

ALTOONA

DECEMBER 2021

Living

MAGAZINE

Christmas *then and now*

Residents reflect on changing
holiday observances

Meet Megan McLennan
EDUCATION

Apple oat crumble and citrus caramel topping
RECIPE

Lauer combines passions for storytelling and horses
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WELCOME

ANTICIPATION

I can't see the word anticipation without singing along to the 1971 Carly Simon song with the same name and that all-too-familiar drumroll. I was only 3 years old at that time, so I couldn't hardly remember that song's debut. But what I do remember from "Anticipation" is the 1979 Heinz ketchup ad that used the popular song as its jingle. Not knowing the original song or Carly Simon, I improperly thought the words to the jingle were "Heinz is the patience" that played along images of the ketchup slowly oozing out of the glass bottle. My sister, who is 12 years older than me and did know the original song and artist, promptly corrected me while laughing at my confusion.



I may not have had the words to the TV commercial down, but I most certainly knew the definition of anticipation, because I experienced it as a child each Christmas season. My mother was the ultimate planner. She had all our Christmas presents purchased and wrapped and positioned under a fully decorated tree prior to Thanksgiving.

As much as I appreciated Mom's planning ahead, the weeks of anticipation in wondering what was underneath the holiday wrapping paper was more than this kid could handle. So, when nobody was in the room, I would carefully pull back the tape and paper on the presents and get a peek at what was inside my gifts. Of course, I didn't tell anyone about this at the time, and I learned to still act quite surprised when I opened the presents on Christmas day.

Mom's type of planning for Christmas didn't happen as often with Jolene and me when our kids were at home. It's not that we didn't have good intentions; we just couldn't seem to get to the shopping and wrapping until the last minute, and I was the worst offender (and still am). This procrastination may have taken away some of the anticipation for our kids — and maybe the temptation to peel back the paper for a look, too. Maybe. As much as we would like to think that things have changed since we were kids, many things have remained the same, too — including anticipation.

Happy holidays, merry Christmas, and, as always, thanks for reading. ■

SHANE GOODMAN

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Read more of Shane Goodman's columns each weekday morning by subscribing to The Daily Umbrella email newsletter for free at www.thedailyumbrella.com.



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Christmas

then and now

Residents reflect on changing holiday observances

By Lindsey Giardino

Mary Lou Olausen enjoys Santa decor and has even made a lot of her own Christmas decorations, but the heart of the holiday and its traditions is baking cookies.

When reminiscing about the holidays and the accompanying joyful celebrations, the brightest and most vivid memories vary. For some, it's the decorating and ornaments, the tinsel and trees that come to mind first. For others, special moments are centered on baking holiday goodies. Still others recall the fun of surprising family and friends with bits of Christmas cheer. For many, the memories they make today are quite different from those of their childhood. As people start their own families, meld traditions with their spouses', and adapt to the changing times, they find their Christmases "then and now" are quite different.

Cookies and family time

For Mary Lou Olauson, who grew up on a family farm near Boone, “Christmas was always special.”

One of her family’s traditions was to bake Christmas cookies every year. In fact, Olauson remembers learning to bake them when she was old enough to stand on a chair and help.

“Cookies have always been very important in my life,” she says.

Over the years, she’s baked “lots and lots of cookies.” Still, today, she makes Christmas cookies with her daughter and granddaughter. While she’s made all kinds, some of Olauson’s staples include sugar, chocolate and refrigerator cookies. She stays true to her roots and uses many of the recipes her family had growing up.

Olauson even had an article written about her in The Des Moines Register in the mid-1970s when she and two of her friends baked cookies for an entire day and gave them all away.

While baking cookies is a long-standing holiday tradition for Olauson, one thing has changed for her: As a kid, receiving gifts was perhaps the best part of the holiday season. Now, “It’s the time together that’s really important,” she says.

Last year, one of her granddaughter’s gifts to Olauson and her husband was a trip through the Jolly Holiday Lights at Adventureland — a gift she thoroughly enjoyed, as it enabled her to spend quality time with loved ones.

What’s changed the most, though, is that now Olauson’s adult children need time with their own families on Christmas Eve and Day. These years, it’s just Olauson and her husband spending Christmas Day together, but she says their family still makes a point to call them and wish them a Merry Christmas.

They do still spend Christmas Eve with some of their family. After attending a Christmas Eve church service, the Olausons will return home to eat dinner — the grandkids requested her spaghetti for this year’s meal — then open gifts, have cookies and coffee and enjoy each other’s company.

And for Olauson, that’s what matters the most.



Ella Mae VanHelden enjoys seeing all her neighbors’ Christmas decorations at Prairie Vista Village.

Traditions evolve over the years

Growing up during the Great Depression, Ella Mae VanHelden remembers some years exchanging gifts with her family and other years not being able to. Regardless, Christmas Eve was a big deal for her family.

VanHelden’s parents were Dutch and

immigrated to the United States. They had six children, of which she is the youngest.

As she and her siblings became adults, they continued to get together on Christmas Eve and draw names for gifts. She recalls her mother making a big meal that included chicken sandwiches, Dutch letters, desserts and more.

When VanHelten and her husband moved to northern Iowa and started their own family, they adopted their own traditions, including attending Christmas Eve church service. VanHelten and her kids would take part in the church's Christmas program, too. After the service, they'd return home and the kids opened one gift. The rest were saved for Christmas morning.

The VanHeltens eventually moved to Mitchellville, which was closer to some of her family. She then started a new tradition of getting together with two of her sisters on Christmas Eve for several years until they passed away.

