Merry & Local

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A Season of Gratitude A Community of Giving

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Find purpose with Giving Tuesday

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CHRISTMAS PARADE & TREE LIGHTING – The East Tawas Business Association will be presenting the Miracle on Newman Street Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting in East Tawas, Saturday, November 28th; Christmas carols starting at 6 p.m. Join us for a fun filled evening which will include cookies and cocoa with Santa!

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A *Season of Gratitude*, A Community of Giving

By Gaylynn Brenoel



Beginning with Thanksgiving, followed by Giving Tuesday and Christmas, to everyday acts of kindness, Iosco County residents, businesses, and organizations make the holidays brighter for our neighbors in need.

Where there are families who are struggling to put food on their tables, parents worrying about providing Christmas gifts for their children, seniors who may be spending holidays alone, and individuals without stable housing, you will also find a community that comes together to help those in need.

During Thanksgiving holidays, you will find local churches, food pantries, and local organizations delivering holiday food baskets, turkey giveaways, and free thanksgiving meals for families in need.

Puff Oscoda also distributes turkeys in advance for Thanksgiving at their local store.

The Collective by Tawas Wellness is hosting a free Thanksgiving supper on Thursday, Nov. 26 from 1-3 p.m. and accepting optional donations to support future community events.

Hale American Legion Post 422 is providing a free Thanksgiving dinner on Thursday, Nov. 26 from 1-3 p.m. and will accept donations to use toward their Children's Community Christmas. Those needing delivery of the Thanksgiving meal can call Sandy at 989-305-2479 or Julie at 810-625-6846.

Giving Tuesday, December 1, 2026, is a worldwide movement dedicated to generosity, charitable giving, and community involvement. Created in 2012, Giving Tuesday encourages individuals, families, businesses, and organizations to support causes that make a difference in the lives of others. Financial contributions, volunteer service, or a simple act of kindness can have a lasting impact.

Throughout Iosco County, many organizations, businesses, and individuals work year-round to provide meaningful Thanksgiving and Christmas season giving.

Local American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and auxiliaries, Pay it Forward Oscoda, Quota of Iosco County, Oscoda Lions Club, Oscoda Rotary Club and the Tawas Area Rotary club provide special events for families in need.

Grace Community Church in Oscoda operates a food giveaway at the Oscoda High School each month.

Local events include Hand it To a Hero/Toys for Tots project by the Iosco County Sheriff's Office in coordination with the Tawas City Police Department, the East Tawas Police Department, Michigan State Police and Tawas City and East Tawas Fire Departments on Dec. 4 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Neiman's Market in Tawas City.

East Tawas Americal Legion Post 211 is featuring a Toys for Tots project through November and December. New toys can be dropped off at 900 E. Lincoln St.

Quota of Iosco County is working with Hope Shores Alliance to provide Christmas gifts for families in need. They also made and donated blankets in time for the holidays for various facilities, and donated money for local families needing medical items for children.

Holy Family Catholic Church of East Tawas is providing Thanksgiving baskets and a complete Thanksgiving meal for local families. Parishioners provide all the food through their food pantry. For Christmas, an Angel Tree will provide 100 Christmas gifts for local nursing home residents.

Tawas New Hope Church offers a Bountiful Harvest Food Distribution just prior to Thanksgiving and a Pop-Up Food Pantry on Dec. 12. The church also operates as the Iosco County drop off location for Operation Christmas Child, which sends gift-filled shoeboxes around the world.

On Dec. 12 from 2-4 p.m. children can enjoy decorating cookies with Santa and have photos with Santa at the Oscoda VFW Post 3735.

Lunch with Santa and gifts from Santa is scheduled for Dec. 12 at the Oscoda American Legion Post 274 in conjunction with Pay It Forward Oscoda.

A free Breakfast and a wrapped gift from Santa at the Hale American Legion Post 422 will be held on Dec. 19 from 9 a.m. until noon. Parents can call the Legion with the name and age of a child to receive a gift.

The Tawas Area Rotary club has partnered with Tawas Wellness Warriors and WE Kids to provide a pancake breakfast, story time, and gifts for kids on Dec. 12 from 8 a.m. until noon at The Collective.

Sacred Heart Church in Oscoda is adopting 10 families for Thanksgiving dinners.

