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DECEMBER 2023

Living

MAGAZINE

Special DELIVERY

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on the tradition of sending
Christmas cards**

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WELCOME

CHRISTMAS card communication

Well, it's that time of year again. Many of us have taken the family photo, updated our address lists, summarized anything and everything that's changed in your lives this year, and, you guessed it, sent out our 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, and another Christmas season has arrived. We gathered a photo from a recent family get-together and, at least for another year, carried on the tradition of mailing out cards. Also this year, I am relaxing in my easy chair with my slippers on my feet and a cup of cocoa in my hand and reading the cards and letters — at least the first page or so.

Be sure to check out this month's cover story to learn how other residents handled 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 Jackie Wilson

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.

Kailey DeVries sends out photo cards, as do many friends her age. Photo by Jackie Wilson

A tradition gone to the wayside

As a board member of the Clive Historical Society, Claudia Howell is all about preserving history, traditions and “old fashioned” items.

Yet, one long-time tradition in her own life has fallen out of favor: sending Christmas cards. She used to send out countless cards, but it's been about 10 years since she's mailed out many.

“I'm afraid it's a dying tradition,” she reflects.

She does mail a handful of cards to her elderly relatives, who are not on social media. However, she cites that social media is one reason for the decline in sending out cards. She and her extended family all communicate on a Facebook Messenger group. The group updates each other on family news and events and sends birthday and holiday greetings online, instantly.

Howell recalls, as a young girl, she helped her parents address Christmas cards.

“We'd sit at the table with my mom and dad, helping address cards and affixing postage stamps. I think it was about 10 or 12 cents to mail a card,” she says.

Her family mailed cards to all of their relatives, as a way to stay in touch — plus it was a tradition.

“That's how we communicated with each other. They never talked on Facebook,” Howell says.

One personal touch she misses is seeing her aunts' and her grandmother's handwriting on the cards.

“I loved seeing my grandma's handwriting, as it reminded me of her,” she says.

She recalls her family would tape the Christmas cards they received along the fireplace mantel.

“It was part of our Christmas decorations,” she says.

As an adult, Howell sent cards to all her family and friends, even if she saw them on a regular basis. She kept cards from one year to the next to keep track of the cards received, ensuring the card-senders also got a card in return.

As a cat lover, a few friends sent her Christmas cards with cats on them. Howell has framed her favorites and displays them each year as part of her decorations.

However, she said the card tradition has dwindled — not only at home, but in the workplace. “In my office, we used to get tons



Claudia Howell has many fond memories of sending and receiving Christmas cards but has fallen into the group that communicates holiday greetings electronically these days. However, she says that, after she retires, she may just start sending cards again.



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of cards from clients and vendors. We've only received five so far," she says, one week before Christmas.

However, Howell may return to the tradition. When she retires from her insurance job at the end of this year, it's her goal to get back to sending cards.

"I like to think I'm a traditionalist. I love all the old stuff. I am involved in the Clive Historical Society, after all," she laughs. "Hopefully I'll have more time on my hands next year."

When she does receive cards in the mail today, she appreciates the sender's efforts, especially those who mail a photo card, tuck a picture in the envelope or write a personal message. "It's exciting to open up a piece of mail, rather than click on an e-mail greeting," she says.

Cards sent since 1965

Rebecca Bretzlaff of Clive has a long-standing tradition of sending out Christmas cards — in fact, she has sent them every year since 1965. Often she tucks in a short letter or includes family pictures.

Most of her friends and family live out of

town. This year, she sent out about 80 cards to folks in more than a dozen states, plus she sends cards to New Zealand and Canada. With five children, eight grandchildren and two great-grandkids, all family members are included on the list.

Bretzlaff also hand-delivers cards to her neighbors, along with one of her homemade almond cakes.

She receives about half the number of cards she sends out. She explains the decline over five decades.

"So many of our friends are 80 years or older, and many of them don't send cards anymore. Very few of our young friends send paper cards. Instead, many of them send greetings through the social media," she says.

She'll save the cards from previous years to ensure recipients get a card in return. After that, she'll toss the cards. However, over the years, she's saved Christmas letters.

