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SPIRIT

WINTER 2025

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IN THE MORONGO BASIN

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CHP TOY DRIVE • LETTERS TO SANTA



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editor's note

E

very holiday edition needs some letters to Santa Claus, and this one is no excep-

tion. For the Basin Wide Spirit, we take a look at some of the letters Morongo Basin children wrote Santa in decades past. It's fun to take a trip into my own memories — some of these kids were my classmates and they ask for things like Carebears and Atari cartridges, coveted items from my own childhood. But what strikes me in so many of them is the care they take to make sure their siblings and parents aren't forgotten. "My mom and dad would like a hug for Christmas," Jonathan Smith wrote. "I am six, I love my mother and my family. I want everybody to be happy," Kaylen Witkowski wrote. "I would like you to bring fifty dollars for the poor," wrote

TJ Norton. "I have been very good this year. And my mother has been too. Please bring her a coat," Kristen Ehrke asked. Many of them send their love to Mrs. Santa, the elves and the reindeer. For as long as there's been Santa Claus, there have been complaints that Christmas is too commercial or kids too greedy. And sure, children ask for toys. We all want nice things. But these letters always show something else just as true and even more important: the spirit of generosity and love thrives and endures, no matter the decade. And with that, I'll wish you the happiest of holiday seasons.

— Editor Stacy Moore



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Basin Wide Spirit

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Santa cookies

Yield: 14 cookies

1 cup (2 sticks) salted butter, at room temperature
 1/2 cup brown sugar
 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
 1 large egg, at room temperature
 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1 teaspoon red food coloring
 mini chocolate chips
 mini red chocolate-coated candies

Frosting:

1/2 cup (1 stick) salted butter, at room temperature
 4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 2 1/2 cups powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 F and line two baking sheets with parchment paper.

In large mixing bowl, beat butter, sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy. Add egg and beat until combined. Add flour and salt; mix until dough begins to form ball.



Remove 1 cup dough and set aside. Add red food coloring to remaining dough.

From red cookie dough, make one 1-inch ball and five 1/2-inch balls. From plain cookie dough, make one 3/4-inch ball and five 1/4-inch balls.

On prepared baking sheet, place red 1-inch ball and gently flatten until 1/2-inch thick. Attach four red 1/2-inch balls for arms and legs. Attach plain 3/4-inch ball for head and gently flatten until 1/2-inch thick. Attach plain 1/4-inch balls for hands and feet. Shape remaining red 1/2-inch ball into triangle for hat and attach. Repeat with remaining dough, arranging cookies 2 inches apart on baking

sheet. Add chocolate candies for eyes and buttons.

Bake 12-15 minutes, or until lightly golden.

To make frosting: In medium bowl, beat butter and cream cheese until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and powdered sugar; mix until combined.

To decorate: Place half of frosting in piping bag with small tip to line Santa's arms and legs. Place other half in second piping bag with small star tip to add Santa's beard, hat and hands. Put small dot of icing between eyes and beard and place red mini chocolate-coated candy on face for nose.

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VOLUNTEER SPIRIT



STACY MOORE Basin Wide Spirit

Cheyenne Bonnell, president of the Friends of the Yucca Valley Library, stands at the entrance to the group's book room.

friend of the library

A conversation with Cheyenne Bonnell
president of the Friends of the Yucca Valley Library



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EXPERIENCE

By Stacy Moore
Basin Wide Spirit

Q: Tell me about your history with the Friends of the Yucca Valley Library.

I came aboard about four years ago when they put an ad in the paper for new board members. I thought, because I'm retired, that was perfect. I'm a retired English professor, so this seemed like the perfect match.

Q: What are some highlights for you from your work with the Friends of the Library?

The big event is the summer reading program for the kids, which costs maybe \$10,000. We get entertainers every week. We also buy toys — incentives to get the kids to come. And the kids love especially the programs about the animals. Wild about that 12-foot snake. Wild about it.

And the other thing, which is coming up on the 13th, is Santa Claus will be here. It is just thrilling to watch the kids with their first Santa Claus. And we always have good Santa Clauses, I have to say. They have to be approved by the county.

Those are the two events that I just love participating in.

Q: Those are two youth-oriented events. Is that one of the main focuses of the Friends?

Yes ... and no. When they moved the library over to the bank, there was lots of computers that we bought. Whatever they wanted, we bought. But now it seems like it is really concentrated on children, especially the younger ones. Most of the programs we have are 11:30 to 12:30 and it's mostly little kids or home schooled kids. People want the 4 o'clock, 4:30 programs and

we did that one time and no one came. Kids are exhausted from being at school or they have to go off to this practice or that practice. So we would sorely like to do something for that age group but it just doesn't work.