This year, the VanHeltens plan to get together with extended family the weekend before Christmas, when they'll reconnect and do a White Elephant gift exchange.

The VanHeltens, who are in their 90s, don't get out much anymore but hold onto their fond memories of attending Christmas Eve services — especially when they'd light candles and sing "Silent Night" — and being with family.

The couple now lives in Prairie Vista Village, where the residents have decorated their porches. VanHelten says each one is different, and she enjoys seeing them.

She also enjoys baking around Christmas time. Her favorites include sugar cookies, spritz cookies, peanut clusters and fudge.

Regardless of traditions old and new, she says she truly loves the holiday season.

"I really enjoy it all," she says. "It's a fun time. I enjoy getting the Christmas cards and getting together with friends if I can and all the decorations."

Spreading cheer to others

As a kid, Becky Brehm recalls Christmas being all about the presents and anticipation for Santa's arrival.

She also remembers her mother making a big Christmas Day breakfast of biscuits and gravy, mixed citrus fruit, and more for her and her three siblings — a tradition that continues still today.

Christmas was a big deal for Brehm's father as well. He enjoyed sitting back in his recliner and watching his children open their gifts. Another family tradition was to buy him candy for Christmas, which he'd munch on during the gift opening. Now that he's a grandfather, the tradition has continued, and he shares his candy with any of his little grandchildren who



With family scattered far and wide, Becky Brehm and her husband, Kevin, enjoy sharing the holiday spirit with others in the Altoona community through their gift shop, Posey and Jett's.

crawl up on his lap to sneak some with him.

As Brehm raised her own family, she started the tradition of waking up with her kids and seeing what Santa brought on Christmas morning. Then they'd go to her parents' home for breakfast — and still do.

Now that she's remarried, though, some things have changed completely for Brehm during the holiday season. Her kids are now scattered, so she doesn't always get to see them at Christmas, but she does make a point to FaceTime with her grandkids — something that's "important to our hearts."

"Being a grandparent is enjoying Christmas through the eyes of our grandkids," she says. "That's probably the best of all."

Now, though, Brehm and her husband, Kevin, focus on their Altoona-based business, Posey and Jett's, during the holidays.

"Our guests and being able to provide them a good Christmas is our Christmas now," Brehm says.

She adds, she feels blessed with their success and called to give back to the community when they can. One way they do so is through their Blessing Bags. Ten percent of sales made on Sundays are set aside to create these bags, which are given to folks going through a hardship.

"Your focus changes as you get older with what's important at Christmas time," she continues. "Through our store, it's just



providing the best Christmas we can for each person who walks through the door."

Now that it's just Brehm and her husband together on Christmas Day, they'll focus on celebrating the birth of Jesus. Throughout the holiday season, though, they're grateful they can serve others in the community.

"Christmas in the last seven years for Kevin and I has gone from all the family to just the two of us," Brehm says. "That's where Posey and Jett's has been our saving grace and given us purpose."

Regardless, Brehm holds on to her fond memories from Christmases growing up and in recent years. Her favorite memory, though, is when she and Kevin celebrated their first Christmas together as a blended family.

"That Christmas will always hold a special place in my heart." ■

ALTOONA

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Maybe you love to go sledding or build snowmen with your kids. Maybe you can't stand the "s" word and wish we had Florida weather here in Altoona. Either way, 'tis the season to start the cold weather talk.

WE NEED YOUR EYES!

The City of Altoona relies on our residents to let staff know of safety concerns created by weather conditions, snow removal operations, water main breaks, potholes, etc. If you have a concern, please contact City Hall at 967-5136 (Monday–Friday; 8am–4:30pm) or 967-2734 (during off hours and weekends).



CHRISTMAS TREE PICK-UP

The Compost It! program's winter collection will occur on your regular collection day from Dec. 27, 2021 – Jan. 7, 2022. Live Christmas tree pick-up is included during this time. Just set your tree out before 6 AM on your regular collection day with one Compost It! sticker attached. When you set it at the curb, the sticker is the only decoration your tree can have. All ornaments, lights, and wires need to be removed. Wreaths and garlands are not accepted.



CITY TRAILS IN WINTER

The City of Altoona does clear the snow off of the trails during winter. However, we do not treat the trails with salt or sand. The trails are cleared last following the city facilities' sidewalks and parking lots. Many communities close all trails during winter months but we want ours to be open for use. Please enjoy the trails but be cautious of the weather conditions.

POND SAFETY

The only recreation allowed on ponds maintained by the City of Altoona at any point in the year is fishing from the shore. No ice skating is allowed. Keep your eyes peeled on our social media and our website for more information to come regarding an ice rink!



WINTER TRASH & RECYCLING CART PLACEMENT

Please remember that your garbage and recycling totes must be accessible 18 inches from the curb. Your clean driveway approach may be the best option during heavy snow times. Please do NOT place your toter on city streets. City snowplows cannot clear snow properly when totes are placed on city streets. This is especially true in cul-de-sacs which are impossible to plow if totes are placed in the road. Check out the city's website at www.altoona-iowa.com for snow removal regulations and updates.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

City Offices will not be open on the following dates:

CHRISTMAS: 12/23 and 12/24

NEW YEAR'S: 12/31

The Altoona Public Library will not be open on the following dates:

CHRISTMAS: 12/24 and 12/25

NEW YEAR'S: 1/1

**Shortened hours on additional days surrounding the holidays will be posted via social media and website updates.*

Wishing you and yours a safe and warm holiday season!

ALTOONA Public Library news

Congratulations to George Ratashak for successfully completing our 1000 Books Before Kindergarten reading challenge.