"Now I have a history of what's happened in my life. It's rather fun to look back at some of them," Bretzlaff reflects.

It's important for her to continue the cherished tradition of mailing out Christmas

greetings.

"There's just something special about opening a card from a friend or cousin that I only hear from during the holidays," she says. "It's like a present because I know the time and effort it takes to write and address a card."

More card stories

Clive Living caught up with several people at the Holiday Hullabaloo, held in Clive. The interactive holiday event benefits Dorothy's House, which provides resources and support for human trafficking survivors.

We inquired about Christmas card traditions with several of the attendees. Many folks said they enjoy the tradition of sending and receiving cards. However, the No. 1 response for people not sending out cards? Lack of time. Below are a few holiday card stories shared with Clive Living.

Saving memories

Michele Hillaker has been sending Christmas cards ever since she and her husband first married 42 years ago. She sends out to everyone: friends she went to college with, church and family members, home-schooled families and, the

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FEATURE

latest, folks she met on a trip.

This year, she mailed about 80 cards. If possible, she'll hand deliver cards to save on postage.

When her kids were little, she created photo cards, and she has sent out pictures of her grandkids. However, she prefers traditional cards.

Hillaker used to save every Christmas card, until recently. This year, she helped clean out her parents' home and found her mom saved every card.

"That was a lot of work to sort out their cards," she says.

Because of the experience of her parents' boxes full of stuff, Hillaker says she recently sorted through her cards and threw quite a few away.

"I don't want to have my kids go through the same thing after I pass away," she explains.

Hillaker kept cards that were special to her, such as those from her aunts, who wrote personal messages and letters. She also has kept cards and envelopes from her father-in-law, who was a wonderful artist.

"He drew pictures on the insides of envelopes and cards. We'll never get that back again, so I



Michele Hillaker has been sending Christmas cards ever since she and her husband married 42 years ago. Photo by Jackie Wilson

want to save it for that memory. That's what I like about Christmas cards," she says.

She doesn't receive as many cards as she sends out.

"I feel like it's a dying art. We used to have a



Devon Bruck recalls making Christmas cards in school to thank professionals such as police officers and nurses. Photo by Jackie Wilson

whole wall covered with cards," she recalls. "Now a lot of the cards are asking for donations."

Hillaker's sister jokes about how she'll send to just about anyone. However, it's a tradition she'll continue, as she likes staying in touch.

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FEATURE

"Lots of people send e-cards," she says. "I like receiving and sending cards. It helps make you feel connected."

A greeting and thanks

When Devon Bruck was in grade school, she recalls decorating Christmas and holiday greeting cards. Her teacher found and organized a list of people she didn't know.

"We used to write thank you notes to nurses, police officers and veterans," she recalls. "It was fun to decorate and send them to let them know they are special."

Devon likes the Christmas card tradition. "I hope the school kids still do it today. It was a great way to thank other people," she says.

Learning the tradition

Mary Gathony knows the traditions surrounding holiday cards; however, it's not something she's ever participated in. She grew up in South Africa and never heard of the tradition until she moved to the United States.

"We never sent or received cards. If we saw people, we'd give them greetings in person instead," she says.

She does have a few friends who send cards — including one friend who also sends Thanksgiving greetings.

"I never got into doing it" she says. "I like to get cards, though."

Doing it right

When it's time to send out Christmas card photos of her family, Kailey DeVries makes sure she does it up right. She hires a professional photographer to take a picture of her and her family.

She makes the photo cards to ensure her kids get on the card. Many of friends her age send out the photo cards.

"It seems like my friends all send out the photo cards, so they can show photos of their kids," she says.

This year, she's sent out 75 cards. With the cost of postage going up, she tries to pass out cards when she sees friends or family members in person. Once she gets a card, she displays it on a wall. Her sister makes a Christmas tree shape, outlined with cards.

"It's a tradition I'll keep doing," she says. ■



Mary Gathony, who grew up in South Africa, says sending Christmas cards was not a tradition there, but she does enjoy receiving cards since moving to the U.S. Photo by Jackie Wilson

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BUY before selling or sell before buying?