The Oscoda United Methodist Church provides a Thanksgiving meal plus their Loaves and Fishes program that offers lunch on Mondays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. which starts after Thanksgiving and continues through mid-April. The Oscoda United Methodist Church also operates a year-round food pantry open three days per week.

For those looking for a meaningful way to give thanks and give back, consider contacting a local nonprofit, church, charitable organization, or community service group to learn how a donation of time, money or needed supplies can touch lives in profound ways.

No act of kindness is too small, and together, we can help make this holiday season a little brighter for those who need it most.





Exterior decorating safety tips

Decorating the exterior of a home for the holiday season is a beloved tradition in countless households. In the movie "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," Clark Griswold had "250 strands of imported Italian twinkle lights," each with 100 bulbs per strand. His grand total of 25,000 lights caused a temporary blackout. While driving around to take in holiday lighting displays, many people may see some that emulate Clark Griswold's vision and be inspired to create their own designs.

Lights are just one type of home decoration. Wreaths, inflatables, metal or wooden structures, and much more are part of holiday displays as well. While decorating can be fun and festive, it's also important to ensure that it is done safely. The following tips, courtesy of Travelers Risk Consultants and Meyer Landscaping & Design, can keep family and friends safe during this wonderful time of year.

• **Plan ahead.** Determine how many electrical outlets you have and plan the display around the accessibility of those outlets. Be sure to calculate the maximum amount of wattage allowed so you do not overload the electrical system. Never exceed the maximum number of strings or devices that may be linked together. Lighting packaging should provide such information. Also, plug all outdoor lights and decorations into ground-fault circuit interrupters to reduce the risk of electric shock.

• **Test the lights.** Only purchase lights that have been tested for safety. Look for a certification mark from UL, ETL, CSA, or another nationally recognized laboratory.

• **Go with LED.** Light emitting diode string lights run cooler, last longer and use less energy than incandescent lights.

• **Inspect decorations.** Make sure all the lights, electrical cords, lighted holiday decor, and inflatables are in good condition before use. Dispose of anything that has frayed wiring or is broken.

• **Use only outdoor-rated products.** Be sure the extension cords and any other products are rated for the outdoors. Electrical connections should be kept clean and dry before plugging things in, and an extra step of wrapping plug connections with electrical tape can further reduce moisture.

• **Practice ladder safety.** Ladders are often utilized when adding lights or other decor to homes. Always be safe on and around ladders. It's essential to maintain three points of contact while on the ladder. Don't risk leaning too hard to one side while on the ladder, and always have a spotter. Use wooden or fiberglass ladders when stringing electrical decor and lights, as metal ladders conduct electricity.

• **Identify where power lines are located.** Be mindful of power lines when decorating outdoors. Keep oneself and decorations at least 10 feet away from power lines.



BRANHAM'S JEWELRY – The experienced staff at Branham's Jewelry are available to assist you in selecting an exquisite gift for that special someone on your shopping list. Engagement and wedding rings, fine jewelry, estate jewelry, Swarovski crystals, and watches are just some of the gift options from which to choose. - *Courtesy Photo*

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Great *Christmas stories* for children

December is filled with opportunities to make magical memories, particularly for families with young children. Christmas commands a lot of thought and attention, and parents know such efforts are worth it to see smiles on children's faces. Stories help set the holiday scene and enable children to hold tight to all of the magic. Whether they are read together as a family or children read them on their own, these literary works can enhance special holiday moments.

• **"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry:** This story tells the tale of a young married couple who have to sacrifice in order to buy Christmas presents for one another.

• **"A Christmas Carol," by Charles Dickens:** No Christmas season would be complete without reading (or watching) "A Christmas Carol." When three ghosts visit Ebenezer Scrooge, he learns an important lesson about charity, friends and family.

• **"The Berenstain Bears Meet Santa Bear: A Christmas Book for Kids" by Stan and Jan Berenstain:** Kids of all generations have grown up reading Berenstain Bears books. This volume has Mama and Papa showing Sister and Brother that the true meaning of the holiday is about giving.

• **"Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree" by Robert Barry:** When Mr. Willowby's tree arrives for Christmas, it is too tall for his parlor. He must cut off the top so it will fit, and that top is passed along again and again to spread holiday cheer.