George Ratashak

Adult programming (18 and older)

- **Senior Set:** For anyone age 60-plus, mark your calendars for a fun activity and time to socialize every Tuesday from 1-3 p.m. First and third Tuesdays: Games; second Tuesday: Crafting (registration required); fourth Tuesday: Movie Matinee.
- **Book Clubs:** Read Elin Hilderbrand's "Winter Street," and attend one of our sessions to discuss. Copies of the book are available at the front desk. Who Picked This Book? Club meets Thursday, Jan. 20 at 7 p.m.; Booked for Lunch meets Monday, Jan. 24 at noon (feel free to bring your lunch).
- **Adult Coloring at Brightside Aleworks:** Thursdays, Dec. 30 and Jan. 27 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Join us at Brightside Aleworks (480 Center Place in Altoona) at 6:30 p.m. for a fun night of coloring. We will bring the art supplies; you bring your friends and money for drinks. No registration required.

Children's programming

- **Cocoa & Crafts:** Saturday, Jan. 8 from 12:30-1:30 p.m. Join us for a brisk walk around the Tale Trail to read our new story. We will finish off with a small craft, hot cocoa and treats in the library. This is a drop-in event for ages 12 and younger.
- **Kids Drive-in Movie:** Thursday, Jan. 20 from 1-2:30 p.m. Come make your own box car and park inside to watch a fun, animated movie. See our website for details. For ages 2-6. Registration required.
- **Glow Art Kids:** Monday, Jan. 24 from 6-7 p.m. Join us for a glowing good time while making art under a black light. Several stations will be set up to explore and create some amazing glowing art projects. For ages 12 and younger. Registration required.

Teen programming

- **You Do You in '22:** Monday, Jan. 3 from 6-7 p.m. Start the new year fresh. Join us to create a vision board, time capsule, or a happy jar to keep you focused on making 2022 amazing. For grades 7-12. Registration required.
- **Snackchat:** Monday, Jan. 17 from 6-7 p.m. You asked for it — a book discussion for teens. Come low-key chat with other teens about the books you love, those you hate, and everything in between. You bring opinions and what you're reading right now; we'll bring snacks! For grades 7-12. Registration required.
- **Puzzle Fight:** Saturday, Jan. 29 from 2-4 p.m. Join us on International Puzzle Day for an intense battle of jigsaw puzzle solving. Gather your crew and get ready, because when the whistle blows, it's on! For grades 7-12. Registration required. ■

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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GET YOUR home ready for winter

Shorter days and colder nights are upon us. While curling up under a blanket with a good book sounds appealing, be sure to knock these DIY projects off your to-do list.

Cleaning your gutters sounds daunting, but what's even more daunting is when your gutters get clogged and start to back up, leading to overflow. When the water cannot flow correctly, it'll run down your home, increasing the likelihood of your home exterior deteriorating. Clogged gutters can also cause deterioration of your foundation when water infiltrates the basement, consequently settling under your concrete porches and walks.

Winter is the time of year when most house fires happen. Testing your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors can help save lives. It's that time of year when blasting your furnace and building fires is a must. Keeping our windows and doors closed increases the risk of carbon monoxide exposure. Be sure to check your smoke detectors to make sure they are working properly and have fresh batteries installed. Don't have a carbon monoxide detector? Now is the time to think about installing one in your home. Some insurance carriers offer discounts for this, as well.

Make sure your pool is properly shut down, as well as your sprinkler system and outdoor water faucets. These lines are typically unprotected from the elements, causing freezing over the winter. If this happens, it's likely that the water lines could split inside your home, flooding your basement and leaving you with a costly clean-up. Keep in mind that a professional winterizing is cheaper than replacing a bunch of broken lines the following spring.

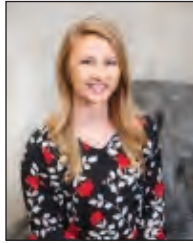
Before you start building those cozy fires, be sure to have your fireplace cleaned and inspected. You want your fireplace to be safe to use, and a quality chimney sweep company will make sure you're taken care of. They can also identify any maintenance problems. Remember to take the time to stack and cover your firewood in a good location in your yard — someplace convenient where you can quickly grab a few pieces.

While you're walking around your home in your warm slippers, be sure to notice your doors and windows. Do you see any trim around your exterior doors and windows that needs a little TLC? Protect your home from the elements and start sealing all the wood trim on any exterior exposures. This will help keep your home warm, so your heating bill doesn't skyrocket.

As if that's not enough, consider adding the following ideas to your to-do list:

- Prepare for snow removal.
- Prep your lawn equipment by draining the gas.
- Inspect your masonry and hard surfaces for cracks.
- Check your home's heating and air conditioning system. ■

Information provided by Rachel Schwab, The Insurance Station, Inc.
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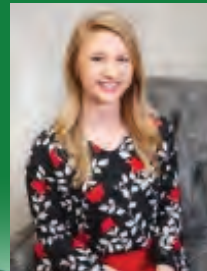
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FAITH

By Pastor Darryl Pierce

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: finding peace in 2022

It's almost 2022. What will you strive for in the new year? Who will you seek to be? What will you seek to accomplish? Those questions don't seem to have as much power as they did a couple of years ago. Maybe it's because so many of us are just hoping to "survive" next year. It seems we've become stuck in a sense of disconnection, loneliness and anxiety after the last two years of our "new normal."



Some folks are mad at God about things going in the world and wonder how He could let them happen. Some feel like they've disappointed God or they've failed a test that He's given us.

Regardless of where you find yourself, I know without a doubt that God longs to bring peace into your life and that peace is what Jesus invites you to engage in with Him. It is so interesting to me that the very thing that seems to be so elusive right now is the thing that Jesus offered more than 2,000 years ago — but often we fail to understand that His offer of peace is just as real today as it was then.

