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Cullman's Monday Newspaper

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CULLMANSENSE
COMMUNITY MATTERS

A Day in the Life of...Santa Claus

By: Meghan Nelson
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qrnews/mnelson



Elizabeth was fascinated by Santa's gloves and furry suit. *Photos by: Emily Durden*

Hollywood producers have certainly made enough movies about Santa Claus to dispel any questions the general population may ask about the jolly man's job. For the origins of Santa, watch "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town". To know how Santa has been around for so many years, rent Tim Allen's "The Santa Claus," and, of course, if you want to learn more about Santa's personality, "Miracle on 34th Street" is the appropriate choice.

Yes, Santa's life has been highly documented. In fact, if you can't find answers to your Claus-related questions in the movies, there's likely a song or storybook that will satisfy your curiosity. As a result, when I recently happened upon Santa Claus taking Christmas photos at Village Furniture, I felt that he probably couldn't tell me very much about himself that I didn't already know. Regardless of such confidence in my Santa lore, I decided to ask Saint Nicholas a few questions about his daily life, and I learned that being Santa Claus involves much more than I had heretofore determined.

I found the classically fur-attired, jolly old man seated in a silver chair positioned near a festive Christmas Tree. As The Night Before Christmas suggests, Santa's bright blue eyes twinkled with merriment, and his neatly-trimmed beard was every bit 'as white as the snow'.

As I approached, Santa was just preparing to have his picture taken with a toddler named Elizabeth perched upon his knee. Though she seemed a bit hesitant at first, Santa's jovial demeanor and furry jacket soon brought a smile to little Elizabeth's face. She was too young to tell Santa her Christmas list, but, being Santa, he naturally and correctly guessed that she would enjoy a new baby doll. After a successful picture, he sent her happily back to her mother, candy cane in hand.



Thinking about the baby doll Santa had earlier mentioned, I asked him what types of Christmas gifts the children were putting on their lists this year. Of course, in the North Pole, he has thousands of Christmas lists from different children around the world, but Santa revealed that the kids he had seen from Cullman thus far had asked for presents ranging from a live baby monkey to an iPad.

"I've had to find some high-tech elves," Santa Claus shared. "They build all of the laptops and iPads these days."

As we discussed the new popularity of electronics, the lunch hour began to approach. Not known for his strict dietary regimen, Santa's stomach unsurprisingly started to growl, and he decided that a personal pizza topped with sausage and cheese from Carlton's would be the perfect solution to his famous appetite.

Living in the remote area of the North Pole, Santa Claus's culinary opportunities are a bit limited. "Mrs. Claus is an excellent cook," he noted, "but when I'm not in the North Pole, I like to visit local restaurants and try new foods...I've heard Carlton's has exceptional pizza that is good enough to put the cooks on my perpetual 'Nice List'."

Hearing St. Nick mention his famous 'List', I had to know exactly how he chooses who deserves the 'Nice' side and who gets put under 'Naughty'.

"That's probably the hardest part of my job," said the jovial man. "Several factors go into my decision for each person. It's difficult to write someone's name on my 'Naughty List', but sometimes it just can't be helped."

Santa shared that the best way to maintain a good standing is simply to follow the advice in the classic song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." In other words, avoid pouting, unnecessary crying, and being bad in general.

Thankfully, though, most of us eventually make our way onto the good side of the list, which creates millions of potential deliveries for Santa to make on Christmas Eve. Like every inquisitive, Christmas-minded soul, I was curious

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Religion

Dwayne Harbison – Getting the Right Results

By: Dawn Owens
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qrnews/dowens

Pastor Dwayne Harbison of Cathedral of Praise Church of God has a mantra, "Right words and right actions produce right results."

Harbison, a native of Cullman, will be the pastor at Cathedral of Praise for two years, this Valentine's Day.

When Harbison and his family first arrived there were 14 people attending. Now, only a few years later they average over a 100 people attending each Sunday.

Their growth could be directly correlated to Harbison's mantra that he repeats often from the pulpit. You can see this exhibited in the way that the people in the church have embraced their community.

This past year Cathedral of Praise gave away over 350 backpacks to area children who were in need. "I was one of those children at one point in time," shared Harbison tearing up. "If we can put a new backpack with supplies into a child's hands, we are giving that child a sense of worth."



Dwayne Harbison, Pastor of Cathedral of Praise Church of God

Photo by: Emily Durden

They also fed over 1,600 people this past Thanksgiving from the West Point Middle School in an event they called "Thankful 2011". In collaboration with area businesses like the Brandin' Iron and Jack's they were able to serve and/or deliver meals to people in West Point and Vinemont.

It was an increase of over 1000 from the year before. "Only God knows how many meals we will serve this year. Maybe it'll be up to five thousand, who knows?"

"It has been amazing for me to see how God has allowed me to minister in my hometown." Harbison, a graduate of Cullman High School, was constantly in trouble as a kid.

When he married his wife, even though they weren't living a Christian lifestyle, they saw a lot of divorce around them and made a covenant with each other that they would base their marriage on church to grow their kids up that way as well.

It was when they started to attend the old Clark Street Church of God that they got saved. At that point, they just wanted to be "good churchgoers" and weren't really worried about ministry.

They then went to Spirit Life Church and felt God's call to do ministry. They moved to Blount County and Harbison was a youth pastor there for about 8 years.

From Blount County they moved to Mobile and was there during Hurricane Katrina. They only stayed for 2 years. "I just couldn't wait to get back to North Alabama," stated Harbison.

The Harbison's returned to Spirit Life Church and "by accident" became their Youth Pastor. He was later asked to be the

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Under the Tree Missions Is Showing Cullman the Love of Jesus

By: Dawn Owens
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There are those who feel called to be pastors, others that are called to teach, some to serve in other countries, still others to sing and play music. For the Ferguson family, they feel called to live right here in Cullman loving people the way God does through their ministry of Under the Tree Missions.

Brian, known to most as Cowboy and his wife Courtney have taken seriously the command from Jesus to love God and love people as stated in Luke 10:27.

"It's what we believe we were sent here to do, or really kept here to do, in a very grassroots, holistic way," said Cowboy. "We just want to share the love of life of Jesus right here in Cullman."

Under the Tree Missions was founded in 2009 when they felt God saying to them, "Without faith it was impossible to please God."

Ferguson commented, "It was a time of God calling us to live by faith."

The name of the ministry came from the idea that the body of Christ is bigger than a building. During some of their trips overseas as short-term missionaries in Bolivia, Kenya, Haiti, and the Bahamas, there wasn't a physical building to do bible study or have a church service in, so they would find a place in the shade, under a tree.



Contributed by: The Ferguson Family

It's a place where people would grow in knowing God, build community, and share the love of Jesus.

The Fergusons' accomplish that in a variety of ways right here in Cullman. Cowboy is currently actively involved with Connecting Cullman's recovery efforts and has been supported by them to lead groups working to rebuild Cullman.

"Just this week we are working on cleaning up 6 trees off of a women's property that could not afford to have them removed otherwise," shared Ferguson.

It's because of the role that the Ferguson's have taken in relief efforts in Cullman that they were recently nominated by members of the community for a Pay It Forward award by WHNT- 19. Cowboy, in partnership with Connect Cullman, logged thousands of man-hours in assisting the community with debris removal and home re-construction.

"We try to meet what physical needs there are like if there is a roof, or a home that was blown away, we go in and use that to build relationships and love on them. Discipleship happens through relationships."

Courtney's role with the ministry keeps her at home with the kids and available for neighbors as tangible needs, support, or a listening ear is required. "We are just here to make ourselves available as people need us," shared Courtney.

