.

"I love that every day is different. I enjoy the opportunity to impact people's lives in a positive manner by helping them solve problems after bad things happen. I particularly enjoy the proactive aspect of policing where we can get out and keep the community a safe place to live and work. In my current role as Community Impact Officer I like being able to dig deeper with cases and make connections with local businesses and community groups."



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# LOTS to do in Norwalk

## Clarke family serves community.

Both Steve Clarke and his wife, Melissa, grew up in smaller towns. So, when they decided to move out of Des Moines, they wanted to find somewhere to settle down that felt similar to what they experienced during their youth.

They found just that in Norwalk and moved to town in 2012. The icing on the cake was finding an affordable home. The town's proximity to other places around the metro is a benefit for the Clarkes, too.

Steve and Melissa say they enjoy many aspects of where they live, but their convenient location is at the top of the list. They enjoy their newer development and nice neighborhood with kids their two boys' ages. They also like to spend time on their deck, looking over their spacious backyard. They appreciate their friendly neighbors as well.

Within the community, the Clarkes have found a lot to appreciate about the Norwalk Community School District. But what stands out the most is the small-town feel that remains.

As an extension of their appreciation for the community, both Steve and Melissa are active with town organizations and activities. Steve serves on the Board of Trustees for the Norwalk Easter Public Library, helping to set library policy, approve library expenditures, and advocate for responsive and creative library services.



Steve and Melissa Clarke say Norwalk has a lot to offer their family, and they give back through volunteering.

He's also the president of the Norwalk Music Boosters. This parent-run organization supports all of the vocal and instrumental programs within Norwalk's public schools. They do so through fundraising, events and helping to enhance program offerings.

Melissa is one of the coaches for the Norwalk Robo Warriors, which is the school district's robotics team.

Their involvement with these activities illustrates the Clarkes' ultimate reason for enjoying living in Norwalk.

"There are lots of opportunities and activities in central Iowa, and Norwalk is conveniently located for all of it," Steve says. ■

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# SMALL-TOWN feel is big draw

Beckmans choose neighborhood and schools.

A little more than a decade ago, Abby Beckman and her husband, Josh, made Norwalk their home.

"We decided to move to Norwalk because it is close enough to Des Moines and all the city has to offer but still gives that small-town feel," she says.

They made the decision to purchase their current home because of the neighborhood — something they still appreciate today, especially because of their three children.

"We love that our neighborhood has lots of kids," Beckman says. "There's always someone for our kids to play with."

What they enjoy about the home specifically is the backyard, where they gather and hang out often.

"We have a fenced-in backyard and a nice-sized patio, so we love to spend time out there," Beckman says.

The family also appreciates being part of the Norwalk Community School District. They have a lot to be proud of, too, as the district boasts a 96.2 percent graduation rate and three Iowa Teachers of the Year, among many other highlights.

"We really love the schools and the support the schools show to our kids," Beckman says.

Beckman also gets to connect with the community through her small business, POP Balloon Co., which offers custom balloon décor for all occasions.

"Really, I just love working with people and making people happy celebrating the things that are important to them," she says.

Being able to do that from her Norwalk home base is just the icing on the cake, she says. ■



Abby and Josh Beckman appreciate their children attending Norwalk schools, which they say are supportive.

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## Think Spring Gardening Seminar

Feb. 24, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Hubbell Hall at the Kent Campus Center on the Simpson College campus

Think Spring is the perfect gift for the garden enthusiast on your holiday list. Join more than 100 garden enthusiasts to listen to inspiring speakers, win door prizes, enjoy shopping with vendors and enjoy a delicious catered lunch. Master Gardeners earn four CEU credits for attending.



Featured speakers include Jessica Lancial (Mushrooms), Dan Fillius (Getting the Dirt on Soil), Ajay Nair (Vegetable Gardening) and Emma Hanigan (Replacing Ash, Planning for Future Forest). Doors open at 8:30 a.m. Parking is available in the lot adjacent to the building and on nearby streets.