"I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Jesus knows we need this peace, and He understands why. He came to earth to usher it into reality for us and make it tangible. He experienced, firsthand, the troubles of this world, and He overcame those troubles on our behalf so that we could have peace.

In his prophecies about the Messiah, Isaiah calls Jesus "The Prince of Peace." In Luke's gospel, Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, says that Jesus is the one who will "guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:79b)

Peace is what our souls long for. If we trust Jesus with our lives, He will bring us peace amid the turmoil of this broken world. God desires to take us far beyond mere survival and into places of thriving and hope. Let this be the year that you focus on what God wants for you: victory over darkness. And a year where you not only engage that truth but share it with others who desperately need it as well.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7) ■

Information provided by Pastor Darryl Pierce, Lead Pastor,
Adventure Life Church, 1700 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, 515-967-5184.

RECIPE

DELIGHTFUL dishes to dazzle holiday guests

(Family Features) Entertaining guests during the holidays isn't just about a main course that calls all to the table. What often makes a festive gathering more fruitful is a spread of delicious appetizers, delightful drinks and divine desserts that keep loved ones coming back to the kitchen for more.

For appetizing dishes from the first guest at the house to the last out the door, you can heighten the flavor and appearance of favorite recipes with one simple ingredient: apples. Ranging from tart to sugary sweet, finding the right balance for your palate is key. Scent can also influence taste, especially when you have a balanced sweetness with an uplifting, fresh aroma.

Turn to an option like Envy Apples this holiday season for satisfying texture and taste with a consistently balanced, refreshing sweetness coupled with a crisp, elegant crunch. They make for an easy snack when eaten fresh out of hand but are also perfect for appetizers, cider and tasty treats. Find more sweet holiday recipes at EnvyApples.com. ■

Apple oat crumble and citrus caramel topping

- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 Envy Apples, diced into large cubes
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup old-fashioned oats
- ½ cup cold butter, diced small
- ½ cup caramel
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ orange, zest only
- 1 tablespoon orange juice
- vanilla ice cream

Directions

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- In bowl, stir together sugar and ground cinnamon.
- Toss apples in lemon juice then in cinnamon sugar mixture. Spread in 9-inch pie dish.
- In another bowl, stir together brown sugar, flour and oats. Using hands or fork, cut in butter until pea size crumbs form. Sprinkle evenly over apples.
- Bake 40-45 minutes until mixture is bubbling and golden brown. Remove from oven and let cool 15 minutes.
- In small pot, whisk caramel, salt, orange zest and orange juice until warm.
- Spoon apple oat crumble over large scoop vanilla ice cream and top with salted citrus caramel.



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END of the year is a time to take stock

2021 has been a challenging year for all of us. The uncertainty and anxiety will continue into 2022. Still, the end of the year is a good time to take stock of your personal situation.

Update your estate plan

Putting your legal affairs in order is important. It reduces the burdens 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 advisor 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 effective steps that can save time and expense in the future. Contact an experienced attorney to help you. ■

Information provided by Abendroth Russell Barnett Law Firm, 2560 73rd St., Urbandale, 515-278-0623, www.ARPCLaw.com.



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ALTOONA resident is author, horse lover

Lauer combines passions for storytelling and horses.

Tiffany Lauer knows a thing or two about horses.

She's had them since she was in fifth grade, and she competed in barrel racing while attending Iowa State University as a member of its Rodeo Club. After that, she moved to Omaha for a bit and taught horse-riding lessons as a part-time job.

When Lauer eventually moved back to the Des Moines area, she started offering horse-riding lessons full-time, which is when she acquired a pony named Elvis.

"Right from then he was naughty," she says. "He's kind of done it all."

Lauer, who is a former high school English teacher and now teaches English at DMACC, started writing down Elvis' shenanigans for fun. She penned the first Elvis story for children back in 2015 but tabled the project until last year when she found an illustrator, Leah Patton, who could accurately represent horses.

As of March 2021, Lauer has officially published three "Elvis the Pony" books with plans to publish many more in the future. One of the books helps little ones learn their ABCs, while another title teaches about different horse colors.

For Lauer, the best part about writing these children's books is coming up with the ideas for them.

"I enjoy the creative writing process," she says. "My brain is just always working on stories."

It's extra special for Lauer that her 7-year-old daughter has helped her generate story ideas.

"Her brain is magical," Lauer says. "We talk about Elvis the Pony a lot, and she has helped with some of the ideas. A 7-year-old brain helps me as an adult remember to be silly."

Lauer, an Altoona resident, has felt a great deal of support from the community for both Elvis and her books. She's done readings at the Altoona Public Library — with Elvis in tow — and also traveled to local parks this past summer where she'd let kids meet Elvis and read a book to them.

"Elvis the Pony has been very well received in Altoona for the outreach I've done so far," Lauer says.

In addition, she took one of her other ponies, Tivio, to Altoona Palooza this past summer. Tivio suffered from a major head injury a few years ago. Lauer plans to eventually tell his story, but she's still trying to determine how to best do so.

"I think it's a book that kids and parents



Elvis and Tivio are the ponies that inspire Tiffany Lauer's "Elvis the Pony" books.



Tiffany Lauer's "Elvis the Pony" series helps a new generation of readers learn about horses in a fun way.

need," she says. "Figuring out how to present his story to the public has been challenging, because you don't know how much detail to go into, but it would also open up a door for people to have that conversation about a group of people who are not necessarily understood or recognized."