• **"The Greatest Gift" by Philip Van Doren Stern:** Written in 1943, this story is about a man named George who is contemplating his life while standing on a bridge on Christmas Eve. This tale became the basis for the classic film, "It's a Wonderful Life."

• **"How the Grinch Stole Christmas" by Dr. Seuss:** Famed children's writer Dr. Seuss was a master of imbuing life lessons in his stories and this book is no different. Isolated and angry, the Grinch learns to appreciate his neighbors in Whoville and comes to realize that Christmas is about being with loved ones and not material gifts.

• **Gospels of Matthew (1 and 2) and Luke (1 and 2):** Families can read about the birth of Jesus Christ, whose birth is primarily narrated in these passages. Matthew focuses on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, while Luke speaks to the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary, Christ's birth and visits from shepherds.



THE HOLLYHOCK EMPORIUM - The Hollyhock Emporium — Monica, Moira, and Jen welcome you to explore a curated selection of merchandise perfect for the holidays or any day. Whether you're searching for a festive outfit or a one-of-a-kind gift, you'll find it here. The shop offers apparel in sizes XS–3X, along with shoes, handbags, jewelry, and Michigan-made nail polish. You'll also discover locally crafted artisan goods, including décor, skincare, and other distinctive items. The friendly staff is always ready to help you choose a thoughtful gift or assemble an outfit for any occasion. - *Photo by Penny Essary*

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116 Newman St., East Tawas
989-362-3437

Keep holiday feasts *fresh, festive and safe*

The holiday season transforms ordinary homes into bustling abodes, with kitchens typically serving as command centers. From Thanksgiving roast turkeys to appetizer spreads for New Year's Eve celebrations, holiday entertaining involves lots of shared meals. Seasoned cooks as well as novice hosts may be testing their skills with larger headcounts and complex recipes. However, these factors, plus refrigerators crowded with food, can heighten the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Food safety experts at the U.S. Department of Agriculture advise that a few essential habits during the prep phase can mean the difference between an entertaining holiday experience and an unintended trip to urgent care.

• **Plan ahead.** Food safety starts well before the first pot or pan is set to cook. The most common holiday mistake is improper thawing of frozen food, particularly when serving large cuts of meat like roast beef or turkey. People mistakenly think leaving frozen meat on the counter to defrost is a smart idea. But the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service says counter thawing puts the food in the "danger zone" (when temperatures fall between 40 F and 140 F), where bacteria can multiply rapidly. Meat always should be thawed in the refrigerator, allowing around 24 hours per every five pounds. Cooks also can use a cold water bath, changing the water every half hour.

• **Prevent cross-contamination.** Multiple courses means preparing various foods. It's essential to keep foods that will be served uncooked separate from raw meats and seafood. Produce, bread and fruit should be prepared on separate cutting boards from other items. People should wash their hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling raw ingredients, advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

• **Use a food thermometer.** Gauging when to take food out of the oven by color or cooking time is not a reliable measure. Instead, every home cook should have a food thermometer at the ready. Digital thermometers even can be set to alert when the desired internal temperature is reached. Health organizations say that the key temperature targets for foods include:

- Poultry: 165°F
- Ground meats: 160°F
- Pork, beef, lamb roasts and steaks: 145°F (followed by a 3-minute minimum rest)

When cooking turkey with stuffing inside the bird, the stuffing also should reach a temperature of 165°F, as it has come into contact with the turkey's raw juices.

Prioritizing food prep safety means gathering and feeding loved ones safely during the holidays.



BLUE BEAR JEWELRY – Natalie and her wonderful associates would love to assist you in selecting the perfect jewelry or accessory for those special people on your holiday gift list. When at Blue Bear remember to “Treat Yourself You Deserve It.” - *Courtesy Photo*



COLE’S APPLIANCE - Cole’s Appliance - Check out the expanded Clearance Center at Cole’s Appliance full of factory blemish and scratch and dent models. Save an additional 10% off already marked down prices until December 2nd. - *Photo by Alex Cole*



TOYS FOR TOTS DONATIONS AT DEAN ARBOUR FORD & CHEVROLET - Our Toys For Tots campaign is underway and we need YOUR help!! Gifts for children of all ages needed. Please drop off donations to: 55 W. M-55, Tawas City, MI 48763 and 1859 US-23, East Tawas, MI 48730. If you’re an online shopper and wish to donate feel free to ship gifts right to the dealership. Donations accepted until December 9! - *Courtesy Photo*

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Find purpose with *Giving Tuesday*



Giving gifts is a big part of the holiday season. By Thanksgiving, many people already have been prepping their lists and preparing a game plan to tackle all of their shopping tasks.