"Courtney has a peaceful, wholesome way about her," said Cowboy with a smile as he shared about his wife. "People are just drawn to her."

The mission of Under the Tree Missions is to minster to the least, the lost and the hurting.

"Sometimes we just need someone to come along side of us and help us to see the truth of who God is and how passionate He is for us. To know how much He loves us," said Ferguson tearing up. "That's all we are here to do. We are just a normal family that loves Jesus and loves people. And we are really passionate about those two getting together."

The Ferguson's have three children: Gavin who is 13 and attends Cullman Middle School, Emily who is 3, and Olivia who is 2, both are at home with Mom.

If you are interested in learning more about Under the Tree Missions you can check them out online at www.cowboyandcourtney.org. To join in financial support of Under the Tree missions you can make checks payable to I.M.S.S. and put Cowboy and Courtney in the memo line. All support and correspondence can be sent to PO Box 2642, Cullman, AL 35056.

No(ah)-It-All: A Single's Guide to Holiday Cheer

By: Noah Chandler
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qrne.ws/nchandler

If you will, picture a beautiful fireplace with flames crackling from the thick sap as it slowly oozes from the pine logs, while quaint Christmas music discretely fills the room.

The melodic tones compete with the smells of freshly baked gingerbread cookies and a full holiday spread of turkey, ham, apple pie, deviled eggs, stuffing, gravy and homemade yeast rolls.

As you sit sipping on smooth nog, the flicker from the musically themed lights bounces ever so refreshingly from bow to bow until they return to their fluffy home inside the glorious, towering Fraser Fir.

A small entrancing moment allows you to embrace the surroundings, to hold them near; then you slowly open your eyes to reveal a dimly lit home, filled with the smell of 76 cent pizza and sounds of white noise coming from the television not hooked up to cable.

See, that's how Christmas is for me, and logic would dictate that there are others who share similar stories when it comes to holidays.

Now to be fair, I do not observe holidays, mainly because most of my jobs have required being available every day, regardless of what ever significance the day holds.

As I get older it has become evident that many others have done away with the Christmas hullabaloo, opting instead for a day or two of sanity. Of course, there are those who are single that may not have anyone to spend the holidays with. I would say you could spend them with me, but then again we know that won't happen-I don't do holidays-so here are some tips that help me deal with the holidays.

Clothing
This is one of the best parts of being single on holidays, well actually any day. You can wear whatever you want because guess what…you're single and no one is coming by so roll with the sweatpants, dirty shirt and stained up bathrobe. That's how I roll!

Sustenance
Food is very important. Since most restaurants are closed on Christmas you must make this the day for Chinese food. Nothing says Santa like egg rolls, fried rice, pork with garlic sauce and a steamy plastic bin of hot & sour soup. Don't forget to get your cokes the day before because you don't want to run out with nowhere to go.

Entertainment
If you actually like the holiday, well, there are plenty of Christmas movies on constant rotation on just about every conceivable channel known to man or God playing days before and many more after, so you should be good.

For those of you that don't really care for Miracle on 34th or It's a Wonderful Life then I suggest you stock up on movies that are more appropriate for the day. The cult classics like A Clockwork Orange, Children of Men, Donnie Darko and many more along that line will definitely keep spirits high as you sit in your recliner eating cold Chinese food and sipping on flat pop.

Presents
Now this is the best part of being single on Christmas, along with not celebrating it in general. Think about all the money you will save by not participating. If you feel bad about not having a gift of your own, just do what I do. Leave a dollar bill under the remote control the night before. That way, when you sit down for your self-deprecating movie marathon, you will at least be greeted with a gift from the TV Fairy.

Now you have the basics down for how to have a merry time all by yourself as opposed to drudging 140 miles only to sit in a room full of people who would probably rather be at home like you; watching movies, eating Chinese food and wearing sweat pants.

Merry Christmas Everyone!

Weather

Source: NWS

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Hi: 60	Hi: 61	Hi: 54	Hi: 56
Lo: 45	Lo: 42	Lo: 37	

Monday: Partly sunny, with a high near 60.
Monday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 45.
Tuesday: A 40 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 61.
Tuesday Night: A 30 percent chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 42.
Wednesday: A 20 percent chance of showers. Mostly sunny, with a high near 54.
Wednesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 37.
Thursday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 56.

Check CullmanSense.com for the latest weather forecast.

About Us

CullmanSense is a weekly print publication based out of Cullman, Alabama. The online site, CullmanSense.com, is a six-day a week publication, which includes arrest and incident reports from Cullman City Police and the Cullman County Sheriff's Office, Obituaries, and other timely information. The site is completely free and does include stories not found in our print edition.

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Sports

Area Athlete Spotlight: Trevor Yarbrough

By: Josh McBrayer
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qrnews/jmcbrayer

This week's Area Athlete Spotlight falls on Vinemont High School Senior Trevor Yarbrough who is averaging 18 points, 2.8 rebounds, 2.3 steals and 2.3 assists a game. He is shooting an impressive 51% from the field and knocking down a staggering 35% of the three pointers he attempts. He answered a few questions for me to pass along to our readers.

Josh McBrayer: Tell our readers a little about yourself.

Trevor Yarbrough: I have lived in Vinemont all my life and attended Vinemont High School my entire scholastic career. I am 17 years old. I play basketball, baseball, and up until high school I participated in football.

JM: How long have you been playing basketball?

TY: I started playing basketball my 3rd grade year and have played ever since.

JM: What is your favorite sport?

TY: My favorite sport is and has always been basketball. I have loved it since I first started playing. When not playing, I enjoy watching NBA and college games.

JM: What is your greatest accomplishment in sports?

TY: While in my 8th grade year in the first round of the county tournament I scored 39 points and hit 12 three point baskets. I would consider this my biggest accomplishment in my career to date. I am also on my way to eclipsing the 1,000 point mark sometime this season.

JM: Who has been your biggest inspiration in sports?

TY: LeBron James is my biggest inspiration by far. I love to watch him play. He plays with so much confidence. I enjoy watching him compete with some of the greatest names in basketball.

I have observed Trevor Yarbrough's game this season and he plays like his sports idol, LeBron James. With confidence and intensity on both sides of the floor, every possession, no matter the score.



Trevor Yarbrough

Support the Good Hope HS Cheerleaders Performance at the Chik-Fil-A Bowl

By: Dawn Owens
dawnowens@cullmansense.com

It's not every day that a teenage girl gets to live out their dream of cheering at a Bowl game. For Maegan Sterling, a 16-year-old sophomore at Good Hope High School and her 5 other teammates that dream is about to come true.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for us," said Maegan. "It's a way for us to meet other squads and get out in front of people to show them what we can do."

There is only one obstacle for the team to overcome before heading to the game on December 31, 2011: They need to raise $4,800 before heading off to Atlanta.

