

A collection of holiday-themed cookies is scattered on a dark wooden surface. The cookies include a gingerbread house, a gingerbread man, a round chocolate cookie with white stars, and a gingerbread cookie with a white border and dots. The text "Holiday ESSENTIALS" is overlaid on the image, with "Holiday" in a white script font and "ESSENTIALS" in a white serif font on a red background.

Holiday ESSENTIALS

The Anniston Star

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Holiday spirit has arrived in Calhoun and Cleburne counties

Anniston

Mainstreet Anniston's holiday season kicks off on Nov. 15 with a two-week Shop Small Campaign. From Nov. 15-29, we encourage our community to do their holiday shopping through local small businesses.

As part of this two-week promotion, residents can participate in the Nutcrackers on Noble scavenger hunt. Mainstreet Anniston has worked with several local charities, organizations, and businesses to paint themed wooden Nutcrackers that will be hidden throughout the Mainstreet district. When you spot a Nutcracker while out shopping local, snap a picture, post it and tag Mainstreet Anniston on Facebook and tell us which Nutcracker you found (but not where).

You'll receive one entry for every Nutcracker you find and post to be entered in a Shop Local prize basket complete with small gifts, brunch at Classic On Noble, and tickets to Knox Nutcracker ballet.

The official Christmas season begins with the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony in front of the future home of City Hall in downtown Anniston on Friday, Dec. 1, at 6 p.m. Residents can expect Christmas carols, cocoa and cookies, and the official lighting of Anniston's 20 foot Christmas tree.

The Holiday theme for downtown Anniston is Christmas Around the World, and we invite everyone to come see Calhoun County's largest Christmas parade on Tuesday, Dec. 5, as we explore Christmas traditions celebrated around the world. We've put our call in to Santa, and he's confirmed that chances of evening snow are very high at the Downtown Anniston Christmas Parade.

The holiday spirit won't end there, as plans are still being made for the annual Fire vs Police Chili Cook-off benefiting the Anniston Police Department Toy Drive and a Pop-up Christmas Village.

— **Karla Eden,**
Main Street Anniston director

Heflin

The city of Heflin will welcome in the holidays with their annual Christmas Tree lighting and Cookie Crawl on Tuesday, Nov. 21.

The Cookie Crawl is scheduled for 4-8 p.m. where shoppers on Heflin Main Street can collect cookies while enjoying special event sales.

The tree lighting takes place at 6 p.m. in front of the amphitheater on Ross Street next to city hall. City officials have branded the night a "magical Hallmark moment."

— **Bill Wilson**

Oxford

The city of Oxford will start its holiday season in earnest on Nov. 17 when the Festival of Lights begins its run at Choccolocco Park through Dec. 24. The drive-through light show can be enjoyed from the comfort of one's vehicle full of family and friends with one price per carload.

Visitors can also park and walk though Santa's Village, enjoy food truck offerings, go skating and have pictures taken with Santa. Tickets are available online at oxfordfestivaloflights.com.

The Oxford Performing Arts Center will host the first of four Christmas-themed performances beginning with "Mariachi Sol de Mexico: Merry-Achi Christmas" at 7 p.m. on Nov. 19. The program showcases the ensemble's musicianship by playing mariachi favorites as well as beloved Christmas music such as Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite performed mariachi style.

"An Olde English Christmas with Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone" hits the OPAC stage at 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 1. Lightwire Theater's "A Very Electric Christmas" combines theater and technology to bring stories to life at 6 p.m. on Dec. 5. The Atlanta Pops Orchestra will be joined by the 2009 winner of "Australia's Got Talent," Mark Vincent, for "Candlelit Carols and Classics" at 7 p.m. on Dec. 14.

All OPAC tickets can be purchased through the venue's website at oxfordpac.org.

The Oxford Christmas Parade, coordinated by the Oxfordfest Committee, will be held at 6pm on Dec. 7 in the historic downtown area. Those interested in participating in the parade or as a crafter or vendor, can visit the oxfordfest.org website.

The lighting of the city's Christ-

mas tree will be the highlight of the Christmas on Main event from 2-7 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 9. The day will be filled with festivities including live entertainment, movies and horse and carriage strolls. The event is provided by the city and Historic Main Street Oxford.

— **Brian Graves**

Piedmont

Piedmont is gearing up for the holidays and will soon decorate the lamp posts in the city with beautiful wreaths, said Piedmont Mayor Bill Baker.

"However, the city has an artist living among them, Tiffany Beale. Businesses often hire her to paint their windows according to the season," Baker said.

"Also, the gazebo will be getting a new paint job and will be decorated for the holidays," Baker said.

The annual Christmas parade is on Monday, Dec. 4, and there is a city party afterward. Guests may come to the Piedmont Civic Center for free hot dogs, chips and soft drinks. Last year, students from the Piedmont High School sang Christmas carols, and Baker hopes they will return this year.