Amid the frenzy of checkout lines and digital deals stands an event that is a stark contrast to the consumerism of the season. GivingTuesday is focused on kindness, community and making an impact.

According to the Third Avenue Charitable Organization, GivingTuesday is celebrated annually on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. It is a global day of generosity that encourages individuals and organizations around the world to give back to causes they care about. The movement was created in 2012 by the 92nd Street Y and the United National Foundation in New York City. GivingTuesday was imagined as a counterweight to the commercial rush of Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

At the heart of GivingTuesday is a focus on doing good for an entire day. *GivingTuesday.org* says the phenomenon has now spread around the world. Today it operates as an independent, open-source organization spanning more than 100 countries. GivingTuesday has helped to raise more than $18 billion for nonprofits and charitable programs worldwide.

Individuals can participate in GivingTuesday through any act of generosity. Financial donations play a key role, but giving can come in many forms. Individuals can opt to volunteer time, skills or labor; donate food, clothing or supplies; and/or engage in acts of everyday kindness like helping a neighbor or visiting someone at risk of social isolation.

GivingTuesday is a breath of fresh air during a season that is often marked by excess and consumerism. Giving back to others and being intentional with a shared purpose can unite diverse groups this time of year.



KATHY'S JANES' BOUTIQUE– Your destination for distinctive gifts and stylish finds. Explore our collection of ladies' sportswear, accessories, handbags, and jewelry. We're delighted to help you discover the perfect holiday gift—and every gift purchase leaves beautifully wrapped. - *Photo by Penny Essary*









Why supporting *Local Small Businesses* matters

The holiday season is a time of year when shopping takes center stage. While online giants and big box retailers seem to be everywhere, offering an endless array of products with the convenience of low prices, small businesses provide a range of benefits that go far beyond the ease of a mouse click or mountains of merchandise. Shopping local retailers is more than just a transaction - it is crucial for maintaining the economic foundation of local communities. Let's take a look at the many ways it pays to shop small businesses during the holidays and all year long.

• **Strengthen the local economy:** A large percentage of the money spent at small businesses stays in the community. That's because these businesses often are owned and operated by local residents who are invested in the community themselves. Various studies indicate that for every $100 spent at a small business, roughly $70 stays in the community.

• **Enhanced customer service:** Owners and employees of small businesses have a keen interest in keeping customers happy. They often do so by providing superior customer service. Tailoring recommendations, exhibiting a willingness to accommodate special requests, offering a more engaging shopping experience, and being more friendly and connected with regular customers sets many small businesses apart.

• **Support the community:** Small businesses serve the community through the products and services they offer, and many give back in other ways as well. Small, locally owned businesses often sponsor schools, sports teams and charities. This helps foster a sense of belonging in the community.

• **Innovative offerings:** Small businesses are not beholden to corporate policies or franchise restrictions, so they can more readily bring new life to existing ideas and trends. Small businesses can offer customers different options that larger retailers cannot match.

• **Job creation:** Small businesses employ a significant percentage of the workforce and frequently provide jobs that might not be available in larger corporate settings. The U.S. Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy says small businesses have generated 12.9 million net new jobs over the past 25 years, accounting for two out of every three jobs added to the U.S. economy. Keeping residents working helps strengthen local communities.

There are numerous benefits to shopping at small businesses this Small Business Saturday and throughout the year. Such firms help to establish a more resilient, diverse and bustling local community.



