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Holiday Style

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Forbes

Full page interview
feature - October 2010

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from THE PUBLISHER



I DON'T CARE WHAT MY husband says, I am NOT a foot-stomping, Mt. Crumpet-climbing, stinky-souled, cantankerous recluse who hates Christmas!

Or am I? I do wear quite the sour, Grinchy frown while I'm doing all the driving, shopping, decorating, wrapping, cooking, more driving, eating, drinking, unwrapping, cleaning, and undecorating that the holiday season entails. And I may have, on more than one occasion, threatened to cancel Christmas if my family didn't stop driving me crazy with their holiday-inspired rambunctiousness and all their *noise, noise, noise!* So maybe my husband is right (please don't tell him I said that).

But if I may, I'd like to speak a bit in defense of my green curmudgeony counterpart. Don't you think the narrator of his tale was a bit judgmental? After all, he did make up a three-minute song—the sole purpose of which is to tell us how vile and heinous the Grinch is. The thing is, though, we never really know what's going on in someone's life that's causing them to behave badly. The Grinch is dealing with shoes that are too small, some sort of physical ailment related to how his head is attached to his body, and a heart condition—that's enough to make even the most congenial among us a bit grouchy. What if, instead of assuming the worst about the Grinch's character, the narrator had extended a hand of friendship? Granted, the story might not have been nearly as intriguing without the dive into debauchery and thievery, but it certainly would have made a good example of how hearts can be touched, and more importantly, changed, by kindness and compassion.

Speaking of a change of heart, that brings me to my next point of defense for the Grinch. Maybe he wasn't a villain at all. Perhaps, he was just desperately in need of a metaphorical heart transplant. He may have been grinchy and rotten and embittered, but in the end, he did open his heart to the mercy and help and grace that were available to him through the birth of our Savior. That was an eternal gift that even the Grinch was unable to resist.

So being a Grinch is not really a bad thing at all—he opened his heart, he learned, and he grew to love. Certainly, my nasty-wasty transgressions extend beyond a little anxiety over the holiday hoopla. There have been times when I have been quite selfish, fearful, and, yes, angry ... regrettably so ... but I do hope like my green Grinchy friend that I experience a true transformation and accept the grace that is available to me. Mostly I want that so I can keep the true meaning of Christmas joyfully in my heart all year long. But also, I want that so the next time my husband tells me I'm just like the Grinch I can respond, "*Thank you! That is so sweet of you to say!*"



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PUBLISHER

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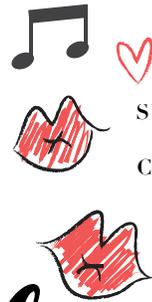
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merry christmas from
LAKE NORMAN WOMAN!



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'Tis the Season!

By: Starr Miller



I am amused every year when I hear that Christmas is showing up earlier and earlier. Why? Because way, way back in the beginning of my career (the 80s), I used to work for Macy's as an assistant store manager. Under my purview was the holiday department full of beautifully decorated trees, shiny ornaments, overflowing baskets, ribbons galore, and carols playing. And we set up every year by September 17!

Why does this happen?

- 1 The amount of product that comes in for the holiday selling season is massive. To make sure that it has a chance to sell completely through, the stores need to get it out on the floor as soon as possible.
- 2 This product comes in from overseas, therefore, the buyers bring in the merchandise early enough to get it to the stores before the trucking companies get too busy and may run the risk of delivering the shipments to the stores too late. This merchandise cannot be returned to the manufacturers if it does not sell.

Why don't the stores just hold in the back until after Thanksgiving?

- 1 It takes weeks to actually set up a store.
- 2 The stockrooms are very small.
- 3 During the 80s we used to pre-wrap gifts. I had a team of people in the stairwells from 10 different departments wrapping thousands of gift items to put on the floor for the customers to just pick up and go.



Starr Miller is the president and principal designer at StarrMiller Interior Design, Inc. Contact her at 704.896.3321 or visit www.starrmiller.com.

What did I learn about Christmas décor during this time?