Ultimately, Lauer hopes that Elvis and her

stories help children learn more about the animal she's so passionate about.

"Elvis the Pony books are really about horses, and they're bringing a fresh perspective, I hope, to a whole new generation of kids who like animals and want to know more about horses in a creative way." ■

ALLEVIATING seniors' holiday loneliness

It is the time of year for joy, laughter and Christmas cheer. It is also the time of year when many people get the "holiday blues." Those who suffer from the holiday blues often express feelings of irritability, tiredness and sadness. The United States Department of Health and Human Services report that one in five older Americans feel lonely or socially isolated, and the number of people who experience loneliness increases during the holidays.



Here are a few ideas of what you can do to help your aging friends and family feel included and supported during the holiday season to help alleviate loneliness.

- Help them look their best. We feel great when we get a new outfit or after a hair appointment. Plan a special day out together to help them look and feel good. It can boost confidence, and they get bonus time with you.
- Include them in the planning of holiday events, whether it be family meals, a football game get-together, or shopping. Planning and then participating can help anyone feel needed and increase their excitement about the upcoming events.
- Cook or bake some of their favorite treats or meals. Food can

bring up cherished memories. Did you wake up Christmas morning and enjoy cinnamon rolls? Maybe you grew up having ham on Christmas Eve. Whatever the goodies may be, try to include their favorite foods in the holiday festivities.

- Mix in different family traditions or start your own. Start a tradition of driving around to see lights or pick a holiday movie to watch annually. Traditions don't have to be grand; they could be simple and funny like wearing an "ugly sweater." Chances are your loved one will relish in the joy and laughter the experience of traditions can bring.

A couple things to not do this holiday season with your loved ones with the holiday blues.

Don't expect everyone to be happy all the time. It is OK to be sad; do not dismiss it. Talk and help conjure positive memories and share stories. You don't have to force things to enjoy your time together.

Adjust your expectations; a Norman Rockwell Christmas isn't real. This season is magical. Enjoy the Christmas that is perfect for you and your loved ones. I hope the holidays bring you lots of reasons to smile. ■

Information provided by Stephanie Proper, Executive Director, Valley View Village, 2571 Guthrie Ave., Des Moines, 515-265-2571.

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MEET Megan McLennan

Making learning fun

After graduating from Jefferson-Scranton High School, Megan McLennan attended the University of Iowa where she received a degree in elementary education and a minor in psychology. She then taught kindergarten for six years in Newton and received a master's degree in elementary education before joining the Southeast Polk Community School District, where she has been teaching kindergarten for seven years. McLennan says she is part of an amazing team of teachers who work together to implement strategies so each student makes progress.

"In middle school and high school, I loved working with younger kids, whether it was reading to them, practicing or teaching them a sport, volunteering to be a 'team leader' at vacation bible school, or babysitting," McLennan says. "Being a teacher was what I was supposed to do. I wanted to help students become the best versions of themselves academically, emotionally and socially."

For McLennan, some of the rewards of being a kindergarten teacher are the connections she builds with her students and their families, her students' excitement for learning, and the progress her students make throughout the year.

McLennan's students participate in a variety of activities such as a Candy House Day, where students get to "board" The Polar Express, much like in the movie.

"At the beginning of the day, our guidance counselor, Mrs. Kayser, shuts off the lights in the hallway, lights her lantern, and calls out all kindergarten classes to board The Polar Express. One of our secretaries, Mrs. Lane, punches each child's ticket to get on the train, much like in the movie. Once we are all in one room, Mr. Skip, one of our custodians, reads "The Polar Express" to all three classes. Silver bells are handed out at the end of the story to all students who truly believe. It is magical," McLennan says.

That same day, students also participate in Winter Party rotations where they complete their own candy house, play a winter math game, work on a winter writing activity, and more.

In addition, McLennan's students buddy up with a second grade class twice a month to complete activities together such as reading, writing, crafts and more. They also participate in a Feel Good Friday Dance at the end of each Friday as well as "flashlight activities."

"I turn off all of the lights, and kids have to use flashlights to search for and write various items such as shapes, sight words, numbers, decodable words, or whatever skill we may be working on. The simple act of turning off the lights to complete an activity takes the kids' excitement to a whole new level," McLennan says.

When not teaching, McLennan enjoys spending time with family and friends. She also enjoys Zumba, yoga, running and reading books. ■



Megan McLennan's kindergarten students enjoy learning in fun ways, such as "flashlight activities."

HELP at home after hospitalization

You had surgery and spent a couple of weeks in short-term rehabilitation. Now it's time to return home — but you're nervous. You wonder if you'll be able to remember how to do your strengthening exercises — and what about your medications? There's a lot to keep straight, and you live alone.

These concerns are a great reason for anyone whose doctor prescribes short-term rehabilitation to choose a provider that offers not just rehabilitation, but a network of services. A "network" can be made up of many services offered by the same organization, designed to work in tandem to make life easier for anyone seeking assistance.

Let's use Ted as an example. He's 74 and a widower; he lives alone, and after hospitalization for a cardiac issue, he rehabilitated in a senior living community. Before Ted finished his stay, he learned from a nurse at the community that a number of services would be available to him after he returned home. He learned the community would arrange everything — and there would be no out-of-pocket cost to him for weekly home health care that would help keep him healthy.

Ted appreciated his twice-weekly nurse visits, and two years after his heart procedure, he continues to thrive in his own home with other services from the same organization: cleaning assistance, grocery-shopping help, and meal delivery. Ted continues his exercises on his own, and is actually in better health than he was before his surgery. The nurse who had helped set up his home services had told him that people who receive in-home assistance after rehabilitation are more likely to avoid re-hospitalization, and Ted is grateful that has been his experience.