— **Sherry Kughn**

Ranburne

Ranburne Mayor Rodney Brown said the annual Christmas parade that will snake though the heart of Ranburne on Alabama 46 is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 2 at 1 p.m.

Also scheduled for Dec. 2 is the Jingle All The Way 5K and Fun Run Saturday morning sponsored by the Ranburne Area Civic Club. To register, visit: https://runsignup.com/Race/AL/Ranburne/jinglerunon-main?rsus=200-500-2bf487e7-67d8-4ba4-9cf4-4057a1e32244&fbclid=IwAR0KPxd7Uwq8YGckqnD6awmZcSLEA0PzYqv-26XJHhLm-nZ-JTqw0gq_3cek

The annual Christmas tree lighting is scheduled for Sunday, Nov. 26, at 5:30 p.m. next to the new Ranburne Town Hall, 21459 Main St. Hot chocolate will be served at town hall for all of the yuletide revelers.

— **Bill Wilson**



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star/File

The star atop Heflin's Christmas tree shines bright on Nov. 24, 2020.

The Anniston Star

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SPECIAL THANKS

Timothy Cash, Bill Edwards, Brian Graves, Kim Jenkins, Sherry Kughn, Ashley Morrison, Patrick Stokesberry and Bill Wilson

Decorating — holiday style

Make home more beautiful and festive, whether you're splurging or saving

BY SHERRY KUGHN

The Anniston Star

Two professional decorators with Calhoun County know that one way people like to express their respect for and joy in the Christmas/New Year's season is through decorating their homes and businesses.

They know everyone needs a sprinkle or two of holiday spirit — which can be achieved by adding even the simplest decorating and some splash an entire house with grand decorative displays.

Below are advice and suggestions from these two pros, both of whom have strong ties to Calhoun County.

□□□

Scott Skinner is an Anniston-based interior designer with decades of service as a consultant and event stylist. He takes pride in giving personal attention to his client's needs. Contact Skinner at 256-591-7148 and visit "STS Decorating & Design Consultant, event stylist" on Facebook, and contact on Instagram @scottdesignerinal. Email is Styleral28@aol.com

For the holidays, Skinner has five tips for those who don't mind investing in a few high-end products to enhance their room and five tips for low-budget decorators:

- **Purchase excellent, fine ribbon:** Skinner says a few rolls of stunning, textured ribbons that are embroidered, embellished with pearls and sparkles, rich velvets (Check out D. Stevens brand.) These are types of ribbons that you will use year after year. "It's like buying a fine painting. Let the ribbon speak like art," Skinner said.

- **Pay attention to doorways.** You can purchase an array of ornaments, in all sizes from a mixed-color or one-color theme. You can use a room's color scheme as your palette and have the entrance side of the door casing in one color and style and the exit side in another color and style. "Use fine ribbons above and surrounding the door casing, and your guest will feel an 'experience' walking through," he suggests.

- **Tree-bottoms can make an impact.** Find large-scale items like nutcrackers, presents, or any grand-scale item. Place around the tree bottom, use some rich greenery and fine ribbons. "You will feel like you have a high-end department store window display."

- **Elegant pillows can "pop" in a room.** Through retail stores and antique sales, find needlepoint pillows. Don't worry about colors because they add only a rich elegant Christmas aura that brings things together nice-



Courtesy photo

Anniston-based interior designer Scott Skinner has decades of service as a consultant and event stylist that takes pride in giving personal attention to his client's needs.

ly. "The textures and styles will make for a very classy, elegant, holiday feel."

- **Mix a variety of metallic items.** Use either shiny ribbons for tabletop décor and add metallic trees and candleholders. Use golds, silvers, rose golds and even the shiny and colorful mercury glass to make a big, bright, sparkly impact. Lay some fresh eucalyptus and fruits like oranges among the shiny decorations. "Not only do you have a festive high end color scheme but you are awakening all of the senses."

- **Greenery.** "Yard greenery is great, especially magnolia and cedar. Drape your mantels and bookcases. You can even spray metallic paint on them to add depth

and make them pop. Use red, gold and silver spray paint to make an impact instead of having to buy expensive garlands, stems and swags, and you've used God's natural elements."

- **Candles throughout.** "Take mason jars, spray them with spray glue and roll in fake snow. Tie a ribbon around the opening and place a votive candle inside. Arrange the jars throughout your living space to add festiveness without purchasing a ton of expensive candle holders."

- **Lights.** "Take battery-operated rice or fairy lights or even a strand of ordinary Christmas lights, bunch them

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DECOR

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together and place them in crystal containers. This makes an impact on bookcases, shelves, coffee tables, and more. It's also very pretty to bring out all those bowls and vases you have. Make a grouping and you have a large impact."

- **Old Christmas cards.** "If you have past or even cost-efficient holiday cards, place them in photo frames, especially those in storage that are empty. When placed in a cluster on a table or mantle, they display a festive holiday spirit without a lot of cost."