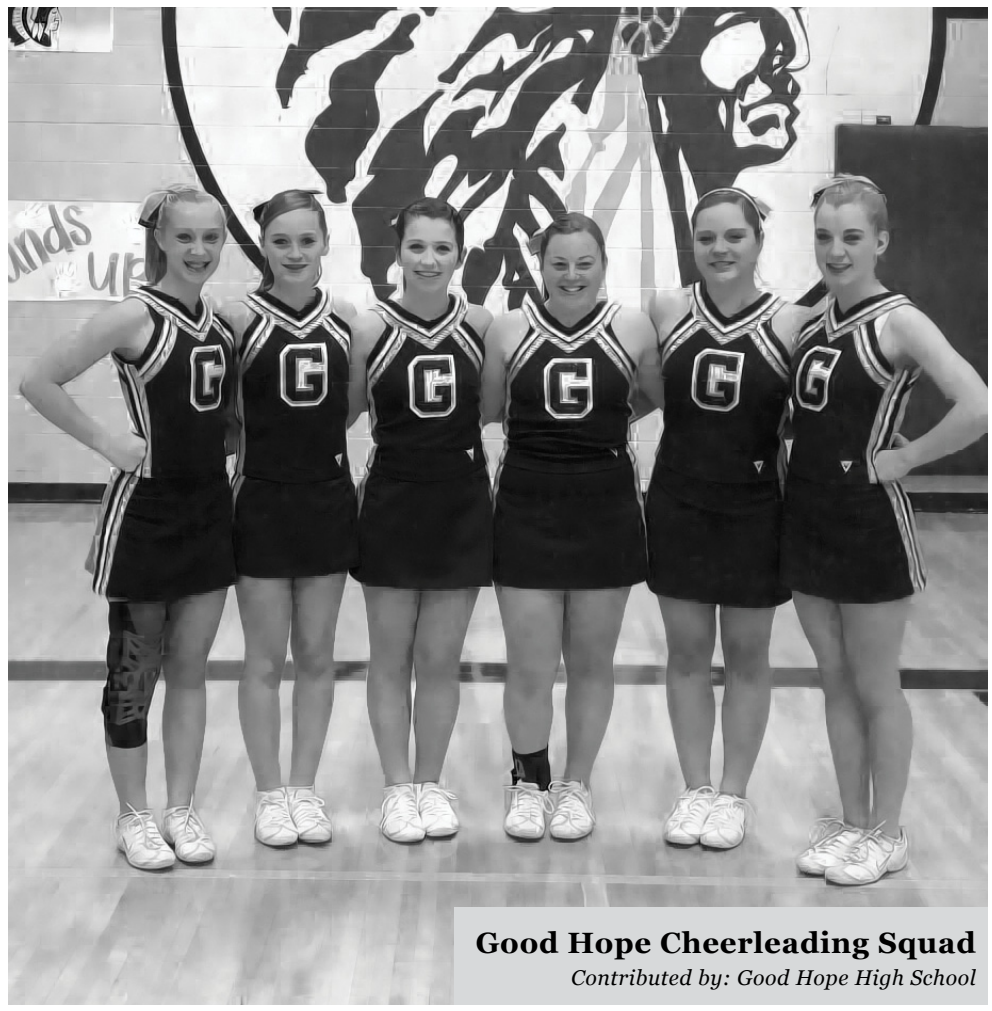
According to one of their coaches, Charlene White, they're not quite halfway to their goal. "The community has already started to make donations, but even with my very recent letter to the area businesses we'll still need to raise a lot more for the girls to afford the trip."

The squad will be performing in the parade, pre-game, and half-time shows. The girls will learn several routines they will be performing on live TV. The cost of the event includes hotel, transportation, meals, and, of course, tickets to the game for the squad and two coaches.

"This is a chance of the lifetime," said White. "This event could change their lives forever. I know what that could mean for some of these girls. When I was their age, someone gave me a chance like this and it made all the difference. I just want to do the same for them."

If you would like to donate to the squad, you can make your checks payable to Good Hope School and send them c/o Charlene White, 216 Good Hope School Road Cullman, AL 35057.

You can catch the Good Hope Cheerleaders on December 31, 2011 at 7:30 pm on ESPN when the Auburn Tigers play the University of Virginia Cavaliers.



Good Hope Cheerleading Squad
Contributed by: Good Hope High School

Cullman County High School Basketball Schedule

Monday, December 19, 2011

Cold Springs @ Oakman Boys & Girls

Holly Pond @ West Point Boys & Girls

Tuesday, December 20, 2011

Good Hope @ Cold Springs Boys & Girls

Holly Pond @ Cullman Boys & Girls

Fairview @ Addison Boys only

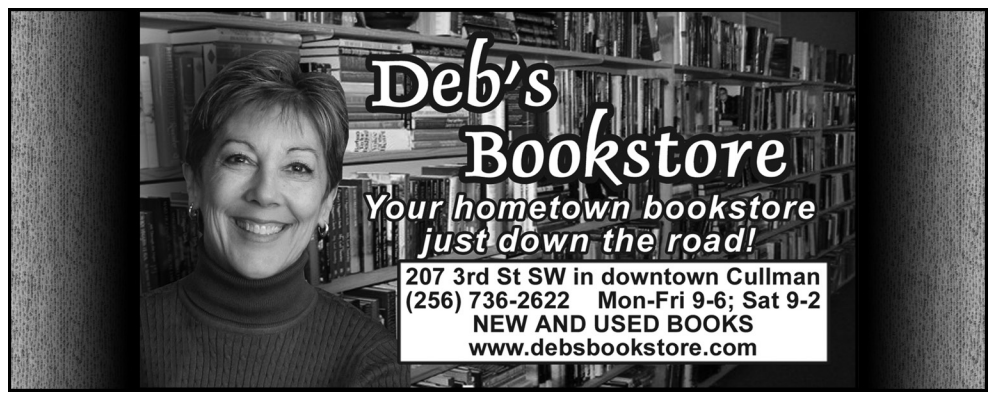
Wednesday, December 21, 2011

St. Bernard @ Susan Moore Boys & Girls

Thursday, December 22, 2011

Fairview @ Cullman Boys & Girls

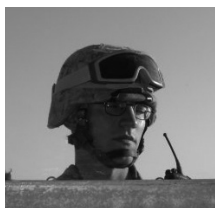
West End vs St. Bernard Boys only



Game and Movie Reviews

Batman: Arkham City

By: Dustin McSpadden
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qrnews/dmcspadden

Since running out of new releases, I decided to review Batman: Arkham City. Arkham City has been billed as one of the best games out this year; designed to be a "sprawling open sandbox" while still being story driven.

All of the Bat's biggest nemesis make an appearance; Joker, Penguin, Ivy, Freeze, Strange, Two Face, Catwoman, Solomon Grundy, Bane and a continuous parade of petty thugs that are there to serve the bigger bosses. The combat mechanics haven't changed since Arkham Asylum, neither has game play. It is what we expected. And if you are like me and got fed up with the inequality of combat in Asylum, then the City will just be a larger collection of anger waiting to explode as the same group of thugs blasts you with automatic weapons fire for the 30th time.

The hand to hand combat system spoils you, allowing you to flow seamlessly through massive groups of thugs, somersaulting across the area to continue your assault. Then the guys with guns show up and you try to make the same moves, only to stand around twiddling your Bat-thumbs.

Yes, I understand that stealth is supposed to be used, but I want to play Batman to unhinge some ubiquitous thug's elbow and make him slap himself silly. Hide-and-Seek was fun when I was twelve, and no one was trying to tag me with lead.

This game is supposedly story driven, and when (SPOILER!) Bruce Wayne is thrown into Arkham Prison, the new depository for all the political/criminal/criminally insane prisoners for all of Gotham, Hugo Strange announces ten hours until protocol X is unveiled. After about ten minutes of chasing the story, the time line is moved up an hour. After the countdown made it to 7 hours, I decided to complete some of the side quest and spent 6 hours just goofing off with no further update on the current deadline from Strange.

Then after 45 minutes of story line, the time sat at 2 hours to go. If you want to put a time limit on something, at least make it follow a semi-rigid system of time. If you want to be story driven then don't make a sandbox, if you want to be a sandbox then don't demand that I pay attention to anything I don't want to!