We are always thinking what can we do for the teens group or the tweens group. I've seen some magnificent libraries where the Friends have gotten computers and computer chairs and you play games with your friends. That would maybe bring them in, but we don't have space.

Q: Do you think there are things that people don't know about the library, or that you wish people knew more about?

One of the things we don't know is where we are, because the signs for the old library, as far as I know, are still up across the street. When we get people in here, like Santa Claus will be one of the prime ways, people will say, 'Oh my gosh, I've never been in this library before.' So just letting people know where it is and what kinds of activities. On Facebook, I put out the six-week schedule for the little kids or any special events, like on Saturday we're having our Saturday super sale — it's two for one, and people love that.

Q: How much of your work is marketing the library and trying to bring in new people?

For my work as president, I took that on. I had to take a course at CMC on the social media stuff. I'm 75, it wasn't in my purview. TikTok is still beyond me, but we're on Facebook and NextDoor. I would say at least half of my time is keeping up with that, so people know what the activities are. I do a lot of advertising about what's going on.

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Our new thing is a puzzle exchange. It's not a money maker or anything, but we are devoted to doing things for literacy and the community, and people have been asking for a puzzle exchange. So now we have five or six banker's boxes of puzzles.

Q: What are some of the other things that Friends of the Library do?

The main thing is the books. That's our main fundraiser. We take them in, we sort them, we run them through Thriftbooks. We send maybe \$200 worth of books to Thriftbook every month. Then the books themselves — sometimes we get 18 boxes of books at once, and a closet is all the storage we have, so it's all hands on deck to look at the books, get them through Thriftbooks, get all the tags off, see what condition they're in. Because we really want the books in the best condition. We want it to look like a bookstore, because after the other two bookstores went out of business, we are the only bookstore in Yucca.

We give away a lot of free stuff, too. If I see one more DVD of "The Little Rascals," I think I'm going to scream. Things like that might end up on the free cart out there. Usually CDs, they're very hard to store or put on display. They'll go like that (snaps fingers) if they go on the free cart. And we feel that's fine. We like to serve the community, and once it gets around that we have DVDs for a dollar and free CDs, people want to come in here.

Q: In 2025, in Yucca Valley, what is the importance of the library — and a well-supported library?

A lot of people here need computers. The computers are used quite a bit. And kind of tooting my own horn, or FOL horn, we have those DVDs for a dollar and on

For more information on joining the Friends of the Yucca Valley Library, visit www.yuccavalleyfol.org.



STACY MOORE Basin Wide Spirit

Stevie Schuler, 5, picks out books at the Yucca Valley library. Stevie and other children won prizes for checking out 15 items and taking part in a 2024 Polar Express party. The Friends of the Yucca Valley Library raises money for children's events at the library.

Thrifty Thursdays, for seniors, they're two for a dollar. And you might think well, they're going out of use, but a lot of people around here don't have cable or wi-fi, anything like that. I think that serves our particular community.

My dream is to get a mobile library. Even if it just has to be for Yucca to start out with, there's just so many people out there who can't get to the library. Someone also mentioned to me that if we had a book mobile, we could also pack some food in there.

There's so much you could do with a book mobile, and it needs to be done. A lot of people don't have access to transportation, and there are a lot of elderly people who would love to have books.

Q: Do you remember your first library?

Oh my gosh, yes. Starting with the kids library and then working my way up into the stacks. I went weekly. I took the bus, which kids could do in those days, when I was 10, 12, 14 years old. I could go to the library all by myself and it was just delightful. It was like going to Disneyland, for me anyway. And I would come home with stacks of books.

My father and mother read a bit. They weren't big, big readers at all. My brother was, and is, a tremendous reader and he was my mentor.

Q: What's your favorite book?

Whatever one I'm reading at the moment.



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California Federally Qualified **COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS** Are Under Threat

A Dangerous Statewide Ballot Measure Threatens Care for Millions of Patients Who Rely on Community Health Centers for Healthcare



A ballot initiative, sponsored by Service Employees International Union (SEIU), would impose arbitrary and extreme restrictions on how federally qualified health centers spend money on patient care and community services. The initiative would divert billions of dollars from patient care into new state bureaucracy, forcing many health centers to significantly cut back on patient services and potentially close their doors, leaving millions of vulnerable Californians without essential care. Further, the ballot measure seeks to criminalize volunteer patient board members and authorize costly shake-down lawsuits against community health centers. This is not about policy reform but about political bullying.