- **Pillow ribbons and packages** can become decorative items. Take a colorful holiday ribbon and wrap it around sofa/chair pillows to texture and color. Use a color theme like red and green or use a single color. Decorators sometimes take a wide ribbon and tie it on chair backs to create a festive room. Wrap empty boxes, tie them with ribbon and add fresh greenery sprigs. When placed beneath tables or even in bookcase shelves, you are copying an old designer tip decorators use especially for holiday tours and parties.

□□□

Brianne Hendrick is an Anniston native who grew up in Oxford and lives in northern Virginia. She owns Brianne Hendrick Interiors, a residential interior design business in Fairfax County, near Washington, D.C. Her new website is www.hendrick-designs.com and should be up and running by the year's end.

You can find her on Instagram at @briannehendrick-interiors and her email is brianne@hendrick-designs.com. Her Facebook page is Brianne Hendrick Interiors. She has 10 tips to consider before giving up and only buying a scraggly "Peanuts" tree that Charlie Brown might like but no decorator ever did. Her tips are here:

- **Focus your efforts.** When you are tight on funds, focus your decorating efforts on one or two key areas. You can make a big impact, and no one will notice you ran out of energy, time or money. Consider decorating the foyer since it sets the tone of your home. Your mantle and dining room table are also great areas worthy of your time and resources.

- **Go natural.** Nothing says Thanksgiving or Christmas like real greenery. The fragrance alone makes it feel like a holiday. While you may think you only have the budget for fake greenery, real is more affordable than you think. Check Etsy online or shop the box hardware stores for fresh cut garland and wreaths to hang on every door, staircase, and mantle.

- **Be thrifty.** Don't be too proud to shop at thrift stores. While much of the items might be junk, occasionally you can find special pieces to place in your home for a vintage holiday feel.

- **Light it up.** Candles are an inexpensive way to beautify a space. Fill glass vases with water, fresh cranberries and floating candles. You can also buy candleholders in the same color and in a variety of heights and shapes to create a gorgeous centerpiece for your dining room table. Don't forget to keep plenty of white taper candles on hand because they work for every holiday.

- **Cozy things up.** Purchase holiday pillows and matching throws. Search discount retail stores that usually have unique and memorable pieces. Make sure new things are color-coordinated with other items in your home, but you may vary the patterns and sizes to add



Courtesy photo

Brianne Hendrick is an Anniston native who grew up in Oxford and lives in northern Virginia. She owns Brianne Hendrick Interiors, a residential interior design business in Fairfax County, near Washington, D.C.

visual interest.

- **Light up your tree correctly.** The Christmas tree is the star of the holidays, so it should be amazing. The single biggest mistake people make in decorating it is not using enough lights. A "tall for the room" tree can glisten and steal the show every year. For mine, I use sixteen strands of lights to fill it up, 1600 lights. Check to make sure your lights can handle that many circuits by looking at each manufacturer's recommendations. Don't just wrap the lights around the outside edges of the tree. Put lights deep inside the limbs as well.

- **Pull out the memories.** Gather old holiday photos and create a large photo album for your coffee table. Visiting family members and friends will love flipping through and seeing holiday memories from the past.

- **Buy holiday dinnerware.** If you can afford only a serving plate with a holiday theme, make it scream in color and beauty. If those items aren't in the budget, consider buying an inexpensive set of matching holiday mugs for hot chocolate and cider. Even one great cup

can make a daily cup of coffee feel special.

- **Make your own ornaments.** Gather your friends and your glue guns. Have everyone bring their random craft supplies from home. Purchase white or clear round ornaments, stand back and watch the magic happen. My friends and I did this years ago and the ornament I made reminds me annually of a wonderful time with my friends. It was fun to see everyone's creativity, and we laughed at our failures.

- **Consider having two trees.** A real tree, hand-selected and personally cut, has become a family tradition for the Hendrick household, and my children have come to insist on it. Being a decorator, I have fancy, themed ornaments for this real tree because it becomes my centerpiece that we sit around and admire.

A second fake, pre-lit, "I'm running out of time" tree is a great one for hanging handmade ornaments and those purchased on vacations. Nothing must match, and every family member can have a part in decorating it, no matter their age.

Lulu's restaurant is fine dining with a Southern twist

BY SHERRY KUGHN

The Anniston Star

Anniston's newest fine-dining restaurant, Lulu's, opened downtown on Oct. 10. The staff is excited about creating a menu that has four or five daily entrees, plus a few seafood dishes from the coast. All the dishes aim to please the Southern palate.

Chef Theorun Anderson, a Birmingham native, and sous chef Blake Owens from Charleston, S.C., have backgrounds in the South.

"I have worked in California, Nantucket Island in Massachusetts and Washington, D.C.," said Anderson, who has 15 years of experience as a chef. "Working in places like that has given me an understanding of seafood, and we decided on a style of cooking with a Southern twist."

Anderson grew up in a household with a mom who enjoyed cooking, especially for their large family gatherings each Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"I found my way into the kitchen during those times," Anderson said.