One of the major problems I have with Arkham City is that with the massive size increase from Arkham Asylum, there is no way to quickly move from one side of the map to another, as in the fast travel in Skyrim.

So as the story line bounces back and forth between sides of the map, you must move continuously across the exact same ground in the exact same manner, and it becomes quite tedious.

I don't hate Arkham City as much as I hated Arkham Asylum, but I think that it comes across as a little scatterbrained. It feels as if the part with Catwoman and Robin (only available as downloadable content) as playable characters is a little shoe-horned in. They don't even have different styles of play or combat.

The only difference is that instead of using the grapple to move all the way to the top of whatever building or ledge that must be scaled, Catwoman's whip only moves her about 8 to 10 feet up the side then she climbs in leaps and bounds.

While none of this is a deal breaker, it just makes me wish that I had the 10 to 15 days that it would take to devote wholly to the game in order to fully complete it.

Once again I'd like to thank Blockbuster for supplying the game, and I hope to have you all back next week when I do a year in review, review…

Scrooge – A Merry Musical Masterpiece

By: Meghan Nelson
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5/5 Stars

Although it was created in the 1970s, which inherently diminishes the amount of available special effects, the film "Scrooge", starring Albert Finney, is a superb adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic tale, A Christmas Carol.

Featuring a joyous, jovial, and sometimes heart-wrenching score, this musical succeeds in the combination of hilariously honest situations and poignantly touching moments.

As with most films based upon A Christmas Carol, the film opens in Ebenezer Scrooge's money-lending office, where he is brutally requiring Bob Cratchit (played by David Collings) not only to work on Christmas Eve, but also to labor for a mere pittance.

Although he's none too thrilled to do so, Scrooge (Finney) at last allows Cratchit to leave and begrudgingly gives him the following day of Christmas free from work.

As the unlikely coworkers journey home through different routes in London, Cratchit meets with two of his children, Tiny Tim and Kathy (played by Richard Beaumont and Karen Scargill), to search the bustling city for their meager Christmas supplies. True to the film's musical nature, much of their humble shopping is accompanied by a song in which Cratchit and his children celebrate the joy and wonderment of Christmas.

On an alternate side of the city, Scrooge sings an equally impressive tune that demonstrates his miserly love for money and his general hate for people. He is also musically mocked for his stinginess by a set of street urchins who follow him home and equate his uncharitable behavior with a that of a bad Father Christmas.

Now thoroughly annoyed, Scrooge arrives home only to be creepily greeted by his dead business partner, Jacob Marley (Alec Guinness).

Although Scrooge pragmatically attributes him to 'a bit of old potato' or some other digestive dilemma, Marley warns Scrooge that he must change his bitter ways.

He reveals that three ghosts will visit Scrooge during the dark hours of the night in an effort to help him become a better man.

Skeptically muttering to himself, Scrooge snuffs out the candles in his convincingly dirty house, and prepares for a peaceful night of slumber. As we all know, peaceful slumber is hardly what Marley and the three ghosts have planned for Scrooge.

Therefore, Scrooge shortly awakens to find a sharp-tongued but elegantly-dressed, gray-haired Ghost of Christmas Past at the foot of his bed.

This apparition, smartly portrayed by Edith Evans, accompanies Scrooge on a bittersweet journey through his childhood and young adult life and reveals that Scrooge was once a fun-loving young man full of dreams.

However, in a tear-inducing, regretful song, the viewer learns that Scrooge chose his passion for riches over his love for his betrothed and thereby began his transformation into a bitter, angry miser. Desperately sad, Scrooge begs to leave the memory, and the Ghost of Christmas Past returns him home to await the next visitation.

Played by Kenneth More, the Ghost of Christmas Present is the epitome of a joyful Christmas celebration.

Dressed in a green, fur-trimmed robe and seated on a mountain of food and wine, this jovial spirit with a booming voice treats Scrooge to a goblet of the Milk of Human Kindness – a drink that, by Scrooge's reaction, we can likely assume is akin to a heady glass of wine. While drinking said 'milk' Scrooge discovers that he does, in fact, like life.

In one of the most positively uplifting, hilariously written numbers of my limited musical-watching experience, the two proceed to affirm this discovery before the robed spirit accompanies Scrooge out into the night.

While journeying through the cold city, the spirit shows Scrooge the joys of Christmas Present found in the humble celebration of the Cratchit family as well as in the jolly festivities hosted by Scrooge's middle-class nephew.

Though Scrooge's compassion begins to awaken for the Cratchits,who are celebrating despite Tiny Tim's disability, the Ghost of Christmas Present nevertheless deposits Scrooge back into his home to await the third and final visitor.

A darkly dressed, sinister creature, the Ghost of Christmas Future reveals that without help, the handicapped Tim will soon die and that left to his own devices, Scrooge will shortly find himself in Hell, wrapped in an enormous chain of misdeeds. Terrified by this vision, Scrooge awakens impressively twined into his twisted sheets and yelling in horror.

Upon realizing that he is merely tangled in his own bed and not chained in the pits of Hell, Scrooge hurries to his window to find that Christmas Day is dawning, he is alive, and he can 'begin again'. Of course, his natural reaction is to engage in a musical celebration of life as he dances through the streets of London.

Donning a costume as Father Christmas, Scrooge is joined by various members of that cast as he ecstatically purchases toys, gifts, and food and cancels all debts owed to his business.

Scrooge ultimately arrives at the Cratchit household where he promises to give Bob a raise, bestows gifts upon the multiple Cratchit children, and pledges to help Tiny Tim overcome his illness.

From angry, impatient hatred to exuberant, uncontainable happiness, "Scrooge" excellently depicts the transformation of a man who finally realizes that life is worth living.

With dirty street urchins, an opinionated Mrs. Cratchit, and an impressive Scrooge, the film also includes a variety of talented actors who are each wonderfully cast. The set is realistically convincing, and the film's attention to detail (such as the dirt under Scrooge's fingernails) is delightful to see.

Every song is thoughtful and appropriate to the moment, whether that be the sad instant of parting or the joyful dawning of a new beginning.

If you are in the mood for a decent amount of singing, a hefty dose of English accents, and a huge amount of Christmas Spirit, then fill a glass of eggnog and rent this fantastic film.

Lifestyle

Santa - Continued

how Santa Claus manages to visit each of those millions of houses all in a single night.

He told me that while several hypotheses exist in book and song, the true way he delivers his presents is a secret he couldn't share – even with a mild-mannered journalist like myself.

"Some things about Santa Claus need to remain a mystery, and how I deliver Christmas gifts is one of those magical mysteries that people can ponder as they enjoy a plate of cookies and a glass of milk."

However, Santa was able to tell me that he and his elves work steadily throughout the entire year in order to prepare so many Christmas gifts. While the elves specialize in different toy-related departments, such as the aforementioned electronics, trains and choo-choos, musical toys, and many others, Santa divides his time evenly among the various categories.

"I like to know how each toy works, how it's put together, and how many we have. I also try to follow the toy trends during the year to get an idea of what we should expect on Christmas. That Christmas when Tickle-Me-Elmo was popular...well, let's just say, we didn't quite anticipate the enormous popularity of that little toy."

Another important task that Santa Claus must do during his off-season is reindeer training. The antlered companions undergo a vigorous training program that Santa himself oversees. They must learn not only how to fly, but also how to work as a unified team pulling the sleigh. Santa trains the reindeer in a variety of weather conditions such as rain, snow, fog, and wind.