If your physician has recommended short-term rehabilitation after a hospital stay, do your homework. Ask questions about ongoing care after your time in rehabilitation, and choose an organization that not only will help you get well but will place a priority on keeping you that way with assistance offered in your home. Your ongoing health and wellbeing are worth it. ■

Ward Phillips is Senior Director of Sales for WesleyLife, which offers a broad network of home-based services for older adults in addition to 55-and-older community living in Iowa and Illinois. Call or text Ward at 515-669-2205 to learn about home health care, non-medical in-home services, hospice care, meal delivery, and much more!





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BEFORE YOU GO

By Jan Shawver

ENJOYING Christmas after the loss of a loved one

Christmas traditions are joyous times families look forward to each year.

My family would always give gifts to every member of the family — no drawing of names in our clan. As our immediate family grew to 13, we began having a “progressive Christmas,” going from one family member’s house to another.

For some, the thought of participating in holiday traditions is more than they can bear, as a precious member of the family will be missing the celebration.

As the holidays approach, do not isolate yourself from family and friends. Many of them are grieving your loss as well. Perhaps this year you should begin some new traditions: create a scrapbook of photos and memories of your loved one; volunteer at a homeless shelter — the possibilities are endless.

Most of all, don’t be afraid of tears. You are hurting, and others are, too. Someone you loved is no longer with you. ■

Information provided by Jan Shawver, Family Services Representative, Highland Memory Gardens Cemetery, 1 N.E. 60th Ave., Des Moines, 515-289-2230.



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CREDIT COUNSELING

By Tom Coates

FINANCIAL wellness planning 2022

Before we know it, this year will be over, and 2022 will be here. Along with a New Year comes fresh goals, hopes, dreams and resolutions. Budgets and personal financial goals are important to review on an ongoing basis, but it is also good to look at those things as a whole on a yearly basis if you anticipate changes and to check your progress. Do you have a new yearly expense? Are you anticipating a large raise this year? Will you be able to direct more funds to debts? Did you meet a short-term goal so that now you can add a new one or direct those funds to a long-term goal? Did you get married, divorced or have a child? Gas and grocery prices are rising, so do you need to change your budget amounts for these items? Employer benefit changes also occur this time of year, so there could be increases to the deductions from your paycheck to account for.

Here are some other important tasks to review as the year ends: beneficiary designations; flexible spending accounts; credit report (www.annualcreditreport.com); subscriptions and memberships; auto, home and life insurance policies; estate plans.

Making an annual financial review part of your year-end traditions will set you up for success in the coming year. ■

Information provided by Tom Coates, Consumer Credit of Des Moines, 6129 S.W. 63rd St., Des Moines, IA 50321, 515-287-6428.



REDUCE holiday stress

The holiday season can be both joyful and stressful. Here are some strategies to increase your joy and reduce your stress this holiday season.

Make sure to honor any feelings you may be having this season such as sadness and grief. Don't try to force yourself to be happy because of the holidays. If you have lost a loved one, reach out to a support group online or attend community or religious events. Seek out companionship from others. Volunteering your time to help others can lift your spirits, too.

It is important to be realistic. Families grow and change; therefore, our traditions and rituals can change, too. If adult children and other family are not able to visit, find new ways to connect through photos, videos and video calls. Think about the importance of your attachments. Share with others the things you find meaningful and special about them.

Plan ahead — create your menus and shopping lists. Then set aside specific days for shopping, baking, connecting with friends and other activities. The holidays are about the quality of our time together, not the magnificence of the gifts or meals. Make time for yourself. By spending 10 minutes just breathing, you can create a sense of peace. ■

Source: The Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>. Information provided by Sheryl Frye, LISW, SS Therapy and Consulting, Ltd, 2675 N. Ankeny Blvd., Suite 105, Ankeny, IA 50023, 515-528-8135, frye@sstherapyandconsulting.com, www.sstherapyandconsulting.com.



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PRIORITIZE your health

The start of a new year provides a new opportunity to shift your priorities. Making your health a top priority will bring you both immediate and long-term benefits to your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Bridging the gap between wanting to live a healthy lifestyle and actually living the lifestyle can be done with commitment and preparation.

Have a plan. Planning allows growth in all aspects of our lives. Planning helps create a clear idea — a visualization — of how to reach your goals. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Become goal-oriented. Write your goals down. Place them in a place where you can read them throughout the day. Choose to move forward toward your goals.

Take action. Repetition breeds habits, and habits turn into character traits. Do something, and be consistent and persistent. With the increase in quantity comes a sudden and dramatic change in quality.

Tune up your engine. It is impossible to function at your highest level when you are not in optimal health.

- Drink water. Drink half your body weight in ounces daily.
- Exercise. Move, move, move, and stretch daily.
- Eat a high quantity of raw, organically grown vegetables along with lean proteins and high-quality fats.
- A well-balanced, whole foods-based purification/detoxification can help to eliminate toxins and improve immune and metabolic functions.
- Regular chiropractic adjustments. A healthy nervous system is essential for optimal function and expression of health. ■

Information provided by Dr. Kari Swain, Swain Chiropractic, 410 Center Place S.W., Altoona, 515-967-9300.

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BESIDES smoking, lung cancer risks include radon and occupational hazards

Lung cancer is projected as the leading cause of cancer deaths in Iowa in 2021, with more than 1,400 lives lost. Smoking is the most common and preventable cause of lung cancer; however, the odorless, colorless, tasteless, radioactive gas radon is second.