For Lulu's customers, Anderson said he is planning a winter-oriented menu. He, Owens and Lulu's manager, Enetria Curd, have discussed the menu, which includes her influence, too, from growing up in a family who loved family gatherings.

Curd said she is thinking about how good a toasted s'mores-type dessert might be. Of course, she's dreaming of homemade graham crackers and homemade marshmallows topped with a whipped ganache.

Bartender Jared Tucker said his background is in catering, estimating that he has served at least 100 customers who have called on him to prepare food for their event. For this article, he shares a recipe.

"I've cut at least 50 people's wedding cakes," Tucker said.

He shared a tip for making neat, straight slices: Use a knife that is dipped frequently into a pitcher of hot water placed near the cake. He recommends wiping the icing from the knife often.



Photos by Sherry Kughn/The Anniston Star

Anniston's newest restaurant is Lulu's. It is in the Stewart Building at 1021 Noble Street and has a staff with a strong background in Southern cuisine. In addition, Lulu's two chefs have a background in serving seafood.

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LULU'S

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In addition to the ample number of entrees, Lulu's menu has about eight appetizers, three salads, a cheese or charcuterie board, and a handful of desserts.

Currently, Lulu's is open from 4- 9 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays and until 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. After January, the owners plan to serve brunch and lunch. The address is 1021 Noble Street in the Stewart Building.

Soon, the staff plans to decorate a tree and may even hand a stocking or two around the dining room area.

JARED'S GINGER CRANBERRY MARTINI

Pour into a glass three ounces of cranberry juice, one ounce of ginger-infused simple syrup, 1.2 ounces of vodka and one ounce of dry vermouth with a lime twist. Mix and serve cold.

In addition to an attractive dining room and bar area, Lulu's has a party room and outdoor dining. The party room is currently open to those wishing to place a reservation. Go to the website www.opentable.com and fill out the online request. For more information, call 256-624-6117.



Sherry Kughn/The Anniston Star

Anniston's newest restaurant is Lulu's. It is in the Stewart Building at 1021 Noble Street and has a staff with a strong background in Southern cuisine. In addition, Lulu's two chefs have a background in serving seafood.

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The Main Olive can add color to holiday dishes

BY BRIAN GRAVES

The Anniston Star

OXFORD — Food is a staple of the holiday season and there is a shop on Main Street that can help add color and flavor to those traditional dishes.

"The Main Olive is a gourmet specialty shop with a large selection of olive oils, balsamic vinegars, jams and jellies," said co-owner Karen Grammer. "We also offer gift basket services."

Grammer said there are also three Oxford-based artists who come to the shop and there are "other locally handcrafted items" available.

"Everything in here is as local as possible," she said.

One of the unique things about the shop is the ability to taste-test the wide variety of flavors available of oil and vinegar.

Grammer said business has been good since her and co-owner Andy Morris purchased the store in 2019 from previous owners who had established the location in 2016.

"Right now, this is our season so business has been nonstop," Grammer said.

Along with the title products, The Main Olive also offers fudge made fresh on Mondays and flavored pastas.

The Main Olive is located at 508 Main Street and is open from 10 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Saturdays. The phone number is 256-444-8498.



Brian Graves/The Anniston Star

The Main Olive co-owner Karen Grammer stands among the sampling spouts and craft works available at the shop's Main Street location in Oxford.

Mad Hatter Cupcakes serves up holiday flavors and fun

BY ASHLEY MORRISON

The Anniston Star

JACKSONVILLE — Mad Hatter Cupcakes will serve up culinary confections with a side of holiday spirit this season with several flavor options — and some fun events for your calendar.

Those who are looking for something festive to do should check out the little local bake shop in the square. Mad Hatter Cupcakes kicks off its holiday season Nov. 30.

Classic holiday flavors will be in cupcake form such as peppermint, hot cocoa and snickerdoodle. In addition to these winter classics, owner Mackenzie Corbin said the store will be doing some extra special flavors for its “Christmas Movie Week” beginning Dec. 12.

All of the upcoming flavors can be found on the Mad Hatter website, but the idea behind the special Christmas Week flavors is that they are flavors inspired by classic winter movies such as *The Elf* and *Grinch*. There is even a “George Bailey” flavor which has Bailey’s Irish Cream in it.

During the week of Dec. 12, folks can visit the shop for holiday treats, to watch classic Christmas movies on the premises, and to take some fun activities for the kids, Corbin said.

There will also be a few fun flavors for Thanksgiving — such as bourbon pecan pie — and a celebration event for New Year’s.

“New Year’s Eve is the big one for our famous alcoholic cupcakes,” Corbin said.

The alcohol is in the icing, Corbin said, noting that there will be three non-alcoholic flavors for those who wish to not partake, as well as five flavors with alcohol. Corbin said this is sort of their “welcome back” greeting to the community, after the store takes a week-long hiatus after Christmas.

The fun holiday treats have been a tradition of the store for some time. Though the bakery has been open since 2010, Corbin took over the business in February. She worked at the Mad Hatter under the previous owner all throughout high school and college; thus most of her formative years were spent at the place.