Warren County Master Gardeners host this fun event to raise funds to provide the educational seminar as well as provide grants and educational opportunities to non-profit organizations.

Ticket prices are \$50. Registration closes on Jan. 31. Go to <https://go.iastate.edu/KBW2WW> to register. For more information, contact Bethany with the ISU Extension office at 515-961-6237 or [bcecot@iastate.edu](mailto:bcecot@iastate.edu).

## GriefShare: Surviving the Holidays Seminar

Saturday, Dec. 16 from 9:30-11 a.m.

Fellowship Community Church, 225 North Ave., Norwalk

GriefShare: Surviving the Holidays is a helpful, encouraging seminar for people facing the holidays after a loved one's death. There is no cost to attend this event. The seminar features practical suggestions and reassurance through video interviews with counselors, grief experts, and other people who have experienced the holidays after their loved one's death. Topics to be discussed include dealing with hard-hitting emotions, what to do about traditions, how to survive social events, and where to find comfort and strength.

The video seminar is combined with support group discussion of the materials presented during the video, and those who attend will receive a Survival Guide filled with practical tips, encouraging words, a gospel presentation, journaling ideas, and exercises for daily help through the holiday season.

For more information, visit [www.fellowshipnorwalk.org](http://www.fellowshipnorwalk.org) or contact Pastor Matt Hayton at 515-981-0699 or email [contact@fellowshipnorwalk.org](mailto:contact@fellowshipnorwalk.org) ■



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### AREA HOLIDAY ENTERTAINMENT

• **Through DEC. 31: Santa's Rock N Lights.** Holiday-themed light show occurring daily from 5-9 p.m. at Living History Farms, 11121 Hickman Road, Urbandale; [lhf.org/event/santas-rock-n-lights](http://lhf.org/event/santas-rock-n-lights).

• **Through DEC. 31: Holiday Hullabaloo.** Now in its second year, experience a family-friendly holiday event with festivities and entertainment every weekend through the dates posted. Horizon Events Center, 10320 Hickman Road, Clive; [horizoneventscenter.com](http://horizoneventscenter.com).

• **Through DEC. 17: "All Is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914."** Des Moines Community Playhouse, 831 42nd St., Des Moines. [dmplayhouse.com](http://dmplayhouse.com).

• **Through DEC. 17: "A Charlie Brown Christmas."** Des Moines Community Playhouse's Kate Goldman Children's Theatre. [dmplayhouse.com](http://dmplayhouse.com).

• **DEC. 8-17: "A Christmas Carol."** Stoner Theatre, 221 Walnut St.,

Des Moines. [iowastage.org](http://iowastage.org).

• **DEC. 15-17: "Home For The Holidays, A Christmas Cabaret."**

Tallgrass Theatre Company, 2019 Grand Ave., Suite 100, West Des Moines. [tallgrasstheatre.org](http://tallgrasstheatre.org).

• **DEC. 17: Michael W. Smith Christmas** at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Hoyt Sherman Place, 1501 Woodland Ave., Des Moines. [hoyshtsherman.org](http://hoyshtsherman.org).

• **DEC. 21: "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer: The Musical,"** at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Des Moines Civic Center, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines. [dmpa.org](http://dmpa.org).

• **DEC. 22-23: "Cirque Dreams Holidayze,"** Des Moines Civic Center, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines. [dmpa.org](http://dmpa.org).

• **DEC. 31: New Year's Eve Pops:** Cirque De La Symphonie at the Des Moines Civic Center, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines; [desmoinesperformingarts.org](http://desmoinesperformingarts.org)



### Middlebrook Mercantile events

Various dates

4125 Cumming Ave., Cumming

The public is invited to the following events: Friday, Dec. 15, 5-8 p.m., Matt Terronez performs; Saturday, Dec. 16, 6-9 p.m., Gina Gedler Christmas performance; Sunday, Dec. 17, 2-5 p.m., Bob Pace performs. ■

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## OPEN meetings and records law

Our nation and state were founded on the principle that it is the government that serves and reports to its citizens. In keeping with that principle, Iowa has laws mandating that governmental meetings and records be open to the public. The Open Meetings Act is found at Iowa Code Chapter 21, and the Open Records Act is found at Iowa Code Chapter 22.



