



# **“The Senior Informer” December 2024**



**Your source of current news and information from The Neal Center,  
100 T.R. Harris Drive, Shelby, NC 28150**

## **Did you know?....**

**THE LARGEST GINGERBREAD HOUSE  
EVER MADE WAS AS BIG AS A REAL  
HOUSE.**



In November 2013, a group from Traditions Club in Bryan, Texas, constructed a gingerbread house that was 160 feet long, 42 feet wide, and 10.1 feet tall. Made with a wood base, it reportedly took 1,800 pounds of butter, 7,200 eggs, 3,000 pounds of sugar, 7,200 pounds of flour, and over 22,000 pieces of candy to cover the record-breaking structure!



## ***Something to think about***

**“If you haven't got any charity  
in your heart, you have the  
worst kind of heart trouble.”**

**-Bob Hope**



## **WHAT'S INSIDE?**

- **A long time employee starts a new chapter**

- **How to have a cookie exchange**

## *The Neal Senior Center Board of Directors 2024-2025*

*Janice Morton- President & Chairman of the Board*

*Stephanie Costner- First Vice-President*

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## **Neal Senior Center Staff**



Paulette Putnam, Executive Director

Daniel Dedmon, Program Director

Teresa Ladd, Finance Director

April Wheatley, Bookkeeper

Dolores Ashworth, Volunteer Coordinator

Heather Ledbetter, Nutrition Director

Jane Wright, Administrative Secretary

Stephanie Baxter, Maintenance



**Monday-Thursday, 8:30am-4:00pm**

**Friday, 8:30am-12:00pm**

**Main Phone: 704-482-3488**

**Weather Line: 704-481-7398**

## Your Social Circle

## Hosting a “Christmas Cookie Exchange” Party



A holiday cookie exchange is a great way to spend time with friends, family and neighbors. Plus, you'll come home with varieties of cookies for your own celebrations. Never been to one of these sweet, delicious and fun events? Read on for tips on hosting or attending your first cookie exchange.

### What is a Holiday Cookie Exchange and how does it work?

- A holiday cookie exchange, usually held in December, is when participants swap cookies. You bring baked cookies that you made from scratch, **not purchased from the local bakery or supermarket.** In exchange, you go home with a variety of goodies that you didn't have to bake yourself.

### What will the invited guest need to do before the party?

- Each guest bakes a large batch of one type of cookie at a cookie exchange. A good number to go by would be to prepare a dozen cookies per guest. So, for instance, in a group of eight people, you would bring eight dozen — or 96 — cookies and go home with the same amount. However, numbers can vary based on how big or small your invited group is.
- Also, it's a great idea also ask your guests to bring an extra half dozen or so of the cookie they chose for the exchange to let everyone to taste test. This idea of allowing participants to taste-test cookies first ensures everyone leaves with a variety they'll genuinely enjoy. This allows them to sample each cookie at the swap, helping them to determine their favorites.

### How can I be certain that everyone won't bring the same types of cookies?

- Ask your invited guests to let you know ahead of time what variety they'll be bringing. Better yet, create a spreadsheet where the guests can indicate what kind of cookie they'll be baking. As a shared document, everyone can see what other people will be baking and adjust their plans accordingly. Having a couple of chocolate chip cookie varieties would be fine, but having eight dozen sugar cookies won't be much fun for the participants. The spreadsheet can minimize the chances of this kind of duplication from happening.
- Another important point to share with people you invite: Bring cookies that travel well. In other words, discourage your participants from bringing a cookie that's so delicate that it will break in transit.

### What about a guest that has a food allergy?

- One of the challenges you may run into when planning a food-oriented event is when your guests have dietary restrictions. This could be someone living with food allergies who can't have nuts or gluten, or follows a religious way of eating, such as kosher or halal. Or, you may have a guest who only wants vegan cookies made without animal products. ***(Continued on the next page)***



### ***(Continued from the previous page)***

In these instances, it might feel impossible to please everyone you want to invite to your swap but don't cancel the event. Try this instead: Make it clear that everyone should make the kind of cookie they would want to take home, whether it be low-carb cookies or gluten-free ones. And, if it's not too much trouble for the host, they could bake additional cookies in smaller quantities to meet their guests' dietary restrictions.