Ashley Morrison/The Anniston Star

Mad Hatter Cupcakes owner Mackenzie Corbin said her Jacksonville shop will be doing some extra special flavors for its ‘Christmas Movie Week’ beginning Dec. 12.

Though she had worked at the bakery for so long, Corbin said she originally had a different plan for her life. She graduated college, worked at Target as a visual merchandiser and then at Chick-fil-A in Jacksonville doing its marketing, and event planning for years.

However the previous owner was ready to move on and had plans to sell the store. Corbin couldn’t see the bakery going to some stranger who didn’t know the shop the way she did, she said.

“I didn’t want somebody to take it and turn it into something weird or take it away from what it’s always been,” Corbin said.

She said she mulled on the idea of purchasing the business for about a year before ultimately making the decision to buy the place.

“My husband and I are really young and we don’t have kids and we were like, you know what, let’s just do it.

Corbin said her grandmother owned a

bakery, so she wasn’t flying into the ownership blind, even if it wasn’t her dream for herself when she started her life plan.

“I was always really interested in small business. I think small business is really important. But I never wanted that responsibility. Because I mean it’s a lot. But this place was like, I don’t want to say like a second home. That sounds so hokey,” Corbin said.

“This business means a lot to me,” she said.

Succ It Up grows on customers for the holidays

BY BRIAN GRAVES

The Anniston Star

OXFORD — Succ It Up has not been established very long at its 508 Main Street location, but its unique collection of plants, succulents and gifts has cultivated a growing number of customers.

Owner Chip Jancsek says if there is a plant someone is looking for, the chances are very good he can dig it up for them somewhere.

"We have holiday arrangements, live wreaths, customized elves, Christmas shirts and candles," Jancsek said. "I have everything in here. Everything here is homemade here in Calhoun County."

Succ It Up has been in business for

several years setting up in places such as farmers' markets and had a short-term lease for a location in Leeds.

"When the lease was up, we wanted to come back home," Jancsek said. "We live only two blocks from this location on Main Street, so when this place came open we talked to the owner of the building who had already gotten two calls ahead of us. It seems like it was meant to be, so here we are."

Succ It Up's services, which include local delivery and shipping, can also be found by using the store's app.

Jancsek says the store offers "a lot of customizable options" with plants, gift boxes, gift baskets and cards.

The offerings are not focused on

Christmas, there are also arrangements and gifts that are also fitting for the fall months, Thanksgiving and all the seasons of the year.

The shop also offers aloe-infused

herbal teas and hot teas.

Succ It Up is located at 426 Main Street in Oxford and is open 7 a.m.-6 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m.-6 p.m. on Saturdays. The phone number is 256-624-7503.



Brian Graves/The Anniston Star

Succ It Up owner Chip Jancsek stands with his Christmas display as the Main Street Oxford shop prepares for the holiday season.

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Redbird Coffee pours holiday pleasantries

BY ASHLEY MORRISON

The Anniston Star

JACKSONVILLE — On any given day, those who find themselves inside The Redbird coffee shop in Jacksonville will find more than just coffee and treats. They will find a place where the community thrives.

Perhaps this is because Gary and Laura Humphreys have made it their mission to make “community” one of the pillars upon which they base their business.

Kingdom, community, and coffee; these pillars are the principles the shop runs on. And for this holiday season, The Redbird is pulling out all the stops.

Starting with Thanksgiving, Laura and Gary are opening the doors to the shop to those who don’t have anywhere else to go. Their family — which includes their three daughters — will host local residents for a “friendsgiving”-style dinner.

Laura Humphreys said their family hosted this event last year and it’s their way to give thanks and pour love that Jacksonville has shown them back into that community.

“People wanted to come and get a meal and take it. That’s not really what this is. There’s plenty of places where you can go get a meal and take it home. We want to really sit down and have a family meal,” Humphreys said.

Humphreys provides the food, and she said there will be plenty. In fact, she said gave away a lot to the police and fire departments at last year’s event.

“It was so nice last year to see, like, we had people we’d never met before who came, and we were able to actually share. We go around and everybody shares something that they’re thankful for and we were able to really connect with people on that level,” Humphreys said.

The time of the event is still to be announced. She and Gary wanted to offer this because they had once experienced a time in their lives where they themselves were unmoored during a holiday period.

“Gary and I had a time in our lives where we didn’t really have anywhere to go and so Thanksgiving became sort of like a hard place,” Humphreys said. “I think for a lot of people, it can be tough.”

The Sunday after Thanksgiving, The Redbird will host a community gingerbread house competition. Organizations can sign up and come decorate a pre-made gingerbread house that is provided by the coffee shop. Afterwards, the gingerbread houses will be displayed



Ashley Morrison/The Anniston Star

Laura Humphreys fixes a drink at The Redbird. The Jacksonville coffee shop is opening its doors this holiday season for those who don’t have anywhere else to go.

and community members can vote with change. That change will be donated to the Jacksonville Christian Outreach Center.