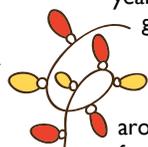
To hang lights on a tree, the best way is to start at the top and work your way down, wrapping each limb from the trunk to the end and back to the trunk. (Or even better, buy a pre-lit tree!)

When placing an ornament on a tree that has a ribbon or cord, hang the ornament and then wrap the cord around the limb until the ornament is snuggled up to the limb.



Place ornaments deep into the tree as well as on the outer tips of the limbs as this adds dimension.

Pick a theme. A two-color scheme has great impact. I personally have collected mostly crystal and white ornaments through the years so that I can change the color scheme each year with ribbon or additional greenery.



Buy a remote or timer for your lights; do not crawl around under your tree looking for the plug, it ruins the hairdo.

For a real tree, buy a great stand that clamps in the tree or slips into the tree trunk. The type our

parents used were horrible and the tree was never straight. The place where you buy your tree (I highly recommend Old Store Produce in Huntersville) will help you with ease of setup.



If you are talented, make your own bows. If not, buy premade and be sure to fluff them up when placing them on your tree, wreath, mantel, or staircase.

If you want an easier setup, forget the tree and simply place fresh wreaths on all of your windows inside and out. This way you get the greenery and the fresh smell with very little work.



Make holiday decorating an event. Play music, make cocoa, put on Rudolph antlers, and sing along.

If it is not perfect, so be it. This is the season to celebrate. There have been years where we did not set up a thing. That was okay. We needed a break. Do what you can, breathe, and *Jingle On!*

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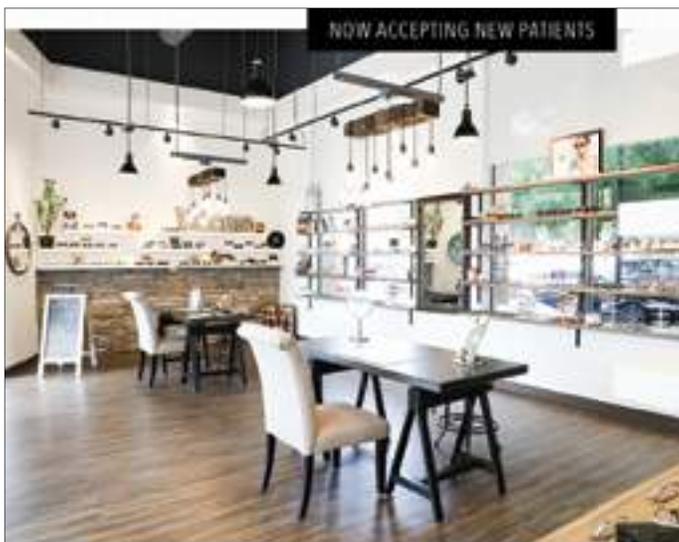


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➔ **ON WHAT INSPIRED YOU:** My mother's close friend married into the funeral service industry, and I remember her making jokes about going to work at the funeral home. When it was time to make a career choice, I decided to shadow her at the funeral home. From there, I wanted this to be my path. During this time, I lost my best friend in a car accident, and my grandfather not long afterward. I was able to witness first-hand the funeral process, and it created an even stronger drive to become a funeral director so that I could walk others through the process.

➔ **ON FAMILY LIFE:** After moving here from Fort Walton Beach, Florida, to work for a firm providing burial insurance, I met the Kepners, and after seven months, ended up moving back to Florida. I kept in touch with them, and when one of their staff retired, they offered me a full-time job working for their funeral home. Shortly after returning to North Carolina, their son Jonathan and I started dating; we were engaged two years later. We married on September 2, 2018, and currently live in Huntersville.

➔ **ON PASSIONS:** I love to travel! I have been to Greece, Paris, Mexico, and St. Lucia. My favorite by far is Santorini, Greece. I also love animals – they bring so much joy into my life. I have a 13-year-old toy poodle named Riley, and Jonathan and I are trying to adopt another animal into our family. When it's time to unwind, I like to enjoy a nice glass of wine, go to a yoga class, visit local farmers' markets, breweries, local festivals, or try new restaurants. The days I enjoy most are spent on the lake. We try to go out often and enjoy the beautiful sunsets.