### Open Meetings Act

The intent of this act is to assure that the basis and rationale of governmental decisions are easily accessible to the people.

The act applies to governmental bodies, which are generally defined as a board, council, commission or other governing body of the state or political subdivisions. A meeting is defined as a gathering of a majority of the members of a governmental body where there is deliberation or action upon any matter within the scope of the body's policy-making duties.

The act requires public notice of each meeting and that it be held in open session. There are some exceptions which allow a body to go into closed session upon an affirmative public vote of two thirds of the members.

It is notable that the public may use cameras or recording devices at any open session.

### Open Records Act

The Iowa Supreme Court has observed that the act is designed to open the doors of government to public scrutiny and to prevent government from secreting its decision-making activities from the public, on whose behalf it is its duty to act.

The act applies to governmental bodies, defined as the state as well as any county, city, township, school corporation, political subdivision, tax-supported district and some others.

The act provides that every person shall have the right to examine and copy a public record and to publish or otherwise disseminate its contents. The cost of copying records can be recovered by the governmental body.

Also, a government body shall not prevent the examination or copying of a public record by contracting with a nongovernment body to perform any of its duties or functions.

Of course, there are many exceptions to this. The act details a list of at least 75 types of "confidential records" (with subparts) which are not to be released absent a court order.

### Iowa Public Information Board

Iowa Code Chapter 23 created a board to decide cases involving the Open Meetings Act and Open Records Act. As an agency, its decisions can be reviewed by the district court.

Transparent government is reflected by Iowa's open meetings and records laws. As is often the case, there are numerous exceptions to these laws, and a careful reading may be necessary in a given situation. ■

Information provided by Ken Winjum, The Winjum Law Firm, P.L.C., 1220 Sunset Drive., Suite 103, Norwalk, 515-981-5220, [www.winjumlaw.com](http://www.winjumlaw.com).

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# SELLING your home in the winter

Most homeowners would agree that the best time to sell a home is during spring. Some of those people would even go as far as to say that is the only time to sell a home, but the fact is that people are moving every month of the year. There will be about 20 offers accepted in Norwalk during a typical December according to the Des Moines Area Association of REALTORS®.

One problem for buyers who are house shopping in December is that there isn't typically a lot to choose from, since most sellers would prefer to wait until spring. For sellers, there will be fewer showings, but if your home is being shown in December, that buyer seriously needs a home.

Sellers may wonder what can be done to enhance curb appeal while their landscaping is either dead or dormant. Here are a few ideas:

- **Color:** Just small amounts of color can



really pop in the winter. You can purchase things like a grapevine wreath with bright berries, or even some potted plants with berries. Real berries not only add color, but attract birds, too.

And, speaking of birds, you can create colorful garlands that will not only decorate your trees but feed the birds as well. Use strands of cranberries, nuts and small fruits like grapes and blueberries. Hanging a colorful bird house can be decorative as well as functional, providing shelter to birds.

- **Light:** You can get creative with string lights and use them after the holidays. They can transform a drab-looking front yard into a cheerful and upbeat atmosphere. It is common to see them on trees and shrubs, but use your creativity to come up with unique scenes. I have seen people put string lights in a large glass jar to make it look like a lantern.

Carefully positioned flood or spotlights will highlight a feature you want to stand out. Don't go crazy on the amount of light. It doesn't take much light to illuminate something in your

landscaping that you want to emphasize.

Ice luminaries or lanterns create a glow that is ideal for illuminating the path to your front entry. Get creative with the shapes by using different containers to freeze the water in. Add color by adding something like berries or marbles to the water before it freezes. Keep the light on by replacing the candle with a battery-powered light instead.

The additional lighting will also help keep your property safe from vandalism. Since it can be dark nearly half the day, the lighting can discourage thieves.

As you can see, the only limit to ideas to what will enhance the curb appeal of your home is your creativity, but even that can be enhanced by the use of Internet searches.