Then, Monday, Nov. 27, Jacksonville City has the “Lighting on the Square” event. Humphreys said anything on the square The Redbird is always going to be a part of.

Then, on the 30th is Jacksonville’s holiday parade.

“And you never know, there’s always some exciting surprises that happen here

at Redbird for those things,” Humphreys said with a sly smile. She would not elaborate further. “There’s always something. Magic comes out.”

On Dec. 10, The Redbird will host a special “Santa Experience” event, where kids can come and spend a ton of time with the jolly big guy in red in a more one-on-one setting.

There will also be a “Christmas at the Redbird” where families can come take photos with Santa, have some hot chocolate or apple cider and hang out. The

photos are donational, and the proceeds from that benefit Big Oak Ranch to help with Christmas stockings.

“For us, kind of our purpose is to make everyone feel like Jesus loves them no matter what and that he can take us and save us and make us whole,” Humphreys said. “And we just know that also happens in community.”

“We’re just better together. People are better together. And coffee is something that we just love.”

Nature-inspired gifts at The Moon in Jacksonville

BY SHERRY KUGHN

The Anniston Star

JACKSONVILLE — Robbie Whitman owns The Moon, but not the one that shines down on earth. She operates a gift shop on Pelham Road just off the square, and has won fans and customers within the university community — students and staff who appreciate the items most gift shops do not carry.

Whitman's shop has crystals and stones, jewelry made with crystals and stones, compasses, small globe-shaped gifts that rotate when light shines on them, hand-blown balls with trees stretching on the interior inside the ball, and many other unusual gifts made of carved wood or porcelain.

"I like to keep my shop earthy and natural," Whitman said.

The outdoors is one of her favorite places to be, but she also enjoys being in her shop getting to know her customers, especially those who are shopping for the men on their gift list who may already have everything they need.

When people browse through the store, they can see, for example, round balls swirling inside a clear covering with no obvious source of energy (spoiler alert: Light and magnets make them go 'round'). Customers will also see leaf-shaped nightlights and macramé wall hangings, as well as the wide variety of nature-like objects — they might even imagine they have seen a fairy-like creature peeking out from one or two places in the shop!

Whitman has owned The Moon for the past three years, but before that she owned a store closer to Anniston on Alabama 21. Its name was The Harvest Moon.

For the holiday season, Whitman may conduct a raffle, which she has done in years past. She wants to remind the JSU students and employees that they get a 10 percent discount for shopping at The Moon, which is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. The address is 104 Pelham Road South, Jacksonville. Email Whitman at rwhitman555@yahoo.com.



Photos by Sherry Kughn/The Anniston Star

RIGHT: Robbie Whitman has two loves: Being in nature and visiting with her customers. She has many repeat customers who enjoy buying unusual items for themselves or for gifts from her gift shop, The Moon. **LEFT:** Many colorful items are in The Moon as well as items in the browns and greens of nature.

Cutter's Pizza and Rons Goode Barbeque to offer tasty treats this holiday season

BY BILL WILSON

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With the holidays approaching, Cutter's Pizzeria and Rons Goode Barbeque are getting in gear to offer yuletide customers a variety of seasonal meals, desserts and of course, pizzas.

Dalton "Cutter" Goode, one of the co-owners of Cutter's Pizzeria and Rons Goode Barbeque, said the pizzeria will offer a delicious holiday dessert to accompany its full menu of tantalizing pizzas, wings, appetizers, calzones, salads and sweet treats.

Goode said the pizzeria has been open in Alexandria for four years, while the second location, in Oxford, opened eight months later.

One of the unique pizzas at Cutter's is the pie-style pizza.

"It has two layers of dough, two layers of cheese, all the toppings are in the middle," Goode said, "We're one of the only places that makes this type of pizza, I really don't know anywhere that makes it."

"We came up with the recipe for doing it; it's double the dough, double the sauce, double the cheese, double everything, it's really good," he said.

Goode said the sauce the restaurant uses is actually cooked — not pre-packaged or canned — that includes "secret" ingredients.

A recent visit to Cutter's to try out its pie pizza was quite an experience. The pizza itself is 12 inches but weighs a whopping five pounds. The ingredients are fresh and can be tasted in each piping hot bite. This pizza is filling!

The Oxford location is located at 1781 Hamric Drive East. The Alexandria location is located at 7113 U.S. Hwy 431.

Rons Goode Barbeque

Rons Goode Barbeque will be offering smoked hams, turkeys, Boston butts and ribs along with a full line of side items, including dressing.

Goode said Rons Goode Barbeque opened in February in the same location as the original Rons Barbeque on Alabama 144 in Alexandria that operated from 2000 to 2010.

"They closed down and we opened back up this year with a lot of the same recipes, we brought some new items in so we've got a smash burger," Goode said.