What to consider when purchasing your next home.

Are you growing out of your current home or looking to downsize? If so, you're probably wondering whether to sell your current home before or after you buy your new home.

There are pros and cons to consider for both options before deciding which is best for you. These include:

- Your financial situation and financing options
- Current housing market conditions
- Your appetite for risk

Buying before selling

Here are a few options to keep in mind to help balance the sale of your current home and the closing of your new home:

- Include a contingency clause in your agreement with the seller. This will require



that for your offer to close, your current home must sell. This is also called a "subject to sale" agreement. With this agreement, you run the risk of another buyer swooping in ready to buy the home with no contingency.

- Own both homes at the same time. If you have the funds to finance the down payment of a new home while also meeting payments on your current home until it sells, owning both for a short time may be the best route.

- Get a bridge loan. Bridge loans are secured by the equity you have in your current home and can help pay off your mortgage, pay for closing costs and put a down payment on your new home. Once your home is sold, the loan is paid off from the net proceeds from the sale. Work with your lender to learn if you qualify for a bridge loan.

Selling before buying

Many homeowners sell their homes before buying a new one. There are several advantages to this approach:

- Selling first often provides buyers with the cash they need for a down payment on their new home.

- There's no risk of having to make two house payments for a period of time.

- Financing the new home is often less complicated when the home buyer doesn't have an existing mortgage.

Work with a knowledgeable lender

No matter which route you choose, it's important you work with a knowledgeable lender that can demonstrate which options are best for you and your situation. Understanding the housing market and your options upfront will lead to a smoother process for everyone involved. It will make the process of selling your home and buying a new one much less stressful and more fun, as it should be. ■

Information provided by Cassandra Haller, VP, Mortgage Loan Originator, NMLS #681625, 1111 University Ave., Clive, Desk: 515-222-2001, Cell: 515-707-6461.



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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 egg expectations at 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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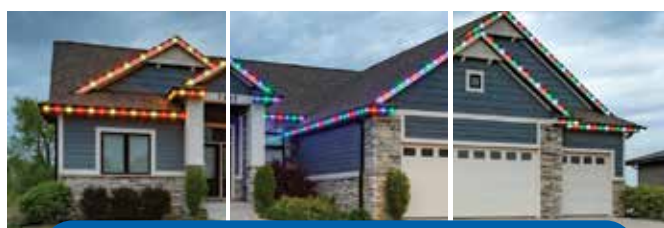
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TIPS for talking with parents about senior living

Are you worried about your mom or dad — or another loved one — living alone? If you want to ask if they would consider moving to a senior living community, chances are you'll encounter resistance. How can you make it easier to discuss transitions with those you love?



Experts agree that the first step to any conversation involving a transition as significant as a move to a senior living community is to ask your loved one what they want — and then listen carefully. Any decisions about change should be driven by the people who will be most affected by them. Older adults who reject the idea of moving to independent or assisted living, memory care or long-term care often say they are worried about high costs, leaving their homes, losing space or giving up their belongings and giving up their independence,

as well. Your best chance of helping loved ones with their concerns is by listening to what they want.

Plan for more than one conversation

Nothing will be decided or solved in one conversation. Think of your conversations with loved ones about moving to a care community as a marathon, not a sprint. You don't want to sound like you are telling them what to do. Instead, ask questions such as, "What do you want that would make you happy? Is there something you always wanted to accomplish but never had time for?" You may discover that a parent has spent years cooking meals for your family and wanted to create art instead. You may find a parent wants to travel, in which case maintaining a home would be a hindrance.

Discuss how senior living can support future needs and plans

As you talk through different scenarios, it's OK to ask loved ones what needs to happen to

make their lives easier or what the plan is if they fall or become injured or ill. Each answer will inform what comes next. Another way to create a smooth transition is to help your loved ones experience a sense of control, which helps them maintain a stronger sense of self in the midst of change. Therefore, you might ask if he or she has spoken with friends who moved to a senior living community. Peers are more likely to influence each other than a loved one's adult children.