Merry Christmas. ■

Information provided by Jon Niemeyer, owner, EXIT Realty North Star, 1039 Sunset Drive, Norwalk, 515-981-5131, Jon.Niemeyer@exitrealtynorthstar.com.

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# NOISY toys

## Protect children's hearing health

December is Safe Toys and Gifts Awareness Month. This initiative aims to increase awareness of current safety laws and guidelines for toys, including toys that produce sound. These safety requirements are intended to minimize the possibility of hearing damage due to sound-producing toys.



### Toy safety

Federal law requires all toys sold in the United States to meet specific safety requirements, including volume (ASTM F963, Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety). This standard requires the volume of most toys to measure less than 85 dB at a distance of approximately 20 inches. However, younger children tend to play with toys near their faces, mouths and ears. At 0 inches, this volume can increase up to 120 dB, or 1,000 times louder than 85 dB, causing permanent hearing loss in less than 10 seconds.

### Noisy toys

Every year, the Sight & Hearing Association (SHA) publishes its Noisy Toys List. This non-profit organization randomly selects sound-producing toys and measures the maximum sound levels. From 2017 to 2021, 118 noisy toys were tested. At 0 inches, or a child's ear to the toy, 73% of these toys exceeded sound levels of 85 dB. The loudest toy was tested in 2021 with a maximum sound level of 109.7 dB. At this

level, hearing damage can occur in less than two minutes.

### How to protect children's hearing health

• Review SHA's Noisy Toys lists at [www.IowaHearingCenter.com](http://www.IowaHearingCenter.com).

• Measure the volume of a toy. Smartphone users can download a free sound level meter app (e.g., NIOSH Sound Level Meter). Position the microphone of the smartphone near the toy's speaker and note the sound level. This level should be less than 85 dB.

- Decrease a toy's volume.
- Adjust the volume to the lowest setting.
- Apply tape over the speaker.
- Remove the batteries.

This holiday season, help prevent permanent hearing loss from noisy toys. Give the gift of healthy hearing. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kelly Cook, Audiologist, Iowa Hearing Center, 1228 Sunset Drive, Suite B, Norwalk, 515-416-5990. References for this article are available at [www.IowaHearingCenter.com](http://www.IowaHearingCenter.com).



## Noisy Toys Can Damage Your Child's Hearing

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## WELLNESS

By Jen Penisten

### VITAMIN C — Does it really make a difference?

Vitamin C is talked about more frequently during cold and flu season, which is sure to amp up during the holiday season. But, does it really work? Why does or doesn't it help? What's the best way to get it? Our body doesn't naturally make vitamin C, so it's something we need to get from food or supplementation. The best food sources are fruits and vegetables, with citrus and berries having the highest amounts of vitamin C. Vitamin C can also be received through injections and IV infusions. Vitamin C 100-200mg per day has been shown to give optimal blood/cell levels, but, when one is sick, the body requires a higher dose to compensate for the inflammation and demand of vitamin C to get back to a normal state. It also helps the white blood cells kill the invading infection. This means it truly is beneficial to not only prevent colds and the flu, but to help the body fight off whatever is ailing you. While food is always the best source, oral supplements aren't always the best for your body to absorb. Injections and IV infusions offer superior absorption and more accurate dosing. Next time you're feeling down and out, remember that vitamin C can help. ■



Information provided by Jen Penisten, MSN, RN, NP-C, CEO/owner, Vivid Life Spa, 1016 Main St., Norwalk, 515-850-7848, [www.vividlifespaspa.com](http://www.vividlifespaspa.com).