NATURAL REFLECTIONS FLOORING & DESIGN CENTER – The design center has lovely home décor, drapery/blinds, lamps, gifts and so much more. Stop in and get your home holiday ready or find the perfect gift for someone special on your list. They sell and professionally install carpet, hardwood, luxury vinyl plank, and laminate flooring. Saturday Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive 11a.m. – 1p.m. Bring the kids for cookies, hot cocoa and goody bags. *Photo by Penny Essary*



ONYX TATTOO – Your holiday destination for fresh ink and standout piercings. Whether you want to treat yourself or give someone a meaningful gift, the skilled and welcoming team provides high-quality tattoos and piercings with exceptional attention to detail and a spotless studio environment. Book an appointment or snag a gift certificate — with an unbeatable gift-certificate deal running this weekend. *Photo by Penny Essary*



HALE HARDWARE - Your Holiday Headquarters. Stop by the Gift Center for unique gifts and seasonal décor that brighten any home. From furniture and appliances to kitchen must-haves and stylish home accents, you'll find something for everyone. And for the DIY lovers, shop top brands like Milwaukee, Stihl, and Husqvarna. Our helpful team is here to make your holiday shopping—and your home projects—easy. - *Photo by Penny Essary*







Seasonal touches to add a festive vibe when hosting family

The holiday season is a festive time of year. That fun and loose atmosphere is fostered by gatherings with family and friends. In many households, holiday gatherings have become something akin to family reunions due to relatives living apart from parents and adult siblings. In fact, a 2020 study published in the Journal of Marriage and Family found that only one in three adults had all parents or adult children living within 30 miles.

The infrequency of gatherings where all family members are in attendance can make holiday season get-togethers especially significant. And that can inspire holiday hosts to want to do everything possible to ensure all of their guests' needs are covered and everyone enjoys themselves during this special and unique time of year. When hosting a family get-together this holiday season, hosts can keep these items in mind to set a festive vibe in their homes.

• **Decorative tableware:** Holiday-themed plates, cloth napkins, place settings, centerpieces, tablecloth, and additional tableware can be a nice seasonal touch when sitting down to break bread with family members.

• **Decorative kitchenware:** Baking is a popular holiday season tradition in many households. Decorative cutting boards, mixing bowls and additional baking tools can be great for hosts who plan to incorporate family baking sessions into the festivities.

• **Fresh-cut decor:** The scent of evergreen instantly calls the holiday season to mind. Fresh-cut decorative items like a homemade centerpiece, homemade wreath or a natural Christmas tree can make for a nice touch.

• **Seasonal linens:** The festive atmosphere can even be emphasized in restrooms, where decorative hand towels can add a touch of seasonal flare.

• **Decorative pillows:** Throw pillows are used to establish a color scheme and atmosphere inside a living space, and hosts can keep this going by placing seasonal throw pillows and blankets out throughout the holiday season.

• **Welcome mats:** A holiday-themed welcome mat at the front door and inside the mud room can immediately establish a festive and welcoming vibe.

• **Homemade crafts:** Hosts who also happen to be parents of young children can display some homemade holiday crafts around the house. Such crafts may spark fond memories among older guests with grown children of their own while helping to establish a relaxed and festive atmosphere.

Some seasonal touches around a home can bring a lot to the table when hosting loved ones during the holiday season.



TAWAS HARDWARE - Give the gift of the great outdoors this Christmas! Stop in and check out our Sporting Goods Department. *- Photo by Jamie Peterman*



Stocking stuffers: Treasures for everyone on your list

Larger gifts under the tree may command much of the glory, but stockings often are a delightful part of Christmas morning magic. Unwrapping small, thoughtful surprises can lend a unique sense of festivity to the holiday season. The secret to filling a stocking isn't to pack it with cheap trinkets. Instead, it's finding compact, functional items tailored to everyone on a holiday shopping list.

According to a survey by Thrive Causemetics®, people prefer cash, gift cards, or food as holiday gifts. Makeup and routine skin care essentials also featured prominently on stocking wish lists. Surprisingly, 44 percent of respondents said they stuff their own stockings each year.

When it comes to finding the best stocking stuffers, the following curated guide for people from all walks of life can serve as a useful resource.

Foods and beverages

Edible gifts and kitchen tools are a hit because they can be used immediately and don't take up a lot of room. Some ideas for stockings include miniature bottles of artisanal sauces, specialty sea salts or festive hot cocoa powders or bombs. A sleek handheld milk frother is a great stocking stuffer for someone who enjoys drinks like lattes or cappuccinos. High-end chocolate bars or local honey jars also are great for festive foodies.