Be positive

The main thing to remember during a transitional period in a loved one's life is that he or she needs to move toward something positive, rather than leaving everyone and everything behind. Focusing on positive reasons to move opens the door to more thoughtful decisions. That's a goal that's worth waiting for. ■

This content provided by Chris Ruzicka, Director of Sales, Meadowview of Clive, Chris.Ruzicka@CassiaLife.org, 515-644-8740, 3300 Berkshire Parkway, Clive.



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TAKE stock and plan for the future

2023 is coming to a close. The end of the year is a good time to take stock of your personal situation and proactively plan for the future.



Update your estate plan

Putting your legal affairs in order is important. It reduces the burden on loved ones in the event of poor health or death. It can save time and expense. And, it allows you to have control over how your assets pass. Every person should have three basic estate planning documents: a Last Will and Testament, a Durable Financial Power of Attorney, and a Living Will / Health Care Power of Attorney.

A will directs the distribution of your assets upon your death. Through the power of

attorney, you give another person the ability to make financial decisions for you should you become incapacitated. If you're too ill to speak for yourself, you can express your wishes and have your voice heard through a living will. This advance directive lets you detail your preferences for your medical care.

Make a list of key contacts

When you update your estate planning documents, you should also make a master list of important information. If you die or become incapacitated, your family will spend time figuring out what you own and whom they should contact. List your investment advisor, insurance agent, tax professional, banker and attorney. Make sure you have the correct contact information for each professional listed.

Review the title to your home

You should review how you hold title to your home. When you purchased your house, the

seller executed a deed. The deed contained important vesting information — the names on the title and the legal relationship between those titleholders.

If you are married, you probably want to ensure that both spouses are on title to the house. This may not be the case if the parties were married after one bought the house or if it is a second marriage. You also probably want to ensure that, if one titleholder were to die, the house would pass to the survivor. A simple review of who holds title and how title is held can prevent expensive problems later.

These are three simple yet very effective steps that can save time and expense in the future. Contact an experienced attorney to help you get 2024 off to a good start. ■

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The Healthcare Marketplace is where you enroll in individual health insurance coverage that complies with the Affordable Care Act (ACA). No medical underwriting is one of the popular components

of the ACA. There are also no waiting periods or exclusion riders put on pre-existing health conditions. Because of this, you just can't wait until you are sick to apply. The open enrollment period runs Nov. 1, 2023, through Jan. 15, 2024. There are also special enrollment periods for life changes such as when you involuntarily lose qualifying health insurance, have a baby or adopt a child. The deadline is 60 days following the event to enroll in a plan. You will have to wait until the next open enrollment period if you miss this special enrollment period window.



What puts the affordable in the Affordable Care Act is the possible tax subsidy that you can receive to help lower your monthly premium. When applying for coverage, you enter your estimated income for 2024. Any tax subsidy is sent by the IRS to the insurance company. You pay the lowered premium.

Many believe that someone can only get assistance from the Healthcare Marketplace if they are very low income. In Polk County in 2023, a 60-year-old making \$50,000 a year may be eligible for \$616 a month premium tax credit toward a Healthcare Marketplace plan. A 35-year-old couple with two young children making \$100,000 a year may be eligible for \$786 a month premium tax credit. There are other requirements to be eligible for the premium tax credit such as, you can't have affordable employer group coverage available and being a U.S. citizen or naturalized citizen.

If you are currently covered by a

Marketplace plan, you can change plans, change carriers, add dependents, and update your income. If you are receiving premium tax credit to help lower your monthly premium, you should update your estimated income for 2024 to get the correct amount of tax credit. You can update your income mid-year if you find that your 2024 income is going to be higher or lower than you initially estimated.

Family glitch

Dependents may be able to get a premium tax credit if the employee is eligible for affordable employer group coverage, but the coverage is unaffordable for the family as determined by the ACA formula. ■

Information provided by Laura Patton, FHIAS, Patton Insurance Benefits, 1112 Maple St., West Des Moines, 515-270-8178.