"You never can predict what the weather will be on Christmas Eve," said Santa. "It might be snowing in New York but foggy and humid in South Africa. We train to be prepared for whatever we might find."

Hearing that Santa was scheduled to visit a mall in Montana in just a few hours, I decided to end our insightful conversation so that he could take a few more photos before leaving. Despite my doubt, I had discovered several details about Santa that I didn't previously know. While I will still rely heavily upon movies, books, and songs to fulfill my Santa Claus inquiries, I will now understand just a little bit more about the hard work Santa does to help make a Merry Christmas.



Merry Christmas from the City of Cullman

Max A. Townson, Mayor
Ruth W. Rose, City Clerk

City Council:
Garlan E. Gudger, Jr. (President)
Jenny Folsom
Andy Page
John R. Cook
Clint Hollingsworth



Pinterest Presents

By: Natalie Bonner
nataliebonner@cullmansense.com



qrnews/nbonner

This one time in college (Don't worry, this isn't going to be one of those stories), I decided it made perfect sense to take an art class—a painting one, actually.

I could be a painter. Why not? How hard could it be?

I remember our professor, Bud, saying, while stroking his ashen-colored beard, "You will either love painting and it will be a great release for you, or you will loathe it and need to be on Prozac by the end of the term."

Laughter resounded throughout the room as people mulled over his conclusion. I just knew I would be one of those protégés or something. I could feel it in my bones. Both my grandmother and mother could paint. I was destined via heredity.

It was about the time I walked into the bathroom some four weeks later to discover the Rudolph red splotch of paint located directly on my nose (that no one had bothered to inform me of) that I decided it was for the birds. I was no good.

Swish, swoosh. I would drag the moody-colored paints over the negative space and change the canvas' life. The canvas couldn't tell you this, but I think it would have begged me to stop had it any vocal ability. I would gasp a lot while painting because I literally couldn't breathe. I was too nervous for the activity, too much of a control freak. One wrong paintbrush stroke, and I felt like I was about to have a stroke.

Pending the night before our final, I was awake some extended amount of time and was so groggy and fuzzy-minded (and probably oxygen deprived from my sheer lack of breathing deeply), that I begged my mother to finish the small weed area of a landscape painting I had to finish by morning.

She regarded me with a disapproving stare, raised eyebrow and all, but agreed to upon the exaggerated yawn I released. By morning I had a beautifully finished painting and what I thought to be a sure A in the course.

Bud took off his glasses and cocked his head to the side. "Natalie, nice work. This is a great improvement from . . . your other works. I especially see great growth in this small area with the weeds."

I cringed. I wanted to throw the painting on the ground and have a three-year-old's tantrum on it. It rocked me to my core not being the best, or even remotely good, at something.

Not even my own mother loved those paintings. She hid them in the garage. That is until my doting aunt discovered them, claimed them to be works of genius, and put them up all over her house.

My point is that arts and crafts kind of terrify me and take my breath away, literally. I get so stressed I forget to breathe. So, when I decided to make scarves and purses for my friends this Christmas, surely I had lost my mind, but the thing is I am surprisingly good at making them.

So, off to www.Pinterest.com I went. The Facebook of its time for arts, crafts and DIY projects, Pinterest is an online website or "virtual pinboard" where users "pin" different pictures, and users can browse multiple categories of interest ranging from art and gardening to film, music and books. There's a category for everyone. You can browse pinboards created by other users or create your own.

What better, more personal touch could I add to any present this Christmas than to make it myself? After all, people are supposed to love gifts from the heart. That is, stylish gifts from the heart. Let alone the cash flow I would save myself.

Who isn't broke right now? Well, aside from the responsible people (whom I aspire to be like this coming New Year) who wrapped up their Christmas shopping months ago.

Home for the holidays in Bremen, Auburn Pharmacy graduate student, Sarah Vest, said, "I am making some Pinterest holiday gifts—some homemade Christmas decorations."

"I love Pinterest because it has all kinds of great DIY ideas and recipes from blogs and sites that I otherwise would have never found on my own. They also have step-by-step tutorials, which I need."

People use Pinterest for all occasions. You can use it to plan your wedding, make your own DIY-inspired outfits, redecorate your home, find different cooking recipes, or share your favorite outfits or items.

My mother even made an adorable diaper motorcycle that she found on Pinterest for my sister's baby shower. Made out of diapers, bibs, bottles and other baby-themed goods, the little diaper cycle was an excellent way to give my sister a lot of needed baby items in a fun, unexpected way.

Similar to Facebook and Twitter in some ways, Pinterest literally connects you to a world of people and ideas where the traffic light is always on green. There is new material from users popping up all over the home page where you are originally directed to upon signing in. From there, you can search any boards, follow people (like Twitter) and "repin" any items of interest.

You have to sign up and be a user, which usually takes a day or two, in order to really browse Pinterest. They even have an entire section devoted to just holidays where gift ideas, DIY projects and decorations abound. It is a literal haven for the creatively inclined.

The Scarlett Letter, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Moby Dick peek out from their carefully arranged pattern and stacked alignment; their spines supporting the weight of some 70 or more books as they spiral upward creating the colorful shell of a Christmas tree made completely out of books, with a tiny tree light tucked here and there throughout the "treeation."



My sister's one-of-a-kind baby shower gift for my nephew *Photo by: Susan Bonner*

Being the reader and book junkie that I am, I squealed when I found this pin. It would be perfect for my tree next year.

Or maybe this year depending on how much coffee I have and how bad my OCD gets on any given day.

It seems many people all over town are jumping on the Pinterest bandwagon. Melane Cruce, of Cullman, said, "It has a lot of ideas that are inexpensive to do, and I love to decorate. I plan on baking cookies and candies [that I found on Pinterest]."

Pinch that penny. Covet those Benjamins. Save your money. Whatever you want to call it, don't be left out of the greatest shopping idea of this season, Pinterest-inspired presents.