SEIU is one of the largest and fastest-growing labor unions in North America and is affiliated with AFL-CIO, Canadian Labor Congress, Public Services International, and UNI Global Union. Since 2022, community health centers have been the focus of a resource intensive political campaign by

SEIU in retaliation for health centers refusing to unionize. It is a power play by labor union executives who are weaponizing the ballot measure to force their demands on community health centers.

Required 90% Spend Ratio:

Health centers will be required to spend 90% of total revenue on direct patient care. If less than 90% of total revenue is reported, a penalty equal to the entire shortfall will be paid to the state. Example: if the health center spends only 70% of revenue on direct patient care, the entire 20% balance must be paid to the state.

While 90% of revenue for direct patient care seems reasonable, it excludes ALL operational necessities such as the patient medical record system and staff to maintain it, drivers for patient transportation services, front office staff, building leases, janitorial and facilities maintenance staff, utilities

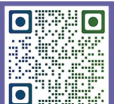
(phone, office supplies, printing), human resources staff, employee benefits such as health insurance, IT systems/security and staff, billing staff, accountants, legal and auditing expenses, property and equipment insurance, general liability insurance, and more.

The exclusion of basic operational necessities, some required by healthcare law, ensures non-compliance by most health centers and that penalties will be imposed, diverting billions of dollars from patient care. This will force many health centers to operate in the red and significantly cut back on patient services with devastating loss of access to care for millions of vulnerable patients.

Criminal Liability for Health Center Officers, Agents & Patient Board Members:

Health Center CEOs, executives, agents, and volunteer patient

MorongoBasinHealth.org



board members could face criminal prosecution and imprisonment for up to one year if found to have knowingly misreported clinic revenue or expenses, even if through a related entity or foundation.

Unlike current law, this initiative allows any patient to sue a health center for falling below the 90% mandate or failing to submit required financial reports, even if intent was good. It strips away the business judgment rule and usual legal protection for health center patient-led boards acting in good faith.

Health centers are already heavily regulated by federal and state governments, with strict reporting requirements and audits of how resources are spent on patient care. Resources are focused on patient care and community benefits, not profits or shareholders. A majority of the health center governing board must be patients of that facility, ensuring decisions reflect patient and community needs.

Yet, the imposed regulations and penalties imposed by this ballot measure would put 90% of California community health centers at risk for failing to meet the new mandate. Nearly all California community health centers would be forced

to operate with a negative operating income after penalties. Up to 48% (97 facilities) would be forced to close statewide. Thousands of healthcare jobs would be lost, and millions of patients would be left without local care.

If health centers shut down, many patients will lose access to care, skip preventive services, and end up in emergency rooms with more costly, difficult-to-treat conditions. By forcing patients into more costly forms of care, this ballot measure will increase overall healthcare costs for consumers, the state and taxpayers by billions of dollars each year.



If passed, this mandate would become law and be locked-in, meaning the Legislature cannot amend it unless the proposed changes "further its purposes." Only a new statewide ballot measure would be able to fix the damage to patients, community health centers and the healthcare safety net.

Morongo Basin Community Health Center will be subject to this political bullying if the ballot measure passes on the 2026 state ballot. The health center provides medical, behavioral health and dental care to over 8,800 local residents at its facilities in 29 Palms and Yucca Valley.

Morongo Basin Healthcare District has joined with other organizations to educate Californians and reject the attack on community health centers. Please join us in voting against this ballot measure.

Visit ProtectPatientsCA.com to learn more.

KEY CHANGES TO SNAP / CALFRESH BENEFITS

Benefit program updated information --

EXPANDED WORK REQUIREMENTS:

Able-bodied adults, ages 18-65 are required to work, volunteer, be enrolled in school or training program for a minimum of 80-hours per month. Adults with dependent children under age 14 are exempt from this requirement.

RECERTIFICATION FOR BENEFITS: To continue SNAP benefits, enrollees will be required to report compliance annually, though same may be directed to report monthly. Any change in status must be reported within 10-days of change (such as location / address, income, benefits, or household size), and then must recertify within 30-days.

Learn more at BenefitsCal.com

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Make an annual health assessment a New Year's resolution. A preventive check-up keeps minor health issues from becoming major problems. Without screenings and professional assessment, signs of a growing health problem may go undetected and increase your health risk. The earlier you identify a problem, the better your chances of getting treatment. What's more, the healthier you are, the better prepared you will be to battle any future health crisis that may come your way. Preventive services are 100% covered by most medical plans when you visit an in-network health provider. Be proactive for your health and peace of mind... schedule that check-up!