Self-care

Small wellness products can turn winter days into cozy, spa-like experiences. Skincare products like rich hand creams, lip balms or sheet masks can amplify the possibility of pampering. Aromatic shower steamers or hydrating bath oils make bath and shower time luxurious. Additional self-care options include silk eye masks or soft socks for lounging around.

Tech

Technology is an important part of daily life. Compact tech and utility gadgets can make life move along more smoothly. No one can have enough charging cables to ensure devices are at full battery power. In addition, small power banks and cable organizers will round out all charging needs. Determine if gift recipients can use compact multi-tools, Bluetooth tags or pocket-sized flashlights. Each of these ideas meets the needs of a wide array of people.

Kids' play

Kids can stay engaged with small items that fill their stockings and place an emphasis on hands-on fun. Creative tools like markers, mini modeling clay sets or sticker books will fuel hours of imaginative pursuits. Interactive fun comes by way of bath crayons, fidget toys or even travel-sized card games.

Stockings are the cherry on top of holiday giving. Small treats can be just as meaningful and appreciated as larger items found under the tree.



CRYSTALS & RINGS & ALL KINDS OF HERBAL THINGS - Discover an incredible variety of merchandise, from jewelry and crystals to healing herbs and unique wellness items. There are also books, gift items and so much more. Explore a wide range of health rejuvenating services including Reiki, Energy Healing, and Foot Detox. The knowledgeable staff will assist you in finding just the right item. *Courtesy Photo*



Unique ways to present *Holiday Gifts*



Shopping is a big part of the holiday season. Long hours are spent scouring stores and online retailers to locate the perfect gifts for loved ones. But before those gifts are given, dressing them up with beautiful and meaningful wrapping sets the tone. Glossy, store-bought wrapping paper certainly gets the job done. However, putting a little extra thought into how a gift is wrapped can elevate the entire gifting experience.

Here are some unique ways to present holiday gifts this year and add a personal, more visually appealing touch.

Fabric wrapping
Furoshiki is the traditional practice of using square pieces of fabric to wrap and transport goods, according to Musubi Kiln®. The practice originated in Japan and completely eliminates the need for tape, scissors and single-use wrapping paper. While there is traditional furoshiki cloth, a silk scarf, tea towel, or another piece of fabric also will fit the bill. The technique usually involves placing the gift in the center of the fabric diagonally, folding the opposite corners over the item, and then tying the remaining corners into a secure knot. The fabric wrap also can serve as a secondary gift that recipients can reuse.

Kraft paper
Gift givers can rely on plain, brown kraft paper for gifts. Not only is it inexpensive and recyclable, it serves as a blank canvas for one's own creative ideas. The secret to prevent it from looking like a basic shipped package is to add some embellishments, such as stamped designs or accessories. Baker's twine or natural jute tied around with fresh pine sprigs or cinnamon sticks gives the gift a rustic aesthetic.

Mason jars
Those gifting homemade treats, like small cookies, hot cocoa mix, or small spa items, can skip the traditional gift box entirely. Glass mason jars turn the gift inside into a display. To make a mason jar even more festive, gift-givers should focus on the lid and the neck of the jar. Ribbon or twine and a custom label on the lid are some extra memorable touches.

Nesting boxes
For high-value items, small gifts or even gift cards, nesting boxes will make a small production out of seeing what's inside. Purchase several boxes of various sizes that can fit inside one another. Wrap ribbon around the last box and watch the recipient get a laugh opening box after box until reaching the final gift.

Scavenger hunt
For a completely no-wrap option, gift givers can provide a recipient with instructions for solving where a gift is hidden in the room or the entire home. Offer a starting clue that brings the person to the first location and the next clue, building on clues until the gift is finally discovered.

A new approach to wrapping gifts can make gift giving even more unique and special.



LR BOUTIQUE - Small-town boutique with endless style for every generation. Creative classics, fresh trends & feel-good fashion that flatters XS-2X. Complete your look with shoes, boots, jewelry, and accessories, or explore thoughtful gifts for any occasion. Their friendly team will help you find a look you love—or the perfect present. - *Courtesy Photo*



Toast to a new year with this Strawberry Champagne Cocktail



`Tis the season for toasting. New Year's Eve celebrations tend to be raucous, and it's not uncommon to hoist a glass in the air when ushering in a new year at the stroke of midnight.