“Everyone in Iowa knows smoking cigarettes causes cancer, but many people are not aware that radon exists, let alone in high levels in their homes. They may be inhaling it unknowingly, and that causes cancer,” said Neil Horning, MD, a specialist in pulmonary and critical care medicine with MercyOne Des Moines Pulmonary and Infectious Disease Care.

“We’ll have patients with no other risk factors develop lung cancer from the high radon levels in their house’s basement or



at their jobs, including agriculture, where farmers work with phosphate fertilizers.”

Some careers may have an increased risk of lung cancer due to the high levels of chemicals, pollution and more. These positions include:

- Mechanics and car hobbyists
- Military positions, especially those previously in the Navy
- Painters and construction workers

Minimize your risk of lung cancer through healthy lifestyle choices and by contacting your primary care provider for more information on available lung cancer screening options. ■

Information provided Neil Horning, MD, pulmonary and critical care specialist with MercyOne Des Moines Pulmonary and Infectious Disease Care, 411 Laurel St., Suite A120, Des Moines, 515-643-7900, MercyOne.org/desmoines.

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HOW TO set a home-buying budget

If you're a first-time homebuyer browsing the market, you might be wondering how to calculate your budget. Lenders take many factors into consideration when considering the size of mortgage you can afford, including your household income, your down payment, and your total debt.



have, such as student loans or auto loans, you want to aim for around 43% or less.

You should look at your personal situation and determine what you feel comfortable paying for your mortgage each month. You could have expenses not considered by a lender or additional income that would enable you to have a higher home payment. Everyone's situation is different, and only you can determine how much you want to spend.

How a down payment impacts your home-buying budget

The more money you put down on your new home, the less you need to finance; therefore, the higher your down payment, the more home you will be able to afford. A higher down payment may also mean lower monthly payments or a shorter repayment timeline.

If you want to buy a home but you do not have the funds for a down payment, a down payment is not always required to buy a home. Even if you do not have the funds for a down payment, it may make more financial sense for

you to buy a home and begin building equity rather than continue to pay rent.

Other factors to consider in your home-buying budget

If you're a first-time homebuyer, you should be aware of any fees that come with buying and closing on a home so there are no surprises to your budget. Keep in mind:

- Homeowners Association (HOA) fees, which may be paid monthly or annually, if they apply
- Home repairs upon move-in
- Private mortgage insurance (PMI), which is usually required if your down payment is less than 20%
- Homeowners insurance
- Appraisal, inspection(s), attorney, and other closing fees, all of which are common. ■

Information provided by Lori Slings, Bankers Trust, NMLS ID: 406021, 3820 Eighth St. S.W., Altoona, Iowa 50009, 515-245-5624, lslings@bankerstrust.com, BankersTrust.com/LSlings, Bankers Trust NMLS ID: 440379.



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Bruce Day concert

Dec. 31, 5:30-7 p.m.

Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack & Hotel

Iowa native Bruce Day is performing at Prairie Meadows New Year's Eve. With his soulful acoustic vocals and the beat of a kick-drum, this is a solo act you don't want to miss. Must be 21 or older to attend this free show at the Finish Line Show Lounge.



Final Mix concert

Dec. 31, 9:30-11:55 p.m.

Prairie Meadows Casino, Racetrack & Hotel

Final Mix serves up the latest in R&B, jazz fusion, blues, hip hop, and rock 'n' roll. Stop by the Finish Line Show Lounge to see this band's high-energy performance. Must be 21 or older to attend. Admission is free.



Jolly Holiday Lights

Through Jan. 2

Adventureland Resort, 3200 Adventureland Drive

Make-A-Wish Iowa started Jolly Holiday Lights over 25 years ago to raise money to grant Iowa children's wishes. Since then, Jolly Holiday Lights has become the organization's largest fundraising event, funding more than 1,000 wishes to date. Make-A-Wish Iowa is excited to continue the Jolly Holiday Lights event at Adventureland Park, where families can carry on this holiday tradition.



Rams Swim Club Blizzard Blast

Jan. 8-9, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Wellmark YMCA, 501 Grand Ave., downtown Des Moines

Volunteers are needed to help at this USA swimming meet. It is an opportunity for high school students to earn silver cord hours. Two shifts are held each day (morning and afternoon). Organizers are mainly looking for timers but will have other opportunities, too.



Des Moines Symphony New Year's Eve Pops: 'The Music of Elton John'

Tuesday, Dec. 31 at 8 p.m.

Des Moines Civic Center, 221 Walnut St., Des Moines

Ring in the New Year with the Des Moines Symphony. The New Year's Eve Pops brings the Symphony together with "The Music of Elton John," starring Michael Cavanaugh and his band. The high-energy celebration will have you singing along to classic hits and rock favorites. For more information, visit www.dmsymphony.org.

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HOW LONG will your vehicle last?

You may hear about vehicles being worn out after 100,000 miles. While this was a good possibility 30 or 40 years ago, today's cars last much longer. With the advent of fuel injection and better oil standards, engines have seen increased fuel economy, better performance, and increased longevity. Today's automobiles are capable of 300,000-plus miles if maintained properly. I have seen three vehicles in recent years attain more than 450,000 miles.



Your automobile is likely one of your largest investments second only to your home. Protect that investment with routine maintenance. I recommend a complete vehicle inspection at least twice a year by an ASC certified technician. This will locate any potential safety concerns as well as inform you of needed maintenance. This will allow you to budget for needed repairs. Quick lube centers are great at changing oil quickly, but most are not trained to inspect your vehicle thoroughly. Most highly skilled shops today are offering digital inspections with pictures sent via text or email to your smartphone or computer. The benefit of this is transparency. We take pictures to show you what we see.