Need a medical provider? Morongo Basin Community Health Center has conveniently located offices in Yucca Valley and 29 Palms. Call us for that check-up at **760-365-9305**.





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These elves wear CHP badges

By Crystal Harrell
Basin Wide Spirit

California Highway Patrol officers are once again spreading holiday spirit through their CHiPs for Kids Toy Drive, inviting residents across the Morongo Basin to help make the season brighter for local children and families in need. What began as a modest effort years ago has blossomed into a cherished community tradition.

“We have experienced an increase in community involvement in our CHiPs for Kids program,” said Officer Brian Schmidt, public information officer for the CHP Joshua Tree office.

“With the help of our generous community members, we are excited to be able to help provide a happy holiday season to those in need. “We look forward to continuing this partnership with the Morongo Basin.”

More than just a toy drive, the annual campaign strengthens the bond between the CHP and the community it serves. “The partnership fosters a sense of teamwork, creating a bridge between the department and the people they serve. The shared mission is to make the holidays brighter for children and young adults in need. The CHP shows that their commitment goes beyond public safety,” Schmidt said.

Community members are encouraged to donate new, unwrapped toys or gifts by Dec. 22 to help make a difference in a child’s life. Donations can be mailed or delivered to CHP Morongo Basin at 63683 Twentynine Palms Highway, Joshua Tree, CA 92252.

Drop-off boxes are also located throughout the Morongo Basin, including Walgreens, Grocery Outlet and Road Runner Copy Center in Yucca Valley, the Bowladium, Grnd Sqrl, 29 Beer Co. Grocery Outlet and Fan’s Sports Grill in Twentynine Palms and Circle K and Small Town Grill in Morongo Valley.

“The holiday season is a reminder of the kindness and compassion that define our community. Every toy donated is more than just a gift — it’s a reminder that community is the heart of what makes this season special,” said Schmidt.

For more information, contact Schmidt at the CHP Joshua Tree office at (760) 366-3707.

your winter calendar

HOLIDAY MIXER

5-7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 18, at the California Welcome Center, 56711 Twentynine Palms Highway, Yucca Valley.

The Welcome Center, Yucca Valley Chamber of Commerce and Basin Wide Foundation will share hosting duties for the annual holiday mixer. It's open to the public and free to attend.

yuccavalley.org

HOLIDAY LIGHT PARADE

5:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 13, on Santa Fe Trail from Deer Trail to Apache Trail in Yucca Valley

The Yucca Valley Sunset Rotary hosts its annual holiday light parade. After the parade, Santa Claus will be available at the Hi-Desert Water District office for photos, a toy giveaway for children and hot chocolate Trophies will be awarded that evening to entries for categories including most spirited, most humorous and best show of lights. Members of the Miss Yucca Valley Court will judge.

sunsetrotary.org, 760-898-1047

THE HISTORIC PLAZA CHRISTMAS STROLL

Noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 21, at The Historic Plaza, Two Mile Road and Adobe Road, Twentynine Palms.

This festive afternoon features local makers, artists, small businesses, sweet and savory treats, live music, holiday lights, pet adoptions and photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Free.

WINTER FESTIVAL

Noon to 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 21, at White Rock Horse Rescue and Retirement, 733 Geronimo Trail, Yucca Valley.

Enjoy festivities with Santa Claus and the White Rock crew. Free.

NEW YEAR'S EVE BINGO

5 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 31, at the Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Ave., Joshua Tree.

Ring in the new year by playing bingo with the Sportsman's Club. Buy-in is \$20. Enjoy coffee, tea, hot chocolate, snacks and sparkling cider. The JT Sportsman's Club raises money for charitable causes in the Morongo Basin, including giveaways of food, clothes and school supplies for local children.

NATURE'S DECEPTION: MIMICRY AND CAMOUFLAGE

2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 24, at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum, Dumosa Avenue north of Twentynine Palms Highway, Yucca Valley.

Insects are some of nature's most skilled illusionists, blending into their surroundings or imitating other organisms for survival. This lecture explores the strategies insects use to hide from predators and ambush prey. Free. Registration not required.

hidesertnaturemuseum.org, 760-369-7211

THE SIX-LEGGED LOCALS: A LOOK AT MORONGO BASIN INSECTS

2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 21 at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum, Dumosa Avenue north of Twentynine Palms Highway, Yucca Valley.