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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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West Side Legislative Breakfast

Friday, Jan. 5, 7:30-9 a.m.
R&R Realty Group, 1080
Jordan Creek Parkway, West
Des Moines

The West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, along with Clive, Waukee and Windsor Heights area chambers, invites the public to attend a breakfast offering an opportunity to meet your legislators, ask questions and get answers. Legislators in attendance will be announced at a later date. Cost to attend is \$30. Registration closes at 10 a.m. on Jan. 3. A registration link is available at <https://members.wdmchamber.org/events/details/west-side-legislative-breakfast-01-05-2024-3527?calendarMonth=2024-01-01>.

Living Well Classes: Overcoming Anxiety or Depression

Orientation: Thursday, Jan. 18, 7 p.m.

Ankeny First United Methodist Church Christian Life Center, 710 N.E. 36th St., Ankeny

Two separate Living Well Classes: Overcoming Anxiety or Depression will be held for eight weeks, Thursdays, Jan. 25 through March 14 from 7-8:30 p.m. Classes are confidential and supportive. For information, call Jim White at 515-313-3701 or email jcjlwhite@live.com.

IOWA WOLVES

Wells Fargo Arena, 233 Center St., Des Moines

iowa.gleague.nba.com

Formerly known as the Iowa Energy, the Des Moines-based affiliate for the Minnesota Timberwolves continues to foster NBA talent right here in Iowa. Home games in December:

- Dec. 29 at 7 p.m. vs. College Park Skyhawks (Atlanta Hawks) | Black Out / Pack Out Night
- Dec. 31 at 2 p.m. vs. College Park Skyhawks | Sustainability Day



Iowa State Fair Flea Market

Jan. 6-7
3000 E. Grand Ave., Des Moines
www.iowastatefairgrounds.org/event-calendar

Find all sorts of goods from antiques, home decor, jewelry and everything in between. This flea market is held each month from January to June and September to December at the Varied Industries Building.



The Winter Wonderpalace

Jan. 6
Raccoon River Nature Lodge, 2202
Park Drive, West Des Moines

The ninth installment of The Winter Wonderpalace allows you to take your little one on a magic winter adventure, where they get the chance to meet four storybook characters inside the Raccoon River Nature Lodge.

Museum open

Urbandale Historical Society, 4010
70th St.

The Olmsted-Urban House will be open for viewing the first Sunday of each month 2-4 p.m. for viewing. Members of the society will be there for guiding tours and showing the collection of things that might have been in Grandma's house. The Rolling Green school quilt made by the students and the painting given in memory of Pamela Powers are now at the Olmsted Urban House. These items can be viewed during the museum's monthly open house.

Square Dance Lessons

Sunday nights starting Jan. 4, 6:30 p.m.
Douglas Avenue Presbyterian Church,
4601 Douglas Ave., Des Moines
www.ankenysquares.com

Ankeny Square Dance Club is sponsoring Square Dance Lessons. Cost is \$20 per person for the entire session, accepted at the third lesson. Attend with or without a dance partner. You'll learn the calls, one call at a time, taught by a caller (instructor) and volunteers. For more information, call Sandy Townsend, 515-291-2624.



Miracle on 86th Street

Through Jan. 8
Charles Gabus Memorial Tree Park, 3600
86th St., Urbandale

Bundle up this winter and stroll through the Charles Gabus Memorial Tree Park. The park features a large custom-built train, larger-than-life ornamental displays, an ice-skating rink, and holiday-themed events. The park is lit with more than 50,000 holiday lights and special events will be held there all season long.

IOWA WILD

Wells Fargo Arena
233 Center St., Des Moines
lowawild.com

The Iowa Wild are the affiliate program of the Minnesota Wild. Home games through December are:

- Dec. 28 at 6 p.m. vs. Colorado (Colorado Avalanche)
- Dec. 30 at 6 p.m. vs. Colorado



EVENTS IN THE AREA

Be sure to check for cancelations.

To submit calendar items for consideration, send to tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com

CITYVIEW's Fire and Ice

Jan. 20

Historic Valley Junction, 137 Fifth St., West Des Moines
fire-and-ice.dmcityview.com

Fire and Ice is a hockey-themed liquor sampling event that will be sure to warm up your winter blues. With your event ticket, you will receive 10 individual drink tickets to sample some of the best winter cocktails from establishments in the Valley Junction area.