#### **How do I set up the room for the party?**

- Have all of the cookies on a designated table or countertop. Ideally, participants have brought their cookies in a tin, on a tray or in a food storage container that they can open and place on the table for display. Feel free to have some fun with these containers, like a festive tin or ribbon for your cookie contributions. One suggestion is to bulk order bakery boxes so that people have a way to package up the cookies as they select them. Also, have a backup of extra trays to hold the cookies for those who forgot to bring one to put out with their cookies.
- It's also a nice touch if each baker has made a label or recipe card for the type of cookie they brought. This helps if the variety isn't obvious. For instance, your exchange might include a lemon cookie that isn't yellow or someone used peanut butter so people with nut allergies can steer clear of that cookie.
- To encourage people to taste-test cookies, provide a small plate for samples. And if you plan on voting for your favorite cookies at the swap, then you'll want to have a voting sheet available, too.

#### **How do the guests take their cookies home with them?**

- All participants should bring enough containers with them to take home the dozens of cookies that they'll be getting at the swap. This is something to communicate on your invitation. However, a relaxed host is a prepared host, so have extra containers on hand, just in case. Thrift stores are a great place to pick up inexpensive cookie tins if you choose to go that route.

#### **Any final words?**

- Plan your cookie exchange one to two weeks before Christmas. This timing allows participants to use the cookies for holiday gatherings or gift-giving. Plus, it means the cookies can be frozen and thawed for holiday celebrations or to Munch on in the New Year. Either way, by keeping these hints in mind, you'll Have a great time hosting or participating in your first cookie exchange!

**(source: <https://fooddrinklife.com>)**



## Catching Up With...

**Paulette Putnam discusses her life and her future plans.**

When it comes to longevity at a workplace, working for one place for ten to twenty years is becoming less common. But Paulette Putnam, Neal Center's Executive Director, has shown that workplace longevity DOES exist! After a total of 33 years as a Neal Center employee, with 17 of them as Executive Director, Paulette is retiring effective December 31.

Her professional background is fascinating as she didn't set out to be the ED of a company. Paulette is a native and life-long resident of Kings Mountain. She graduated from Kings Mountain High School and holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. "I have always wanted to help people", she says. She even at one time worked for the Kings Mountain Senior Center for a brief period. From there, she became a state employee and worked with children from low-income families. She recalls, "I really loved that job and enjoyed it a lot," Unfortunately, as often happens, the funds for her position were cut out, so she got out of the Social Work field for a while. "I was a Dental Technician for nine years," she explained. "But then, I just wanted to get back into my field of Social Work. About my ninth year as a Dental Technician, I started looking." She had actually applied for a job at the Neal Center in August 1990, but didn't get it. Then the following February, she got a call from the center. Libby Shipley, who was the CEO of the Neal Center at that time, called Paulette in for an interview...and this time, she got the job! "I've been here at the Neal Senior Center for 33 years," she remembers. She began work at the center in March 1991, and with a laugh says, "And I'm still here!"

She has held several different positions at the center. "When I started at the center working with Libby and the council, I was doing direct outreach assistance. I was out in the field a lot", she stated. At that time, there were funds for home repair projects, so she did all the home repair visits. She recalled that she enjoyed that position a lot, though it was "challenging, but rewarding."