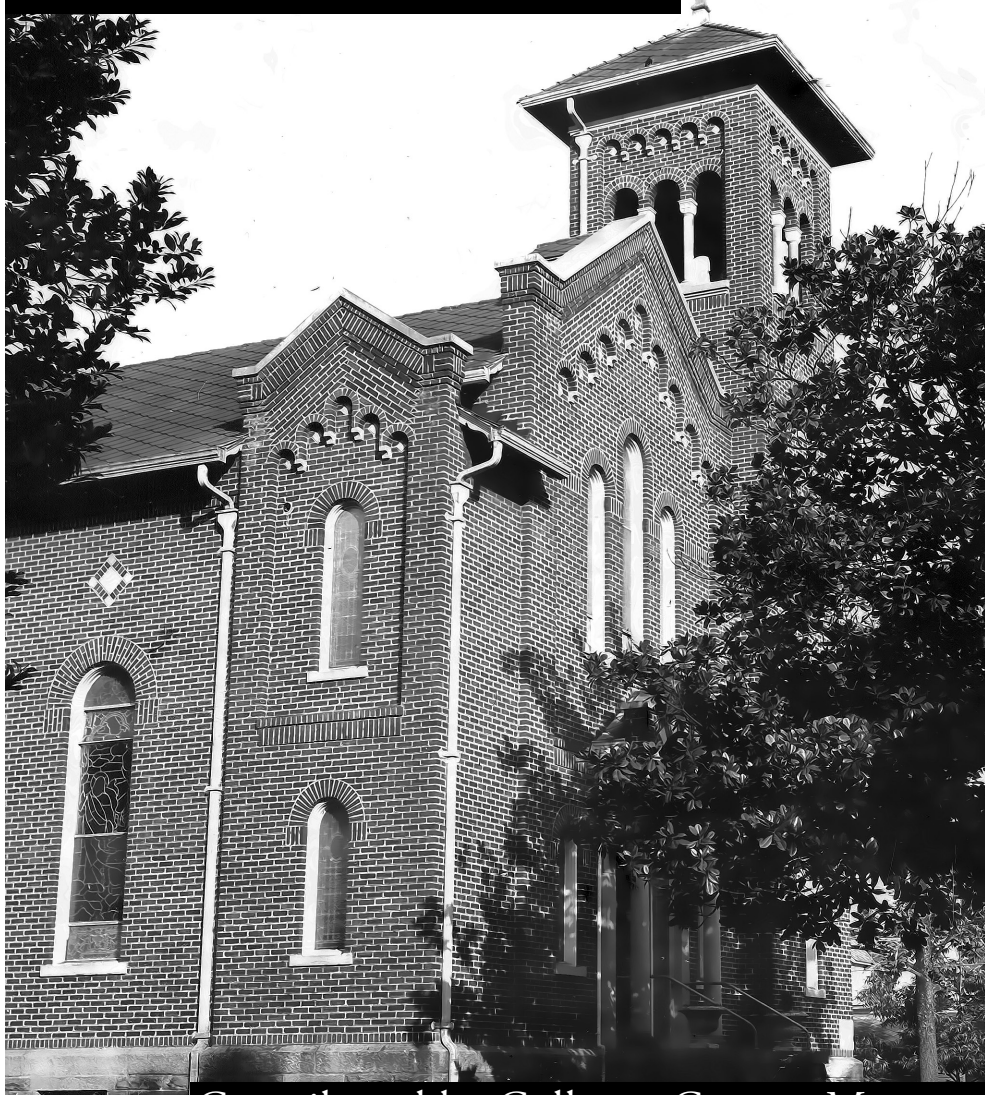
Now, get to painting, knitting, baking or just creating. The smile on your loved one's face when he or she opens your homemade, Pinterest-inspired Christmas present should be all the satisfaction you will need this season.



Mirroring History

Looking Back: Exploring Historic Cullman at St. John's Church (top) and First United Methodist Church (bottom)

Circa 1947-51



Contributed by Cullman County Museum

2011



Photo by: Jessica Norrell

Circa 1947-51



Contributed by Cullman County Museum

2011

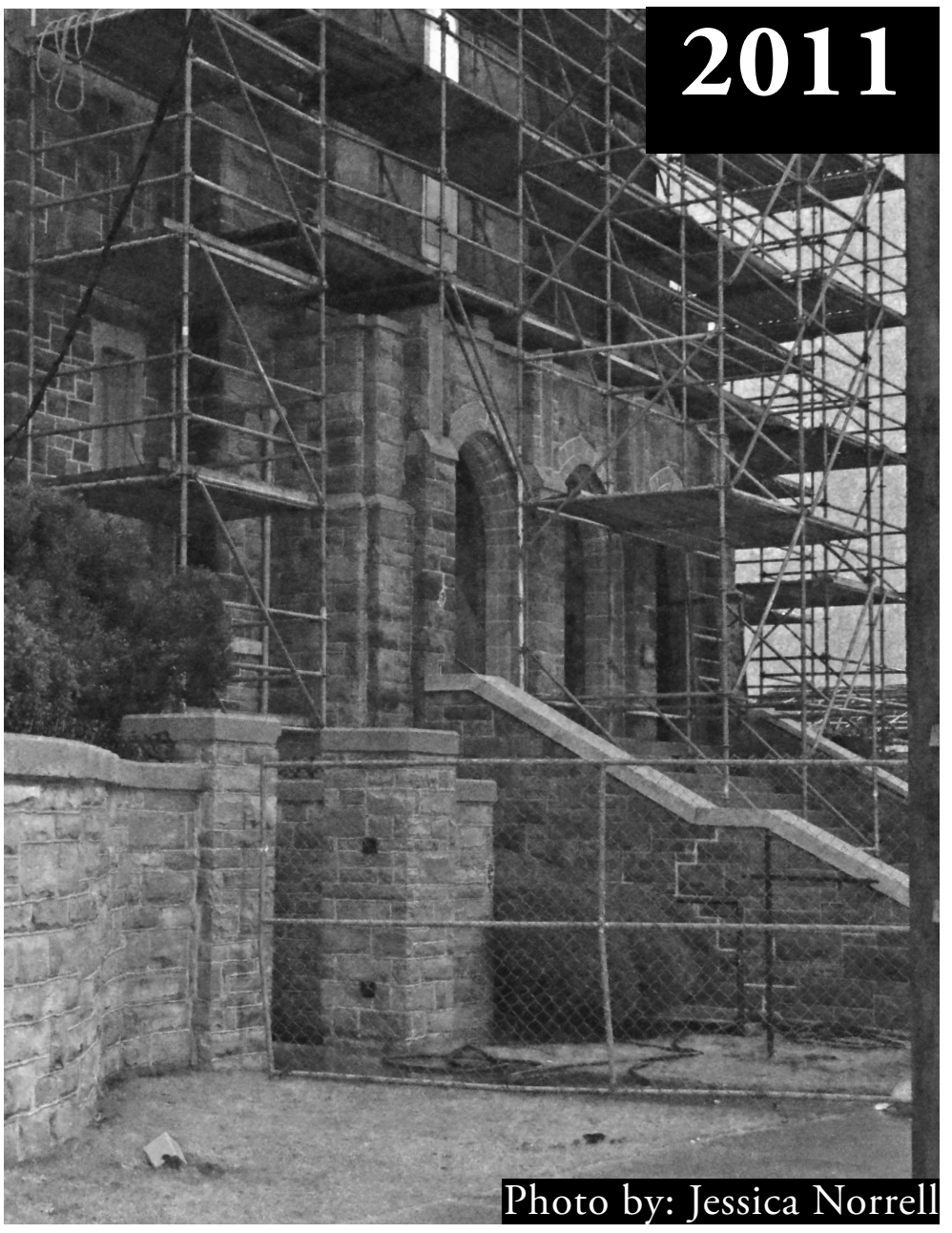


Photo by: Jessica Norrell

Rediscovering Cullman: Werner's Trading Company

By: Meghan Nelson
meghannelson@cullmansense.com

As I was well aware during my teenage years, Cullman doesn't boast shopping malls, outlet strips, or enormous department stores. Not surprisingly, I was often quite vocal about my opinion of such a seemingly shopping-unfriendly characteristic. However, as usually happens, I have since decided that the view I held as a teenager was a bit askew.

Since moving back to Cullman and generally providing my own transportation (instead of relying upon that of my mother), I've opted to save gas when shopping and stay a tad closer to home for many of my purchases. A pleasant result of this decision is that I've had the opportunity to peruse many of Cullman's unique shopping destinations and discover what makes these shops so special. My most recent venture was to the largely varied and well-known store, Werner's Trading Company.



Rob Werner, owner of Werner's Trading Company, and his dog, Mazzie. *Photos by: Meghan Nelson*

Upon my arrival, I was met not only by the current owner of the store, Rob Werner, but also by Rob's sandy-haired Labradoodle named Mazzie. Instantly addicted to Mazzie's cute curls and sweet temperament, I had already discovered one four-footed reason to shop locally rather than at large retail stores, and I had barely crossed Werner's rustic threshold.

Likely because of the kayaks strategically positioned outside the shop, I have always thought of Werner's primarily as a destinations for campers, hikers, and other warm-blooded, hearty, outdoor types. As Rob led me through the shelves and displays packed with assorted goods, though, I quickly realized that Werner's offers items that suit a variety of interests – both indoors and out.