Waukee Family Fest

Saturday, Jan. 20, 9 a.m. to noon
Lutheran Church of Hope - Waukee

This free, family-friendly event will help kids burn off some cabin fever energy. Check out Waukee area businesses, enjoy games and prizes and jump on inflatables. To become a vendor, visit waukeee.org/familyfest.



HOLIDAY LIGHTS

- **Jolly Holiday Lights**, Adventureland Park, 3300 Adventureland Drive, Altoona, www.jollyholidaylights.org
- **Gingerbread Lane**, S.E. Richland Court, Ankeny, Facebook: Gingerbread Lane Ankeny, IA
- **Prairie Ridge Church**, 825 N.W. 36th St., Ankeny, www.ridgelife.org
- **Winter Wonderlights**, Uptown Ankeny, 715 W. First St., Ankeny, www.uptownankeny.org
- **Winter Wonderscape**, Reiman Gardens, 1407 University Blvd., Ames, www.reimangardens.com
- **Beaverdale**, Ashby and Wallace avenues near Beaver Avenue, Des Moines, www.beaverdale.org
- **Dogtown Lights**, University Avenue between 23rd and 25th streets in Des Moines' Drake neighborhood, Facebook @ Dogtown Business and Entertainment District
- **First Church of the Open Bible**, 2200 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, www.firstchurch.org
- **Miracle on 86th Street**, 3600 86th St., Urbandale, www.urbandale.org
- **Santa's Rock N Lights**, Living History Farms, 11121 Hickman Road, Urbandale, www.santasrocknlights.com
- **Historic Valley Junction**, Fifth Street, West Des Moines, www.valleyjunction.com
- **Lights in the Heights**, Franklin Avenue, Marylynn Drive, 72nd Street, and other streets in Windsor Heights, www.windsorheightsfoundation.org ■

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MILES galore at Shuler Elementary

Rosenow leads Strider program.

Shuler Elementary School in Clive has an exercise program that's really caught on with the kids. The Striders program, which started seven years ago, welcomes kids to walk and/or run, with volunteers tracking each student's distance. Prizes are given out for reaching certain milestones.

Mandy Rosenow is a parent of a Shuler student, and she also serves as the head of the Striders program.

"We have a group of parent volunteers, two volunteers every day. We run Striders Monday through Thursday. We've finished for the fall, so Striders is done until the spring. It's a big chunk of time in the afternoon, so it can be challenging to get volunteers for the whole year. There are 63 parents on my email list that will look and see if they have time to fill in," Rosenow said. "It's from about 11 a.m. to 2 p.m."

The basic process is that volunteers keep track of how many out-and-back "laps" each child has completed. Each out-and-back equals roughly one-third of a mile. The first half of an X is made at the turnaround, and the X is finished when the student gets back to the starting point. Rosenow continued, "And when they've got 75 X's, they've run a



Daniel Timmons with Edward Jones congratulates this month's Neighbor Spotlight recipient, The Strider Program, represented by Abby Hurlbut, Pam Mohr, Mandy Newton Rosenow and Papi Dodge.

marathon. They get a trophy for their first marathon, and then they get a medal for their second marathon. And we just didn't plan on kids running more than that, but last year, we had one fifth grader that ran six marathons and another one that ran five. Last year, we gave out 147 marathon awards."

The program started years ago with a grant, but now all of the funding is through the Parent-Teacher Organization. The funds pay for the various achievement awards given out. For smaller milestones, kids earn a charm, while larger milestones earn a medal or trophy.

"We participate kindergarten through fifth grade. We do it after the lunch recess, which maybe isn't the best time, because they've just eaten. But it's really the only time that we can really capture all of the grades in a consecutive order. Most of them walk. It's hard to run with a full belly, but some of them run. We had one kid that was practicing for basketball, and he dribbled a basketball the whole way for a couple of days."