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Jen Penisten ARNP, Owner

## HEALTH

By Dr. Michael O'Meara

### Q: What is diabetic retinopathy?

**A:** Diabetic retinopathy is an ocular complication of diabetes. It occurs when the blood vessels in the retina (the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye) are damaged. Anyone who has diabetes can develop retinopathy, but the risk is higher in patients with a long duration of the disease. The risk is also higher if the diabetes is poorly controlled and for diabetics who have hypertension and high cholesterol and who smoke. In early stages of diabetic retinopathy, vision may not be significantly affected. However, later stages of the disease may lead to reduced vision and blindness. Treatment of diabetic retinopathy may include use of lasers, medication injected directly into the eyes and surgery. Diabetic patients should have a comprehensive eye exam at least once a year that includes dilation of the pupils to monitor for retinopathy. The take home message: Diabetic retinopathy can be avoided, or the severity reduced, by good control of blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol. If you smoke, try your best to quit. ■



Information provided by Dr. Michael O'Meara, Optometric Associates-Norwalk, 1228 Sunset Drive, Suite A, Norwalk, 515-981-5388.

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## HEALTH

By Dr. Elizabeth Fleck

# MAXIMIZE benefits and minimize costs

'Tis the season to utilize dental benefits before the end of the year. We understand dentistry can be expensive, and the cost alone can be a deterrent for many to seek care. We work to do what we can to maximize the use of your dental insurance and minimize your out-of-pocket costs in any way we can. Many dental insurance plans run on a calendar year basis and have "use it or lose it" benefits. The cost of larger treatment plans can be overwhelming, but, by initiating treatment now, it's possible to maximize your insurance by utilizing 2023 benefits for some treatment in December and 2024 benefits for the remaining treatment in January.




Do you still need a second cleaning this year? Have you had treatment planned that you've been putting off? If you're mentally saying yes, it's the perfect time to schedule an appointment. HSA and Flex spending plans are typically thought to be a medical benefit, but they can be used on most dental procedures, too. Don't lose out on unspent Flex dollars.

Between patients trying to get in before the end of the year and office closures for the holidays, appointments this time of year fill up fast. The clock is ticking. Call your dentist to schedule your visit today. ■

Information provided by Dr. Elizabeth Fleck, Norwalk Family Dentistry, 1101 Chatham Ave., Suite A, Norwalk, 515-256-9000, [www.norwalkfamilydentistry.com](http://www.norwalkfamilydentistry.com).

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## HEALTH

By Ashley Powell

# ELEVATE your wellness

Unlock the full potential of CBD and THC with the revolutionary water-soluble format. This cutting-edge delivery system maximizes bioavailability, ensuring rapid absorption and heightened effectiveness. Unlike traditional methods, water-soluble cannabinoids offer a more efficient way for the body to absorb these compounds, leading to enhanced therapeutic benefits. CBD, known for its non-psychoactive properties, delivers holistic relief from various conditions such as chronic pain, inflammation, and anxiety. When combined with THC, the psychoactive counterpart, the duo can create a synergistic effect known as the "entourage effect." This collaboration can provide a more comprehensive range of therapeutic benefits, catering to a broader spectrum of wellness needs. The water-soluble formulation takes these advantages a step further, offering a convenient and potent solution. It allows for precise dosing, making it easier to customize and control intake. Moreover, the quicker onset of action ensures faster relief, making it an ideal choice for those seeking immediate results. Additionally, the water-soluble format eliminates the need for carriers like oils or fats, enhancing the product's versatility. Experience a holistic approach that combines efficiency, precision and the powerful benefits of cannabinoids. ■



Information provided by Ashley Powell, CBD American Shaman, 800 S. 50th St., No. 106, West Des Moines, 515-380-5251, and 3418 Eighth St. S.W., No. 3, Altoona, 515-967-4036. Sources: Cannabidiol and Cannabidiol Metabolites: Pharmacokinetics, Interaction with Food, and Influence on Liver Function. Nutrients 2022, 14, 2152. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14102152>



## MANAGING holiday emotions

Like clockwork, we once again find ourselves in the thick of the holiday season. It's no secret that this time of year is meant to be filled with joy and thankfulness, but often left unsaid is the anxiety and fog that arrives with expectation and uncertainty.

We are currently in a loneliness epidemic. Knowing what those around us are working through is hard unless we reach out. While it can be stressful, don't be afraid to call someone or seek a connection.