Revelers looking to add a little extra flavor to their New Year's toast can consider this recipe for a "Strawberry Champagne Cocktail" courtesy of Lines+Angles.

Strawberry Champagne Cocktail
Makes 1 serving
1 strawberry
1 wooden skewer
1 small egg white
13/4 ounces gin
1/2 ounce strawberry liqueur
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon simple syrup
Chilled champagne or sparkling wine

1. Remove top from strawberry with a paring knife. Thread strawberry onto a wooden skewer.

2. Combine egg white, gin, strawberry liqueur, lemon juice, and simple syrup in a cocktail shaker. Cover and shake vigorously until outside of shaker is frosty, about 30 seconds.

3. Fine-strain into a chilled champagne coupe and top up with chilled champagne. Garnish with prepared strawberry skewer across rim of glass.



JOHNSON AUTO SUPPLY, INC. - May your holidays run as smoothly as a freshly tuned engine. Merry Christmas from our crew to yours! - *Photo by Jamie Peterman*







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5 fun *gift exchange* ideas

Gift-giving is a significant component of the holiday season. Families can embrace traditional gift-giving, but those who want to add a touch of whimsy to gatherings with loved ones can consider these five creative and fun ways to exchange gifts.

1. Play the plastic wrap game. To exchange small stocking stuffer gifts, compile gift cards, cash, small toys, candy, and even some larger gifts (all participants can chip in and one person shops for the gifts). The designated person in charge begins rolling up the gifts in the plastic, adding one every few rolls. Turning the ball 90 degrees while wrapping helps make a more round, finished gift ball. To play, the person with the ball puts on oven mitts and tries to unwrap as much as they can to access the gifts, while the person to the left is attempting to roll doubles on dice. When doubles are made, that person passes the dice to the left and starts his or her own attempts to get at the gifts in the plastic ball. The game ends when all the gifts are revealed, whether everyone has had a chance to unwrap or not.

2. Plan a white elephant gift exchange. A white elephant exchange is like a secret grab bag. Everyone brings a wrapped gift, and then takes turns choosing a gift based on the number they've been given. When the gift is chosen, the person opens it. The next player can select a fresh gift or steal one of the presents that's already been opened.

3. Host a make-and-take craft party. With this type of exchange, participants will engage in some form of crafting for the duration of the event, whether it'spottery, painting, epoxy resin pouring, or even knit crafts. At the end of the night everyone can swap their creations with another or keep their own crafts as gifts.

4. Give the gift of a group outing. Instead of exchanging material gifts, focus on sharing experiences with friends and family. A trip to watch a sports game or a theater performance can be an excellent way to spend time together, and something a person may not be inclined to do on his or her own. Certain venues will offer discounts on group tickets, so everyone can pool their resources.

5. Host a DIY cookie and cocoa exchange. Cookies, cocoa and the holidays are a perfect combination. A gift exchange where participants supply ingredients for these sweet treats, share their favorite recipes and then put together the finished products can make for an entertaining and festive afternoon. Each person can fill a cookie tin with baked cookies to take home and mason jars filled with homemade hot cocoa mix and marshmallows can be an additional gift to enjoy later on a chilly evening.

There are plenty of fun ways to exchange gifts during the holiday season.



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VILLAGE CHOCOLATIER – Allen and Jasmine Tubbs are caught in the act with Santa's helpers, Makayla, Rosemary, Sydney, Amy, and Mercedes, making their traditional Christmas chocolate wreaths. Come in and order yours now for the Christmas season. *– Photo by Jamie Peterman*

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Upcycle boxes to make a *gingerbread village*

Building gingerbread houses is a holiday tradition in many classrooms and households. But as any adult enlisted to help out with the project can attest, constructing gingerbread creations tends to be a messy business. Kids and counters are covered in sticky icing, candy rolls onto the floor, and unless the builders are especially adept, many gingerbread homes topple over before they can be appreciated. Plus, the recipes to create strong gingerbread for building tend to be dense and less palatable than others, meaning kids are not likely to munch on the gingerbread after the thrill of building is over.