Goode said the restaurant's Thanksgiving meat selection includes a five-pound smoked turkey breast for \$55. The seven- to eight-pound smoked boneless ham will be \$75 and smoked butts will be \$35. Goode said the prices for the Christmas offerings may change due to market prices. Goode said orders may be placed the week of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

A recent visit to Rons Goode Barbeque at lunchtime was a treat as the original owner, Ron Dover, was present helping cook meals and greeting customers.

"I am the original Ron," Dover said with a smile. When entering the restaurant one is not only greeted by a helpful



Photos by Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

LEFT: Ron Dover, the 'Ron' in Rons Goode Barbeque, works at the restaurant on Nov. 6. The Alexandria eatery offer a plethora of smoked meat and side dishes for the holidays. RIGHT: Dalton 'Cutter' Goode, one of the co-owners of Cutter's Pizzeria and Rons Goode Barbeque, holds a pie-style pizza.

staff but also the intense scent of smoked barbecue. You can almost taste the sweet tea in the air.

Dover said that one of the customer favorites include the buffalo chicken fingers and the restaurant's signature smoked ribs and chopped pork.

Restaurant manager Makenzie Wilkinson said the exact same recipes are used from the original Ron's Barbeque.

"Cutter wanted it to be the exact same for when he was

a kid so now that he has it, it's exactly the same," Wilkinson said.

Elmer Wheatley from Saks and a friend of his from Oxford were enjoying their lunch as Dover came by to say hello. Wheatley is glad the restaurant is back open.

"I love it, I eat here at least once a week," he said.

Rons Goode Barbeque is located at 8314 AL Highway 144 in Alexandria.

Susan Shipman's Oven Odyssey tastes like 'Home for the Holidays'

BY BILL WILSON

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When someone hears "Home for the Holidays" one of the memories conjured up is often home cooking. Thanks to Susan Shipman's Oven Odyssey, those who don't have the time to cook for themselves can still enjoy homemade treats.

Shipman's small business offers a full catering menu of traditional holiday favorites for both Thanksgiving and Christmas lovingly cooked in small batches.

Shipman calls herself a "bake-ologist and designer" and has been a regular at the Jacksonville Farmers Market with her mouth-watering treats. Her love of baking and cooking runs in her blood as her relatives have handed down recipes, each with its own unique ingredients and spices.

"I've always enjoyed baking, it's like math. If you follow the recipe it turns out the same way every time and I like eating too, so it works out really well for me," she said.

Shipman started selling her treats and tasty offerings in June 2022.

"It's a good experimental thing, that's the odyssey, it's a journey, it's not about the destination, it's about trying new things, and seeing how they work out," Shipman said.

Shipman recently retired, allowing her to focus more time and energy on her cooking. Some of her treats include:

- Chex Party Mix made with wheat, corn, Rice Chex, Cheez-Its, pretzels, almonds, pecan, butter, worcestershire sauce and Lawrey's seasoning salt.
- A variety of cookies including those made with white chips, oatmeal raisin, chocolate chips, sugar, pecan coconut and peanut butter.
- Muffins including blueberry, apple cinnamon, honey/wheat/oat, pumpkin and zucchini made by the dozen in standard and jumbo sizes.
- Toasty nutty oat granola made with Quaker Oats, chopped almonds, pecans and pepitas with locally sourced honey and canola oil.
- Brownies of all types from milk chocolate, fudge to dark chocolate with nuts and chocolate chips.
- Banana bread, zucchini bread and



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Susan Shipman runs a small business, Oven Odyssey, that sells all kinds of homemade treats. She along with her brother are a offering holiday catering menu that includes home cooked favorites.

pumpkin bread that can be made with or without nuts.

- Cakes including sour cream pound cake and devil's food.
- Pecan pie that Shipman calls, "The best pecan pie on the planet."

Shipman has enjoyed interacting with her customers at the Jacksonville Farmers Market.

"It's a lot of fun at the farmers market in particular the regular people that come all the time and I remember them from last year also and they've go their special thing that they like, there's the oatmeal raisin cookie people, and the chocolate chip cookie people, anything that's got

cream cheese frosting on it people and so that's amusing," Shipman said.

"I offer samples every Saturday, so that people can try the product before they decide on the product and that's fun too," she said.

A favorite of Shipman's customers is the "best pecan pie on the planet," named because everyone who eats it says that.

"I believe that it is. Pecan pie is an art in itself because you have to get used to making it and the way that your oven makes it work," Shipman said.

Shipman has her own signature pound cake.

"I tried to replicate my granny's pound

HOLIDAY MENU
• Thanksgiving dinner (smoke turkey breast choice of two sides, homemade rolls) \$95
• Smoked turkey breast (6-8 pounds) \$45
• Southern cornbread dressing \$25
• Mac & Cheese \$25
• Green bean casserole \$25
• Pecan pie \$18
Dinner and sides serve 4-6

cake for years and it finally occurred to me that granny's kitchen was granny's kitchen and the humidity was whatever it was, she left the butter out to soften for a certain amount of time and all of this other stuff," Shipman said, "I can never replicate granny's pound cake because I'm not in granny's kitchen and I don't have granny's process, so that's OK."