Rosenow explained that Striders is completely voluntary, so each student chooses whether or not to participate and how often. She also stressed there is nothing competitive in the Striders program, as there are no prizes for finishing first. It's simply focused on setting a goal, and working to meet or exceed that goal on an individualized basis.

One of Rosenow's favorite things about Striders is the enthusiasm of the kids.

"It's fun to be able to give the kids positive feedback on how far they've gone."

And it's obvious that the kids have come to enjoy and expect the encouragement. Rosenow told of a funny moment one day when a large group of kindergarteners reached the turnaround point together, and the volunteer was swamped trying to mark all of the mileage cards. A kindergarten student piped up, saying, "You're supposed to tell us 'good job.'" ■

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tammy@iowalivingmagazines.com.

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 Kwanzaa. 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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OVER-THE-COUNTER cough medicine: harmful or helpful?

Coughs, colds and kids go hand in hand. Most children have up to eight colds per year, lasting two to three weeks with uncomfortable symptoms that can inhibit sleep. It may be tempting to try over-the-counter cough medicine; however, these have not been proven to be more effective than placebo and have potential side effects, including death from overdose. Cough medicine is not recommended for children under age 6.

What can you use to help your child?

- Fluids – offer plenty of water, soup, broth, tea
- Cool mist humidifier – place near bed to help keep mucus moving (be sure to clean routinely)
- Nasal saline – use nasal saline drops for infants (wait a short time and then use bulb suction) and saline nasal spray or irrigation for older children
- Honey – if your child is over age 1, a teaspoon of honey coats/soothes the throat
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) – a fever isn't harmful, but it doesn't feel good (follow dosing instructions or ask your pediatrician before giving)

Most colds are viral and must run their course. If you think your child has more than a cold or worsening symptoms, call your pediatrician. ■

Information provided by Dr. Amy Petersen, Cornerstone Pediatrics & Family Allergy, 6800 Lake Drive, Suite 260, West Des Moines, www.cornerstonepfa.com.



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BREAKING the dry skin cycle

It's December, and that means cold air outside, hot air inside, and dry air everywhere. This combination can weaken your skin's barrier — the outermost layer of the epidermis — that acts as your skin's last line of defense, keeping toxins out and water inside your body. When the humidity drops, water more easily escapes this barrier through evaporation, causing dry skin.



Symptoms

Signs that your skin barrier isn't functioning properly include itchy, dry, cracking skin, rough or scaly patches and sensitive or inflamed areas. These symptoms are usually not critical, but failure to treat them could lead to an infection. In addition, people with skin conditions like psoriasis and eczema may see flare-ups this time of the year.

Winter skin guide

• **Home environment** — Keep a consistent temperature — but not too hot. The humidity should be 40% or higher. A small humidifier for the bedroom may be a good idea.

• **Shower/bath** — Avoid long, hot showers or baths which can remove natural oils, causing your skin to lose moisture more quickly. Also, remember to pat, not rub, your skin while drying off.

• **Cleanser** — Use a creamy, soap-free, fragrance-free cleanser that will gently clean without stripping any of the natural oils of the skin. Cleansers that include emollients and antioxidants will help restore a

healthy glow to winter skin.

• **Moisturizer** — Look for ceramides to help repair the skin barrier and hyaluronic acid to plump and hydrate the skin. Apply it right after drying off from your shower/bath while your skin is still damp.

• **Sunscreen** — Most people don't think about wearing sunscreen in the winter. Not only do we need protection from the sun but from environmental damage as well. Use sunscreen with antioxidants to provide protection from both.

• **Diet** — It's important to maintain a diet that supports good skin health including high quality protein, omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants (vitamins C and E), and always drink plenty of water.

• **Clothing** — Choose fabrics that are kind to your skin like natural fibers, such as cotton, that allow your skin to breathe. Wool, although natural, can irritate the skin and cause itching.

• **Irritants** — Avoid harsh detergents, shampoos and soaps with dyes or perfumes. These products can dry out the skin and cause itching and a potential skin reaction or dermatitis.

• **Treatment** — If dry skin becomes itchy and irritated, your provider may prescribe a steroid cream or an oral antihistamine.