The important part of this is performing maintenance, such as changing fluids. I think we can agree, almost no one would let their vehicle go without an oil change for its life. Yet we see vehicles all the time with transmission fluid that has never been changed. Every fluid in your vehicle has a life expectancy. Coolant decreases its PH over time. This makes it acidic. This scenario can eat away at gaskets, seals and even metal or aluminum parts inside your engine. Transmission fluid gets darker in color due to heat and friction along with small particles of clutch material. It is important to keep that fluid clean. Transfer case and differentials need fluids changed as well. Small metal particles from bearings and gears get carried in the fluids. The fluids also break down with heat and moisture.

Brakes, as most of you know, are a wear item. Replacing pads before they are worn completely to metal can save money and provide peace of mind that your vehicle will stop when you need it to.


Rust is really the only thing that is not repairable, and even that can be lessened with frequent car washes. This is especially true in the winter. I recommend weekly car washes with under-car wash during winter. Even with no snow, the roads are getting treated with brine, which is basically salt water with some additives. Take care of your vehicle, and it will last for many, many years. Make sure your family is safe on your holiday trips by maintaining it correctly today. ■

Information provided by Keith Williamson, Williamson's Repair & Tire, 515-967-0900, www.williamsonsrepair.com.







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A NEW YEAR of networking and more

As the calendar turns to 2022, I want to thank you for your continuous support of the Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce. I am honored to have served our community and businesses as the president this past year. It has been an incredible experience to meet other members and leaders in our community and hear how our committed board of directors and staff can best serve you as the voice of business in Altoona.



While COVID-19 has impacted our local community and businesses the past year and a half, the Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce has grown stronger, more resilient, and more innovative. The Chamber staff has continued to put on events, workshops, and networking opportunities, including Perk before Work, Business 101 and Noon Networking, as well as created a shop local campaign to help support our small businesses and restaurants.

The Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce exists by helping member businesses grow through advocacy, education and marketing. We will continue to preserve and strengthen a healthy business and tourism environment and promote our local businesses and community to our members, residents and visitors to our area.

If you are a new member or interested in learning what the Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce has to offer, I encourage you to get out and get involved. Seek out a board member or the Chamber staff and introduce yourself. To help our member businesses, the Chamber of Commerce offers a space to advertise on the Chamber website and events, business-to-business referrals and networking opportunities. The Chamber presents an opportunity for all members to grow their network, and, in turn, grow their business. You will get an opportunity to build both professional and personal relationships that will last a lifetime.

I look forward to continuing the Altoona Chamber's history of connecting the network of businesses, non-profit organizations, and our local officials to develop and grow our community in 2022. We will continue to strive for greatness in all that we do at the Chamber. I want to encourage you to remain active in the community and work together to make Altoona a place where businesses succeed and grow.

On behalf of the Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce board and staff, I wish you and your family a blessed holiday season and a bright new year!

Upcoming Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce events

- **Tuesday, Jan. 11 – Perk Before Work** at the Hyatt Place Hotel at 7:30 a.m. (normally would be the first Tuesday, but we thought we'd ease into the year after the holiday)

- **Tuesday, Jan. 18 – Noon Networking** at Perkins with American Shaman CBD from 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. ■

Information provided by Makenzie Moburg-Appleton, 2021 Altoona Area Chamber of Commerce President.

OUT & ABOUT



A ribbon cutting was held for Wholistic Health Center at 3160 Eighth St. S.W., Suite J, on Dec. 3.



Jayne Thompson and Vicky Livingston at the ribbon cutting for Wholistic Health Center on Dec. 3.



Nick Schippel, Phyllis Barkhaus and Troy Barkhaus at the ribbon cutting for Wholistic Health Center on Dec. 3.



Johanna Hayes and Shawn Cross at the ribbon cutting for Wholistic Health Center on Dec. 3.



Maaik Hendrikson and Makenzie Moberg at the ribbon cutting for GreenState Credit Union on Nov. 19.



Kyle Wooten, Lesley Thompson, Alison Litt, Ryan Doehrmann and Amy Henderson at the ribbon cutting for GreenState Credit Union on Nov. 19.



Neily Catalan, Rion Glynn and Courtney Clark at the ribbon cutting for GreenState Credit Union on Nov. 19.



A ribbon cutting was held for GreenState Credit Union at 104 Eighth St. S.E. on Nov. 19.



Abby Cooper, Sonya Wingfield and Dean O'Connor at the ribbon cutting for GreenState Credit Union on Nov. 19.

OUT & ABOUT



Linda Lawson, Luke Peterson and Joe Tollari at the Chamber's Noon Networking at Social Crafts & Eats on Nov. 16.



Callie Williams and Deb Franklin at the Chamber's Noon Networking at Social Eats & Crafts on Nov. 16.



Shannon Fisher, Paul Hartwell and Julie Jordan at the Chamber's Noon Networking at Social Eats & Crafts on Nov. 16.



Pennie Carroll & Associates hosted its 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party at Copper Creek Golf Club in Pleasant Hill on Dec. 4.



Kyle, Angela, Drake and Kennedy Skinner at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



Diane Neubauer and Becky Hammar at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



MariAnn, Ella and Linsey Borgen at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



Kristin Goodwin and Kendal Burzacoft at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



Jules and Katie Pearce at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



Loren Graber, Pennie Carroll, Ellen Graber and Loren Carroll at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.



Aaron, Jamie, Nora, Keaton and Millie Fincham at Pennie Carroll & Associates' 20th Annual Gingerbread House Building Party on Dec. 4.

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Merry Christmas!