"Back then, we didn't have the options then that we have now in Cleveland County", she remembers. "We had a lot of seniors living in sub-standard housing and saw a lot of seniors needing repairs...major repairs. We did anything from smoke detectors to grab bars, and railing steps to get in and out of their house. We did some major things back then. There were Baptist churches that I worked with and we would go out and look at some of the major houses. The Baptist men would come in the summers and "adopt" a project." She got roofs done, painting, floors (which were often in such poor condition, you could see the ground), and a lot of major repairs which was "a blessing to get those done for those people, and they were so grateful and appreciative. I really enjoyed that outreach assistance, going out and meeting those people and helping them." The senior center later got into housing and service coordination and Paulette was a service coordinator for housing for a while. When the center moved into its current building, she was the housing director. Then Paulette added, "Things changed a lot over the years. We got more funding, though some funding got cut. Some jobs get cut then things change, but there are also new jobs and new opportunities", she states. She later became Services Director, which she really enjoyed.

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because she was out in the field more. The services the center could offer had grown, such as the food services, the food pantry, the congregate meals, and the nutrition program . At one time, there was a housekeeping program that consisted of three part time Title Five employees that went into people's homes and complete basic housekeeping. "That was a wonderful program", she recalled. Though she has served in many roles and many areas, her devotion to helping people still remains. "I love learning from our seniors. They're just a wealth of knowledge, so that would be one of the most rewarding things...being able to help somebody and make a change in their life for the better, as far as simple things. This place means a lot to so many people, as far as people who come in here to spend their day or eat a meal . 'This place has saved me' has been said by some of the seniors who have been coming to the center."

As far as her future, Paulette is looking forward to doing the things she enjoys. She plans to do yard work, some home improvement activities, hiking, and getting involved with church work. She also has 14 outside cats to care for! She has always loved cats so she plays "caregiver" to the cats, who are named, though they come and go. She likes to make sure that they get their shots and are spayed or neutered, then they become hers. She will also be spending more time with her daughter, who is married and is a Social Worker at Kings Mountain High School. "Hopefully, there will be a little one down the road, so I'll look forward to helping with that!"



*Congratulations and best wishes  
as you begin your next chapter!*



# Let's Eat!

## Holiday Brunch Prepared in a Slow Cooker

### SLOW-COOKER HOT CHOCOLATE

- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
  - 14 ounce can sweetened condensed milk
  - 6 cups whole milk, divided use
  - 2 cups heavy whipping cream
  - 2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
  - 2 cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
- mini marshmallows, whipped cream and miniature candy canes for serving



In a microwave-safe bowl or cup, microwave one cup of milk to scalding, but not boiling (this can also be done in a small saucepan on the stovetop.) Gently whisk in the cocoa powder into the milk. In a 4 qt. (or larger) slow cooker, combine sweetened condensed milk, whole milk, whipping cream, vanilla and chocolate chips. Stir in the cocoa and milk mixture. Cover and cook for two hours, stirring often as it begins to warm (this is a crucial step to make sure the chocolate chips are melting evenly and getting incorporated with the other ingredients.) When all the chocolate has melted and mixture is warm, ladle into mugs and top with marshmallows or whipped cream and a miniature candy cane.

### SLOW-COOKER BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

- 1 Dozen Large Eggs
- 1 Cup Milk
- 2 lbs. Frozen Hash Brown Potatoes, preferably thawed
- 1 lb. Bacon, cooked, drained and cut into pieces. (may substitute with your favorite breakfast meat, sausage, ham, etc.)
- 1/2 C. Onions, diced
- 3 C. Cheddar Cheese, shredded
- 1/4 Tsp Dry Mustard
- 1/4 Tsp. Garlic Powder
- 1 Tsp. Salt
- 1/2 Tsp. Pepper (An additional pinch of salt and pepper for each layer of hash browns is recommended)



Beat the eggs until well blended (an electric blender works great for beating a large number of eggs); beat in the milk and all the seasonings; in a greased slow-cooker, layer 1/3 of the potatoes and 1/3 of the onions, adding additional salt and pepper; top with 1/3 of the bacon and 1 cup of the Cheddar Cheese; repeat this twice to make a total of three layers and ending with cheese; pour egg mixture over all. Cover and set cooker to "Low". If using thawed hash brown potatoes, the cooking time is about 6-7 hours until the eggs are set. If using frozen hash brown potatoes, the cooking time is about 8-9 hours until the eggs are set.