The shop carries several lines of men's and women's clothing and offers highly-sought brands, such as Patagonia, Dansko, and North Face. Werner's also stocks women's jewelry, pocket knives, grills and grill accessories, bikes, and, of course, camping supplies, canoes, and kayaks.

Perhaps my most surprising discovery was the glass case full of live bees that Rob pointed out near the back of the store. Housing around 250 of the little honey-making insects, the case was casually hanging on the wall near a variety of bee-keeping tools. Rob shared that he originally became interested in bees when he began to lease them for pollination to farmers in the county. Although he no longer leases the little guys, he does serve as a singular local choice for all things bee-keeping related.

Continuing on our relaxed perusal of the shop, I was constantly impressed with my discoveries. In addition to the awe-inspiring assortment of bees, I found that the shop offers Orvis fly fishing supplies, boy and girl scout products, kid's toys, metal detectors, and telescopes, as well.

Curious about Werner's immense variety of products, I asked Rob how the shop began. He said that his father, also Robert Werner, opened the business in 1951 as an army surplus store. Rob's father, who graduated from the University of Alabama, had previously worked for Sears, opened a restaurant, and even served in the military before finally founding Werner's Trading Company.

Rob began working with his father about forty years ago and has since become the business's sole owner. He currently runs the store with his wife Mary Ellen and often recruits local young people – especially around the Christmas holiday – to help at the front desk.

Throughout the years, Rob has managed to accumulate an impressive assortment of interesting items. He shared, "Many of them are unusual things that I scout out. I ask people what their hobbies are, and I read all of the time to find new ideas."

Resuming our stroll through the shop, I found that Werner's also carries several food and beverage related products. Among many items, the shop offers meat grinders, jerky seasoning, wine and beer-making kits, and even cheese-making products.

With so many hobbies and products at hand, I asked Rob which ones he has tried. "I've done all of them..." he replied, "fly fishing, bicycling, and hiking." Rob shared that he's also used the fresh mozzarella cheese kit more than a few times. He explained that the kit only requires a gallon of milk and thirty minutes to produce a delicious batch of fresh cheese, and I, of course, made an immediate mental note to return for one of these intriguing, cheese-making kits.

Rob also mentioned that he and his wife have recently become increasingly interested in Nordic Walking – another sport for which Werner's sells the supplies. Since I am unfortunately not the largest exercise enthusiast, I had never heard of Nordic Walking before Rob mentioned it. Naturally, he strode over to the set of Nordic Walking Sticks and began to demonstrate them for me.

Exercisers strap the walking sticks, which have rubber tips for asphalt and spikes for more rugged ground, onto each wrist and use the sticks to push them along as they walk. According to Rob, Nordic Walking takes forty percent of the weight off of the knees and thirty percent off of the back. It also works ninety percent of a walker's muscle mass and can increase the heart rate by fifty percent.

Nordic Walking has become increasingly popular, and the walking sticks are a prime example of Rob's efforts to stay informed on the latest hobbies and products available. As he said, "We have to keep changing because if we don't we're out of here."

Venturing back toward the front desk, Rob shared that his favorite part of owning a business like Werner's is meeting new people and seeing different products. The shop welcomes several shoppers and families from outside of the state and often serves as a rendezvous point for travelers headed to the beach. These days, Rob even sees customers that he knew as children bringing their own kids into the store.

Thinking about his experience at Werner's, Rob shared, "We enjoy people and try to work with them. God has blessed us. I don't think we'd be here without His blessings."

After my morning at Wener's Trading Company, I decided that exploring the shop's intriguing shelves of inventory was much more interesting and enjoyable than shopping at a large mall or outlet store. Werner's offers a variety of products to suit almost anyone's hobbies or tastes, and each item is obviously chosen with thoughtful consideration and an eye toward quality. Unlike at many larger stores, Rob's individual customer service makes choosing the right item a pleasure, and having the opportunity to befriend a furry Labradoodle only serves as the proverbial icing on the cake to a unique and pleasant shopping experience.



Werner's sells a large variety of women's items, including apparel, jewelry, and bath soaps.

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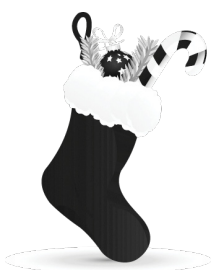
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Puzzles and Comics

THIS WEEK'S WORD SEARCH TOPIC IS: GIFT IDEAS

BY: DUSTIN ISOM







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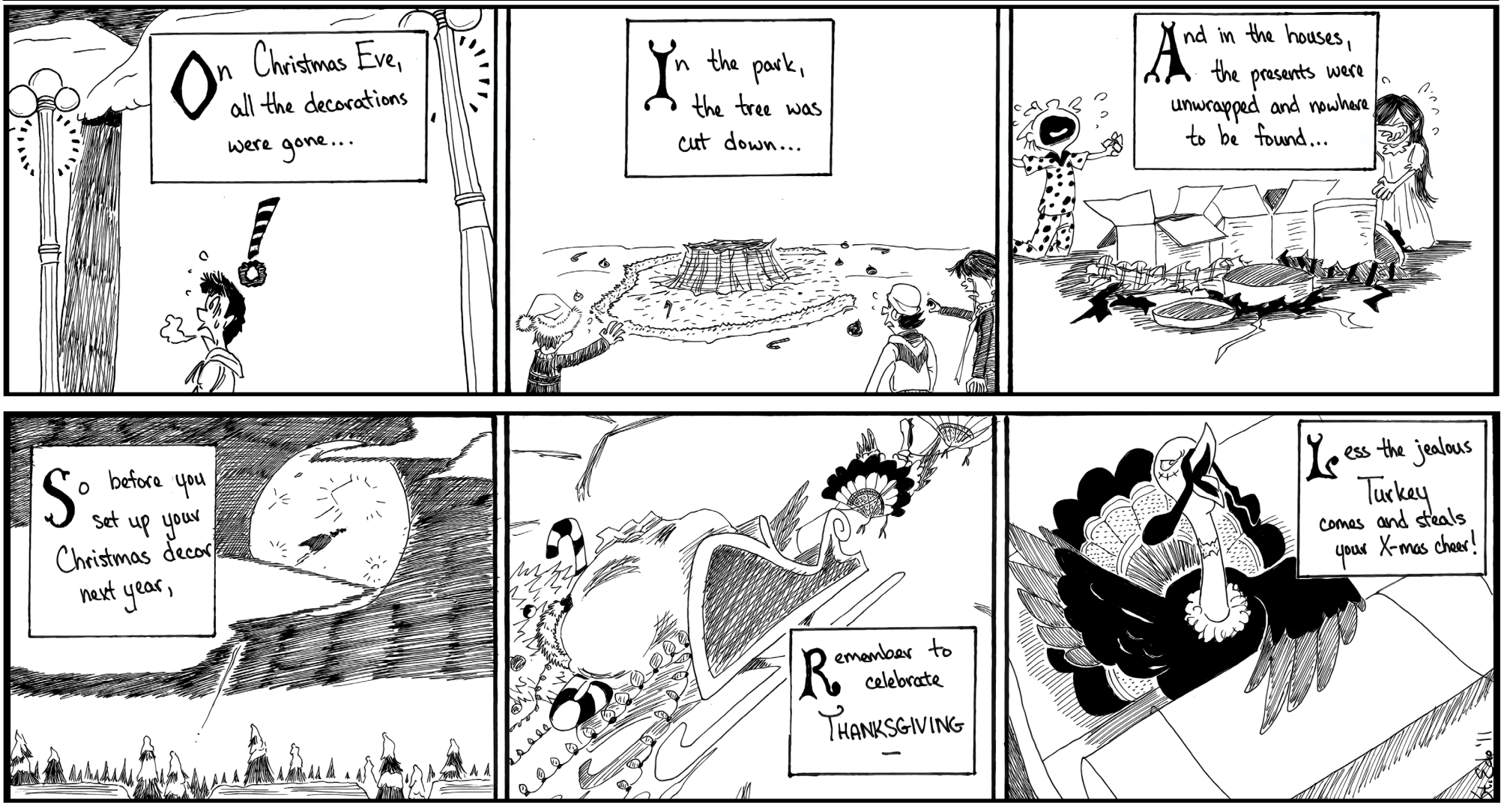