Here are some useful tools to remember when interacting with stressors (people) this year:

- **Breathing** – Collect your thoughts, control your reactions.
- **Distancing** – Seek out another room, go for a walk.
- **Communication** – Speak up when in need.
- **Exit strategy** – Come with a plan for a quick exit.

It's important to remember there is no perfect Christmas or Kwanza. There is no perfect Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Thanksgiving, or New Year Celebration. All we can do is make the best of our situations and laugh off the rest as we work towards tomorrow. ■

Information provided by Jacob Dickey, intern, SS Therapy and Consulting, Ltd, 4725 Merle Hay Road, Suite 205, Des Moines, 515-528-8135, dickey@sstherapyandconsulting.com, www.sstherapyandconsulting.com.



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## Q: How do stress and chiropractic care affect my back condition?

**A:** During the holidays, we all come under an extra amount of stress. Stress actually affects the cycle of back injury or condition in several ways. Stress involves your body's reaction to change and, although we commonly think of emotional or mental reactions to change, physical force and tension are also included.

Stress, or force, is a key element in the creation of conditions for which people seek relief through chiropractic care. Stresses from high force, such as slips, falls and motor vehicle accidents, may cause injury as can lower forces of a prolonged or repetitive nature (sitting at a desk).

Once the cause of your condition has been identified, and the method of correction has been selected, your doctor of chiropractic will actually use positive stresses to counteract or overcome the negative stresses that have created your condition. Some of these positive stresses may include chiropractic adjustments, exercise, stretching, diet, relaxation and nutritional recommendation. Your chiropractic doctor is quite capable of converting negative stressors, which are responsible for causing many physical injuries and conditions, into positive wellness. If you're feeling an exceptional amount of stress these days, call your chiropractor. ■

Information provided by Dr. Jesse Stumbaugh, Norwalk Chiropractic, 1300 Sunset Drive, 515-981-9208, [www.norwalk-chiropractic.com](http://www.norwalk-chiropractic.com). Norwalk Chiropractic is a provider with most major insurance companies.



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## HO, HO, HO! Happy holidays

Last month I touched upon what many of our clients have done to extend the beauty of their residence beyond a beautiful lawn and landscape.

Permanent holiday lighting and/or traditional Christmas lighting is a great way to enjoy the upcoming holiday season. Office parties, family gatherings, and spreading Christmas cheer are all valid reasons for investing in a beautiful lighting display that showcases the uniqueness of your home.

Professional lighting contractors can provide you with many options that best fit your individual needs and desires. Many consumers appreciate the no hassle approach that leads to a spectacular and stunning lighting display for their home. Roof lights, wreaths, garland, ground lighting and window lighting are all possibilities with traditional Christmas lighting. Permanent lighting provides a permanent installation that allows various color choices, patterns and flexibility not afforded by the traditional lighting packages. Of course, as a homeowner, you always have the option of lighting your home yourself, as many new products have become available that makes a quality installation easier.

I personally enjoy driving through my neighborhood looking at my community's light displays. It always brings joy to my family as well. Whether you hire a professional or do it yourself, consider holiday lighting and spreading a little Christmas cheer. Enjoy the holidays! ■

Information provided by Kevin Johnson, All American Turf Beauty, 311 DeSoto Road, Van Meter, 515-996-2261.



## MEET Chelsea Everhart

Teaching ELL at Orchard Hills and Lakewood

After growing up in Indianola, Chelsea Everhart received two college degrees: one in sociology with a minor in human relations and psychology from the University of Iowa and an elementary education degree with endorsements in ESL, reading, language arts and social studies from Upper Iowa University.

Everhart previously taught for two years as a sixth-grade ELA teacher for the Norwalk Community School District before teaching ELL for four years in another district. Now, she has returned to teach ELL at the Norwalk district and has recently entered her eighth year teaching overall.

"I enjoy teaching in Norwalk, because it has a small-town feel, and you get the opportunity to build relationships with the families," she says.

The district has three ELL teachers, each with a different schedule and each traveling to different buildings throughout the day. Everhart begins her day at Orchard Hills Elementary School where she works with second- and third-grade students in small groups for 30 minutes four to five times a week. She then travels to Lakewood Elementary School to work with fourth- and fifth-grade students in small groups as well as push-into classrooms.