### SLOW-COOKER CINNAMON ROLLS

#### Dough:

- 1 C. Whole Milk
- 1/4 C. Unsalted Butter, room temperature
- 3 C. All-Purpose flour, divided
- 1/4 C. Sugar
- 1/2 Tsp. Salt
- 1/2 Packet Instant Rapid-Rise Yeast (about 1-1/4 Tsp.)
- 1 Large Egg Yolk

#### Filling: 1/2 C. Sugar

1 Tbls. Ground Cinnamon

1/4 C. Unsalted Butter, melted

#### Icing: 1-1/4 C. Confectioner's Sugar

2 Tbls. Milk

1 Tsp. Vanilla Extract

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## Slow-Cooker Cinnamon Rolls (Continued)

In a small saucepan, heat the milk and butter to 110 degrees (warm to touch). Into your stand mixer add the yeast and milk and whisk and let sit for one minute. Add the flour, sugar, salt and egg to the stand mixer. Attach the dough hook and turn the mixer on speed 3-4 (low to medium). Let it work for 5-7 minutes, until the dough to become a ball that doesn't stick to the sides of the bowl. If dough appears sticky, add flour ¼ cup at a time until it pulls away from the sides of the bowls (use no more than a total of 1 cup more of flour). Take the dough out, grease the stand mixer bowl and put it back in. Cover the dough with your dish towel you used to keep the flour in the stand mixer.



For the filling, in a medium sized bowl, mix the sugar and cinnamon. Dust a large, even surface with flour and roll the dough into a large rectangle about a ½ inch thick (if your space is limited, do this in two halves). Spread the 1/4 C. butter over the dough and sprinkle the cinnamon-sugar over the butter. Roll the dough tightly to form a long log and slice into 6 even pieces. Line your slow cooker with parchment paper or spray with baking spray, then place the cinnamon rolls inside. Place a paper towel right under the lid of the slow cooker. Turn your slow cooker on "HIGH" and cook for 2 hours, or until the rolls are fully cooked through. Once done, remove the rolls from the cooker right away by lifting out the parchment paper. For the icing, whisk the confectioner's sugar, vanilla extract, and milk together until smooth. Add a little more milk if too thick. Drizzle over the warm rolls.

**HINTS:** These rolls are fine uncovered for up to 2 hours at room temperature. Do not keep them in the slow cooker with lid on or they will get soggy. They will stay fresh covered tightly in the refrigerator for 5 days. They freeze well up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and heat up in the oven for best results.

## Laugh-A-Little!

## "Baby Blues" by Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott





## Senior Community Service Employment Program

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community service and work-based job training program for older Americans offered through AARP Foundation. The program provides training for low-income, unemployed seniors. Program participants gain work experience in a variety of community service activities at non-profit and public facilities, including schools, hospitals, day-care centers, and senior centers. Participants work an average of 20 hours a week and are paid \$7.50 an hour. This training serves as a bridge to unsubsidized employment opportunities for participants.

Participants must be at least 55 years old, unemployed, and have a family income of no more than 125% of the federal poverty level. If you or someone you know may be interested in learning more about SCSEP, please contact Kristen E. Maynor at AARP Foundation, 910-775-9264.



## Just So You'll Know...

**The Neal Senior Center will be closed for the Christmas Holidays from Tuesday, December 24 through Thursday, December 26.**

**The center will reopen on Friday, December 27. The center will be closed for the New Year's Holidays on Tuesday, December 31 & Wednesday, January 1, 2025.**



## We thank you!

The Neal Center would like to thank everyone who donated money, food, paper products, and medical equipment from September-October 2024

- Sara Hendrick    -Karen Burton    -Jean Foster    -Linda Bogan    -Peggy Reeves
- Beverly Quinn    -Cleveland County NC Ext. and Comm. Association
- Camp's Creek Baptist Church, Mooresboro    -Double Shoals UMC
- First Baptist Church Parlor Co-Ed Sunday School Class



*Just So You'll Know...*

*There is no Monday  
Night Bingo on  
December 23rd. The  
next game will be on  
December 30th.*

*Have a very  
Merry Christmas!*



*"For unto us  
a Child is born..."*

### *A Christmas Prayer*

Heavenly Father,  
we celebrate the birth of Your Son,  
Jesus, remembering the words of  
the angels on the night of His birth,  
"Peace on earth to all of good will."