Ask your dermatologist about a winter skin treatment plan that works best for you. ■

Information provided by Jessica Sanford, a Certified Nurse Practitioner at Harlan and Steinhoff Dermatology Group. She's accepting patients at their Clive and Ankeny locations.



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MEET Rachel Greene

Enjoying collaboration with fellow educators

Originally from West Des Moines, Rachel Greene attended Indian Hills Junior High School and graduated from Valley High School. She then attended the University of Northern Iowa where she graduated in 2022 with a bachelor's degree in business teaching and economics. Now, Greene has returned to her alma mater to teach computer science. This is her first year teaching at Indian Hills Junior High School and her second year working in education.

"A reward is collaborating with awesome teachers, both new to the profession and veterans. The community of support I have made the 'I don't know what I'm doing!' moments feel more manageable and not exclusive to me. I have received wonderful advice and tangible classroom techniques that not all new-to-the-profession teachers receive. My colleagues are a big part of why I'm enjoying my job," Greene says.

She adds that this is the first year a computer science course has been offered at Indian Hills Junior High. It is an introductory elective course that welcomes both seventh- and eighth-grade students. Although students don't need any previous coding experience to take the course, those who are proficient in basic math and have problem-solving skills tend to find the most success.

So far, Greene's students have completed projects with and without a computer. They have designed an app, coded different images and animations, and talked about the pros and cons of artificial intelligence

(AI). Greene says she enjoys working with her students at the junior high level because they have a great sense of humor.

"They are sponges who are absorbing information about the world and formulating their own responses, which has been cool to see throughout the semester. It's awesome to see the development of their self-regulation skills and their ability to collaborate with others," she says.

Greene says she is enjoying piquing her students' interest in computer science. When not teaching, she is a big family person. With her mother's side of the family located in town, she is able to see her aunts, uncles and grandparents often. In addition, she attends yoga and enjoys meal prepping.

"I love the support of my colleagues and administrators, who treat me like the professional I am. I know I have become a stronger, more effective educator since starting in August, and I genuinely enjoy going to school to support students. My students make me laugh all the time, and seeing their growth and learning is rewarding and fun," Greene says. ■



Rachel Greene attended Indian Hills Junior High and is now teaching computer science there.

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HOLIDAY Party

Edward Jones in Clive held a holiday customer party Dec. 1.



Daniel Timmons and Scott Victor



Donna Simmer and Kenny Patton



Bea Roskam, Dwayne Nydam and Barb Green



Jerry and Ginny Nelson and Patti Lewis



Sandy Holland, Daniel Timmons and Mike Holland



Scott Victor and Paul Greenwalt



Dee Dee and Bob Wright



Amy Hill and Carly Yoder

HOLIDAY Hullabaloo

Holiday Hullabaloo was held
Nov. 21 in Clive.



Santa and his helpers



Chris Baker and Claire Strickland



Mike Gonzalez, Suzy Snowflake and Kat Gonzalez



Stephanie Stark and Katie Gallo



Heidi and Paul Peglow



Ira White and Rich Harbart



Lance Knaack, Santa and Kara Knaack



Dave and Brenda Applegate



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Lorie and Paul Williamson

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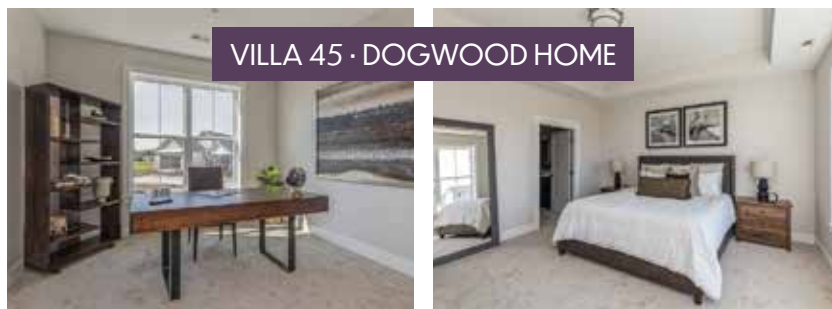
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