Shipman is teaming up with her brother who has decades of culinary experience to help with the holiday catering menu. The pair have already cooked samples on the holiday menu to try out.

"So far so good," she said.

Shipman offers homemade cornbread dressing that she said is a "big process" to make it right. The recipe is based on her mom's dressing.

"People are with dressing like they are with barbecue sauce," Shipman said, "You don't make your dressing the way I make my dressing."

Shipman prides herself on the small-batch homemade cooking.

"I don't think you can make 12 dozen chocolate chip cookies at the same time, you need to go with the small batch and break the eggs separate and all that kind of stuff. That's what keeps it true to the recipe and how it's going to be mostly the same every time," Shipman said.

"This is so much fun and as long as it's fun we'll keep doing it and when it gets not fun we'll do something different," she said.

Shipman can be reached at 938-899-4222.

BEST PECAN PIE ON THE PLANET

1/3 cup packed brown sugar
1 1/2 tsp plain flour
1 1/4 tsp vanilla
3 eggs at room temperature
1 1/4 cups corn syrup
1 1/2 cups very coarsely chopped pecans
2 T melted butter
1 uncooked pie crust

Set eggs out of the fridge to warm to room temperature an hour before you're ready to make the pie. This will help the filling to set faster/better so you don't overcook the pie waiting for it to set.

Chop your pecans while the eggs get to room temperature. A very coarse chop is good as it makes the pie cut easier.

Prepare crust for pie: either make your own (bad idea for beginners), mix up a boxed pie crust mix (I use Jiffy) or purchase a prepared crust and let it warm to room temperature with the eggs. When mixing up a boxed crust, using ice water will make your crust develop well. Mix only until all the pieces stick together – don't use too much water. Press into your 9" pie pan and don't leave any holes. (I use glass pie pans to cook my pies. They're sturdy and easy to clean.) You can make pretty edges if you want – consult the internet for suggestions.

Preheat your oven to 375 degrees with your pie cooking rack about a third of the way from the bottom, just below the middle rack slot.

Measure brown sugar – packed into 1/3 cup measuring cup – into a medium sized mixing bowl. If you don't pack the brown sugar in the cup, you won't have enough.

Add 1 1/2 teaspoons of plain all-purpose flour to the brown sugar and work flour in with a fork until well combined.

Add vanilla to the mixture and work it into the sugar and flour until well blended.

Add eggs one at a time, breaking them into a separate container before adding to the mix so if a shell gets into the broken egg, it's easier to get it out and you haven't wrecked the whole mixture. Mix eggs into the mixture well.

Measure corn syrup into the above mixture and scrape the measuring cup with a spatula to get it all out of the cup. Mix well.

Add the coarsely chopped pecans. Make sure to look at them closely as you chop so you don't get bitter into the pie



Bill Wilson/The Anniston Star

Susan Shipman shows recipes that she holds near and dear.

mixture.

Finally, add the melted butter and stir it in well.

Carefully pour the mixture into your prepared crust and ease it into the preheated oven. My oven cooks this pie in

40 minutes. Pay attention as it gets close to time to be done. The filling will puff up and when the center collapses, get it out! Cool completely before serving. An eighth of a pie is about 500 calories. (Just don't eat as much tomorrow!)

SUPER GOOD BANANA BREAD

This recipe is best with over-ripe bananas.

2 cups plain all-purpose flour
1/2 cup wheat flour
1 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1/2 cup butter (1 stick)
5/8 cup sugar
5/8 cup Splenda
2 eggs
1 tsp vanilla
3 small bananas mashed
1 cup pecans chopped
1/2 cup buttermilk

Set butter and eggs out to reach room temperature before you start. Put your butter in a medium sized mixing bowl.

Chop some pecans and assemble other ingredients while you're waiting.

Grease the bottom only of a 9" x 5" loaf pan or four mini pans (5.75 x 3 x 2.125).

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees with shelf one third from the bottom or just below middle slots.

Mix white and wheat flour, soda and salt in a small bowl. Really, mix them well.

Add sugar and Splenda to room temperature butter and work together with a fork until well mixed. The mixture will start to get harder as you work it with the fork.

Add vanilla and blend well. It's important to get the vanilla mixed into the butter mixture well.

Add eggs one at a time, breaking them into a separate container then adding one at a time and mixing well. (Cracking the eggs into a separate container will keep you from getting shell in the recipe – every time.)

Mash the bananas well (it's about a cup and a half you're aiming for) and mix into above.

Add dry mix, pecans and buttermilk, in that order, and mix just until well combined.

Scoop into pan(s) and place in preheated oven. Bake for 25-30 minutes in small pans and 35-40 in large pan. I always begin to check the small ones at 20 minutes, using a toothpick to test. When the toothpick inserted in the middle of the batter comes out mostly clean, with crumbs – no mush attached – it's ready.

Cool 10 minutes in pan then invert onto cooling rack and cool completely.

Enjoy! This is a great way to get out the door with breakfast in hand!





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