Today, as never before, Almighty  
God, we pray for Your loving peace.  
May peace be the guiding force in the  
hearts of our world leaders. May peace  
reign in every corner of the globe and  
in the hearts of every man, woman and  
child upon this earth.

This Christmas and always, may we  
embrace Your wonderful gifts with  
courage and conviction. In so doing,  
we will also be embracing Your greatest  
gift to us, Your Son, the Prince of  
Peace!

*Amen.*

**Are you baking this holiday season and can't find  
red or green food coloring in the stores?**



## **WE HAVE PLENTY OF IT!**

**Come to the Neal Center's gift shop, "Cobwebs & Confetti" and get your special holiday baking ingredients and even do your Christmas shopping, too!**



**Just in time for the holiday cooking...a full line of "Happy Home" flavorings and colorings, bags of fresh pecans, kitchen knives, and a fragrant spice mix for sale! Plus, there are antiques and unique homemade items, such as dolls and toys, and a full selection of greeting cards.**

**The Neal Senior Center Gift Shop is open  
Monday-Thursday,  
8:30 am-4:00 pm and  
Friday, 8:30 am-12 Noon**



## DECEMBER 2024 ACTIVITY CALENDAR

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>9:00 Monday Morning Bridge</p> <p>9:30 Chair Yoga (Not meeting Dec. 23)</p> <p>12:00 Beginning Canasta</p> <p>12:30 Monday Afternoon Bridge</p> <p>2:00 Chair Yoga (Not meeting December 23)</p> <p>5:00 Monday Night Bingo</p> <p>5:30 Zumba (Not meeting Dec. 23 &amp; 30)</p>	<p>9:45 Carolina Line Danc- ers (Not meeting Dec. 24 &amp; 31)</p> <p>10:00 Acrylic Painting (Not meeting Dec. 24 &amp; 31)</p> <p>11:00 Tai-Chi (Not meeting Dec. 24 &amp; 31)</p> <p>12:00 Canasta For Beginners (Not meeting Dec. 24 &amp; 31)</p> <p>1:00 Chair Volleyball (not meeting Dec. 24 &amp; 31)</p>	<p>9:00 The Sewing Circle (not meeting 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p> <p>9:30 Chair Yoga (no class 12/25 &amp; 1/1/25)</p> <p>10:00 Carolina Singers (Dec. 18)</p> <p>11:00 Zumba Gold (no class 12/25 and 1/1)</p> <p>11:00 Beginner Spanish (No class 12/25 or 1/1)</p> <p>11:30 Piedmont Rook (No class 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p> <p>12:30 Knit Pickers (No class 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p> <p>1:00 Packing Out (not meet- ing 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p> <p>2:00 Chair Yoga (no class 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p> <p>2:00 Euchre (not meeting 12/25 &amp; 1/1)</p>	<p>9:00 Canasta For Beginners (Not meeting 12/26)</p> <p>9:30 Chair Volleyball (not meeting 12/26)</p> <p>10:00 Daytime Friends (Not meeting 12/26)</p> <p>1:00 Thursday Afternoon Bridge (Not meeting 12/26)</p> <p>1:00 Mexican Train Domi- noes (Not meeting 12/26)</p>	<p>9:30 Fun Friday Bingo (Dec. 6 &amp; 20)</p> <p>11:00 Zumba Gold (No class 12/27 or 1/3)</p> <p>(Center closes at 12:00 noon)</p>

### Laff-A-Little!

### "Red & Rover" By Brian Basset