Children can recreate the appeal of making gingerbread houses by turning to non-edible materials. Chances are most homes have plenty of shipping boxes and other cardboard around this time of year, especially since online shopping is so prolific. These boxes - with a few extra materials - can be transformed into entire gingerbread villages.

Collect the materials
Kids can begin by gathering the necessary materials. Depending on the desired size of the finished project, boxes can be small, like those that contain tea, hot cocoa or cereal, or larger shipping boxes can be utilized for more ambitious undertakings. Scraps of wrapping paper, postal paper, construction paper, colored markers, crayons, washable paints, and additional decorative materials also can be gathered.

Cut house panels
For thicker cardboard, adults may need to use a craft or utility knife to score through the cardboard and get kids started. Prepare gingerbread house "walls" and triangular portions that can be used to make roofs. Kids may be able to cut through thinner boxes with their own safety scissors.

Design and build
Before they are stuck together, children can be encouraged to decorate their gingerbread homes by drawing, painting or gluing items on, or adding whatever embellishments they desire onto the cardboard panels. Once ready to go, the house can be constructed by using masking tape to attach the corners of walls and roof pieces together. Painters tape is another option, as it is less sticky, and can be removed and repositioned more easily if a mistake happens.

Display and play
Children can take pride in displaying their homemade gingerbread villages among the rest of the holiday decor. Kids can use their imaginations and create stories and other play using their cardboard gingerbread houses as the backdrop. When the holiday season is over, the cardboard can be recycled and ideas for a new batch of gingerbread village creations can take root.

Upcycling cardboard boxes into materials to build gingerbread-style homes is a way to foster creativity among kids and add to the holiday magic.



GARDNER WHITE - From Festive morning gift exchanges to late-night cocoa, our plush seating options bring everyone closer together. - *Photo by Jamie Peterman*

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Thinking *outside-the-box* for kids' gifts

Children may look forward to the holiday season more than most people. The holiday season is an opportunity for kids to tear open wrapping paper and see the amazing gifts they've received this year.

Although toys and games are typical gifts for children, there are many other items that go beyond these staples to make for unique and creative gifts that can spark imagination or boost physical activity. Shoppers can consider these outside-the-box gift ideas when shopping for youngsters this holiday season.

• **3D pen or printer:** Kids can design and build amazing objects that encourage them to employ their creative side.

• **Soap-making kit:** These skits spur creative endeavors and ultimately produce useful finished results. Soap or perfume kits are great for hands-on sensory learning. Such gifts also teach some components of science and math by requiring users to follow the recipe.

• **Robot-building kits:** Take building kits one step further with items that can move. Robot kits combine play with engineering basics.

• **Interactive books:** Children can solve puzzles or make choices to move the story along. These types of books may even appeal to the most hesitant readers.

• **Bug collection kits:** Budding entomologists can observe insects close up, and then release them back into the wild.

• **Greenhouse, terrarium or bonsai tree kit:** Put together the materials needed for kids to grow something special. They can nurture the plant along the way.

• **Dress up trunk:** Fill a box or a trunk with various dress-up costumes and accessories and let children's imaginations run wild. This will spur hours of imaginative play and crazy combinations of clothing.

• **Geocaching app:** Let kids find objects hidden all over their neighborhoods in real-world outdoor treasure hunts. Geocaching utilizes GPS coordinates to find hidden containers, called geocaches, placed there by other players.

• **Various craft supplies:** Let kids create any and all of their fun ideas by compiling a kit full of various craft supplies. From beads to wooden letters to paints to paper, there are plenty of items to be made.

• **Hiking attire:** Get kids out into nature by supplying the gear needed to take to the trails.

• **Adopt a star or planet:** Children can adopt and name a star or planet and get a certificate honoring the event.

• **Time capsule:** Let children store favorite items tucked away for safe keeping, where they'll remain until unveiled in the future.

Parents and other holiday shoppers can think creatively when it comes time to choose gifts for children.



CHICK'N DOTS - A charming children's boutique filled with clothing, shoes, toys, books, furniture, bedding, and more—everything to delight the little ones in your life. Browse our holiday must-have gifts and bring a little extra magic to the season. *Photo by Laken Buchanan*



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