The Morongo Basin is alive with an incredible diversity of insects. This lecture explores the world of local beetles, bees, butterflies, ants and more, highlighting their adaptations, survival strategies and essential roles in the desert ecosystem. Discover how these often-overlooked creatures connect plants, animals and people in the vibrant web of life that defines the Morongo Basin. Free. Registration not required.

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Dear Santa...

Take a peek into Santa's mailbag over the decades

Dear Santa,

berfor I write anthing speshell I want you to be alart that I don't have a chimney so don't fall threw the roof. Now I'll get down to the toy's the frist thing I want is a pistil B.B. gun R5d4 3cpo that comes apart and powerdroid. that's all star wars. a new cat and a molt cotrol car a smerte vido game magamanya laers Blast missill camand dokey Kong sinaped that's all vido games.

Love
Alex

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 24, 1982

Dear Santa,

We are going to leev you cokies and wine. I wond like a nice colring book and a Santa claus stuffed person.

Love, Denise

The Desert Trail, Dec. 24, 1981

Dear Santa,

I hope you will come to my house. I've been pretty good this year. I did scream and yell at the kids a few times, but I,m only human. Have the elves done a good jod for you this year? I noticed last year you didn't eat the cookies I left. Don't you like oatmeal cookie Santa?

Love, Ricky Paul Harman

The Desert Trail, Dec. 20, 1979

Dear Santa Calus,

Are you busy? If you are I would like to help you. I'd like to say fly away now Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupit, donner, Blitzen, I would like to fly through the sky. Merry Christmas.

Your Pal Robbie Wheatley

The Desert Trail, Dec. 29, 1979

Dear Santa Clause:

How are you. I am find. I am in the 4 Grade and my report card was pretty good. I would like a go-kart. A go kart with light and horn.

If you don't have a go-kart, I would like a club house.

Love, Norman Plasse

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 23, 1965

Dear Santa,

How is Rudolph. Don't fly too fast. I like your ho ho ho! I want a dog for Christmas.

Love

Julie Lohr

The Desert Trail, Dec. 24, 1981

Dear Santa,

all I want for Christmas is Atari and Atari cartridges so I can play games. And I hope every one has a Merry Christmas and if you can I'd like a b-b gun.

Yours truly

Adam Caudle

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 24, 1982

Dear Santa

I want that train in the Cornet.

From Ferd Jansen

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 23, 1965

Dear Santa Claus:

This is what I want. A hush puppy and Mr. Ed the talking horse and a new bicycle, also Big Bruser, a milk truck and a rocking horse.

From,

Joey Lyneis

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 23, 1965

Dear Santa,

How are you at the North Pole? And at the top of the world. Is your sled in good shape? this is sane things I want a part-able am fm radio and a tv.

Sincerely yours

Michiel Suadner

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 24, 1982

Dear Santa Claus,

I want a dolly for Christmas if thats ok with you.

Jennifer D.

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 22, 1976

Dear Santa Claus,

I want a little teddy bear, my vary onw little taddy Bear.

Love, Jill

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 22, 1976

Dear Santa Claus,

How have you Ben Doing? I like toys very muth. I like Christmas too. I have Ben very nice to my mom and my dad. I want a cat and a dog. Thank you!

Love, Stephanie B

Hi-Desert Star, Dec. 22, 1976

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COURTESY PHOTO

Copper Mountain College Foundation President Brandon Burdett holds his People's Choice certificate for the Tree of Life wreath he created. Winning bidders for the wreath are Glen Harris, left, and Tom Snell, right.

Wreathed in glory

A bagpiper heralding the arrival of two cheesecakes. Stuffed bears, trains and bike-riding Santas. And glitter everywhere. The Festival of Wreaths Nov. 23 opened the holiday season with \$21,500 raised for the Copper Mountain College Foundation.

Over 100 people created wreaths and other holiday decorations and baked desserts to make the event possible, according to foundation Executive Director Sandy Smith.

"To have the funding to meet our students' needs whatever they may be is truly meaningful and I am so thankful to our foundation team, our donors and volunteers and all our guests," Smith said.

A wreath by Brandon Burdett, president of the CMC Foundation, broke all previous bidding records. "The Tree of Life," an illuminated metal fabrication, sold for \$6,000. Businesses, non-profits and individuals all donated wreaths for the live auction. Wreaths were decorated with handmade jewelry, hundreds of dollars in gift cards, antique toys, lottery cards and other extras.

"I hope the joy felt on Sunday carries our community through the coming year," Smith said.



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