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handwritten letter
jack-in-the-box
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kazoo
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music box
perfume
photo album
poinsettia
quilt
snow globe
Silly Putty
Slinky
sweater
Tinkertoys
wagon
wallet
yo-yo



Comics by St. Edo **Anthony Saint** **st.edo@cullmansense.com**



Getting Creative in the Kitchen

By: Natalie Bonner
nataliebonner@cullmansense.com

People who claim not to be a fan of sweets have to be lying. How can one not enjoy a sweet piece of chocolate candy or a tart slice of key lime pie? It's just not natural. I don't particularly want to gorge myself on sweets either, but when you refuse to even have a bite of a dessert just to try it. Come on. It's saved as the ending to every meal for a reason—because it's awesome.

To put it as an analogy, cooking shows are to me as sports shows or sports cars are to guys. I have spent literal days watching marathons of shows such as Iron Chef, Restaurant Impossible and Diners, Drive-ins and Dives. It is only to be expected that my obsession with all things Food Network-related transpire into my new favorite pastime of cooking.

Food is endlessly appealing to me for its metamorphic quality and hybrid blend of art and science. A slight alteration to any recipe can create an entirely different dish. It is truly an artful and scientific experience.

Culinary creations are the best to me. The kinds of dishes that are rich in culture, influence and most of all, taste. I remember going to Cullinard as a kid and wishing I could go to culinary school. I said I wanted to be a horse when I grew up, too, but not all things stick.

My passion for cooking took a hike when I started college due to confined spaces, having to live in the library, and finding the Dollar Store expensive, but now that I am back at home, the obsession is back full-force with a vengeance.

A good friend of mine shared the following recipe with me, and in turn, I have made and shared this very simple, delightful concoction with many coworkers, friends and family. It is the perfect little snack size and doesn't leave you desperately longing for more. It hits the spot, and the best thing is that you can make plenty of them at one time and share with others. Get ready to get dirty and make some Oreo dirt balls.

Oreo Dirt Balls Recipe

Ingredients:
1 package of regular Oreos
1 8-oz package of cream cheese, softened
½ a package of Almond Bark milk chocolate
4 small squares of Almond Bark white chocolate

Other Items Needed:
1 large mixing bowl
Spoon
Food processor if possible

Instructions:
First, completely crush the entire package of Oreos down into a sand texture. The idea is for the batter to not have any lumps, so the finer the consistency, the better. You can achieve this texture by way of a food processor, a pin roller or a lot of anger and determination. Whichever method works best for you is fine.

Next, put your softened package of room temperature cream cheese into your mixing bowl and add the crushed Oreos to it. Make sure you mix very well, ensuring no large lumps are present in the batter.

Then, break off tiny pieces of the batter (I make about one-half inch bite size balls) and roll it into a round ball shape using your hands.

Place in the refrigerator to cool for 20 minutes. When it is about five minutes until they are finished cooling on your timer, place the Almond Bark milk chocolate into your mixing bowl and microwave on high for three minutes.

If if you prefer to melt your chocolate on the stove, place on medium heat for five minutes.

Finally, dip the cooled Oreo balls into the melted chocolate, making sure to fully cover the shape and place back in the refrigerator to cool. Melt a small square of Almond Bark white chocolate in the microwave and drizzle over cooled Oreo balls for a pretty final touch.

Last step—eat and enjoy!

Harbison - Continued

lead pastor at Cathedral of Praise.

Now the church is thriving with a mission to love God and love people. They are striving to lead a discipled life to Christ, and to connect not just with each other but, with their community, state and world.

Harbison is passionate about how that mission is played out every day. "If we could do anything in this community it is to reach everybody with the truth of who God is.

Not this messed up religiousness - you have to live this way, we have to act this way. We want to reach them with the unconditional love of God. I hope we are reaching those that feel like there is no hope, to let them know there is hope."

It is also important to Harbison that people have an opportunity to begin a relationship with God every time they attend a Sunday service. He offers invitation for salvation every Sunday.

"I went to church many times and never heard that salvation invitation", shared Haribson.

"I know the Holy Spirit had to work on me, but the bible says 'Today is the day of salvation'. I want to make sure that everyone gets an opportunity to hear about that to make a decision. That is why we offer the opportunity every week and we are constantly seeing people get saved."

When Harbison isn't out serving the community or preaching from the pulpit on Highway 157, you may find him on the golf course.

"I just love fellowship, especially with other men. I also love to play golf, even though I stink at it." Harbison also enjoys hunting and hanging out with his family.

It's his hope that this next year brings more opportunity to unify the body of Christ in Cullman. He commented on the lack of interest from other pastors in the area to join together for community events and outreach.

"I was hoping that since the storm that would change. But I've only really met, a few pastors in the area. I welcome the opportunity to build relationships with them to meet the needs of our community."

Cathedral of Praise welcomes you to the church for the Sunday morning service at 10:45 am, their Sunday evening service at 5:00 pm or the Wednesday Night Life at 6:00 pm. Cathedral of Praise is located in West Point on Highway 157 about 2 miles from the stop light at Jack's on the right hand side.

If you'd like to learn more about Cathedral of Praise, you can find them on Facebook as Cathedral Praise CoG or call at (256)737-7291.

Christmas Closings

Cullman City Hall

Cullman City Hall will be closed from December 23 through December 26, with doors reopening on December 27.

Cullman Police Department

Cullman Police Department will be closed from December 23 through December 26, with doors reopening on December 27.

City of Cullman Water Department

City of Cullman Water Department will be closed from December 23 through December 26, with doors reopening on December 27.

Cullman City Sanitation Department

The office will be closed from Friday, December 23 through Monday, December 26, with the office reopening at regular hours on Tuesday, December 27.

Garbage and Recyclables Pick-up are as follows:

Friday, Dec. 23 - Commercial and Recyclables Only

Saturday, Dec. 24 - Commercial route only

Monday, Dec. 26 -Commercial route only

Tuesday, Dec. 27 - Residential service will resume. Trash pick-up for Monday and Tuesday will be collected on this day.

Cullman County Courthouse

Cullman County Courthouse will be closed from December 23 through December 26, with doors reopening on December 27.

Cullman County Sanitation Department

All routes will be ran as normal, no delays or closings

Cullman County Sheriff's Office

Cullman County Sheriff's Office will be closed from December 23 through December 26, with doors reopening on December 27.

Cullman-Jefferson Gas

Cullman-Jefferson Gas office will be closed as normal on Friday, December 23, but the office will remain closed on Monday, December 26, with doors reopening at normal hours on Tuesday, December 27.

Cullman Power Board

The Cullman Power Board office will be closed from Friday, December 23 through Monday, December 26, with doors reopening at normal business hours on Tuesday, December 27.

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