Her students work on the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. She says she is excited to introduce her students to the Bee-Bots they just received. These small robots use coding to practice different concepts.

Everhart says that ELL is not only for students who speak another language. It is also for students who have a second language or dialect spoken in their home, even if they do not speak it themselves. She says a challenge of being an ELL teacher is knowing some of the experiences her students have endured. Everhart says ELL helps students build their English language and reading skills and teaches them new strategies to help them be successful in their classrooms.

"A reward of being an ELL teacher is learning about the different cultures and traditions of the students. We often talk about and acknowledge traditions, and students love to share about their own special holidays. It is really neat to compare the different cultures," Everhart says.

Everhart is looking forward to seeing how much each of her students grows throughout the school year. She hopes to take some of her students to see a show at the Civic Center. When not teaching, Everhart enjoys working out at Pulse Dance Studio in West Des Moines. She enjoys taking both dance and Barre classes. ■



Chelsea Everhart says, "A reward of being an ELL teacher is learning about the different cultures and traditions of the students."

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# LET'S keep making our community strong

It's been an honor serving as your 2023 chamber president — and what a busy year it's been. We rolled in the new year by settling into our new, larger office and welcoming our new executive director,



Lauren Ebensteiner. Lauren is a valuable asset to our chamber and the entire community. Our chamber couldn't be prouder of the work she's done, as she's organized events, built relationships, strengthened connections, welcomed new businesses, and represented our chamber throughout the metro with strength. Thank you, Lauren, for a great year.

I've lived in Norwalk almost 10 years, and it's exciting watching our chamber grow. Every year, more and more businesses and families choose to live and do business in Norwalk, Cumming, and our surrounding community. We are known across the metro as the exciting place to be. The stellar staffs at the city of

Norwalk and the city of Cumming deserve a lot of the credit for their tireless work promoting and growing our communities. Our amazing Norwalk area schools have always been the envy of the metro, and our new superintendent, Shawn Holloway, is leading our schools to the next level. But, even more than the work of our city and school, it's the culture of our businesses and citizenry that make Norwalk the place it is.

The great joy of being the chamber president is getting to witness firsthand the people, organizations and businesses that make Norwalk great. Though we may, at times, get a little heated with one another in the Facebook comment section, our community consistently comes together to support one another and create a positive community culture. Business owners show up to celebrate one another, even if they might be competitors. Tips and leads are shared at chamber networking events. Every church in the area joins together in the work of the Norwalk Area Ministerial Association to support those in need. Community

organizations collaborate on events like Celebrate Norwalk on the 4th of July and Norwalk Musicfest. And the commitment to shop local is great here.

Our foundation in this community is strong. As we continue to grow numerically, it's important we keep growing the culture that truly makes our community great, as we increase our support of one another, strengthen our civility and respect, seek out greater diversity, and ensure that everyone who lives, works and does business in the Norwalk area thrives. During this holiday season, let us be grateful for the community we live in. A place like this doesn't happen by accident; it is the work of us all, committing to doing our part to make the whole strong. Thank you for all that you do. ■

Information provided by Travis Stanley, 2023 Chamber Board President and Pastor of Norwalk Christian Church.

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# BE HERE. *Be You.* BELONG

NORWALK COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2023

## MEET OUR NEW SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS



### **Kate Baldwin, New Member At-Large**

Serving on the school board is an honored community service. We moved to the Norwalk community in 2002 and made it our home. Norwalk Schools was the primary reason we selected Norwalk as our permanent home. I care deeply about the school district (students, staff and parents).

### **Daniel Doefler, New Member At-Large**

Our schools need engaged and professional community members to volunteer their time and talents to ensure that the excellent quality of education Norwalk provides continues into the future.

### **Michelle Kelly, New Member At-Large**

I want to continue to support the Norwalk Students, Staff and Community.

Scan for more information about our School Board.



CHECK OUT THIS  
MONTH'S NEWS  
AND MORE.



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