➔ **ON TACKLING OBSTACLES:** From the time I was 18, I decided to move out, buy my own car, and become independent. I had to learn to become self-sufficient and responsible very quickly. I have always had a job from the time I was 15 years old, and that truly made me understand and appreciate the value of work and making my own money. Prayer keeps me going and motivated. When faced with a bad day, I tell myself that there is always tomorrow, and that I can turn to a new page and start fresh once again.

Lindsey B. Kepner is a licensed funeral director with Raymer-Kepner Funeral Home & Cremation Services, located at 16901 Old Statesville Road in Huntersville. She is also a licensed life insurance salesperson. You may contact Lindsey at 704.892.9669 or visit www.raymerfh.com.

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+ EAT SMALL AMOUNTS.

Portion control is key so use a small plate, choose wisely, and eat slowly. Also, don't starve yourself thinking you're saving calories for the "good stuff." This actually accomplishes the opposite and you can end up overeating.

+ HAVE DAILY WEIGH-INS.

Weigh yourself twice a day instead of once. It may be painful but it will help you face your realities and perhaps keep you from that extra piece of cake.

+ BE MINDFUL OF HOLIDAY SPIRITS.

It's also easy to indulge in festive alcoholic drinks over the holidays but be wary of these "evil" spirits. Not only does the alcohol add calories but often the mixers and ingredients carry their own load of sugars!

+ TAKE IT OR SEND IT.

If you are going to an event, take a healthy dish with you. If you are hosting an event, send your guests home with leftovers. You can even purchase colored cellophane wrap so a leftover plate of cookies turns into a thoughtful gift.

+ HYDRATE, HYDRATE, HYDRATE!

No matter how you slice it, water is nothing but positive. Not only will it help you feel full, but it is necessary to combat all the high-sodium foods indicative of a holiday feast.

cakes and candies and pies,
OH MY!

WITH THE HOLIDAYS UPON US, we have to get everything in check — including our weight! While our homes are decorated with tinsel and lights, our tables are decorated with pies and cakes. We all know what we're supposed to do, but here are some reminders so we don't lose our waistline or our sanity!

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holiday traditions from around the globe

WITH VARYING NAMES and customs, cultures from around the world take time to celebrate this time of year. So whether you're celebrating Sheng Dan Jieh in China or awaiting the arrival of Père Noël in France, we are all enjoying the magic of the season.

In *Russia*, Christmas is celebrated on January 7 and many people fast for up to 39 days—until January 6th when the first evening star appears in the sky. Then they begin a twelve-course feast in honor of each of the twelve apostles.

On Christmas Eve in *Germany*, according to legend, animals speak to one another, rivers turn to wine, mountains open and reveal precious gemstones, and church bells ring from the depths of the oceans. 'Tis truly magical for the believers and pure of heart!



Leave it to the fun-loving *Irish* to do it right! Their tradition includes leaving mince pies and a bottle of Guinness as a snack for Santa.

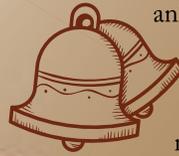
A 40-plus year tradition in *Sweden* involves a giant goat made of straw that marks the beginning of the holiday season. In a fun-spirited game, vandals try to burn the goat before Christmas Day.



Roll On, *Venezuela!*
On Christmas Eve they close the roads to cars in Caracas so that people can roller skate to Mass on Christmas Day.



An ancient *Norwegian* custom involves hiding all brooms because it is believed that witches emerge on Christmas Eve.



For more holiday traditions, celebrations, and beliefs, visit www.worldholidaytraditions.com.

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Dr. Jodi Stutts
Iredell Family Medicine
MOORESVILLE, NC



Jayson's parents still reside in the area, and Jodi's parents moved from Florida to Mooresville to be nearby. "We have been blessed with our family living so close, especially after having our daughters, Avery Grace (7) and Emerson Noel (5)," says Jodi.

"I believe I have gained a different perspective on life – everyone has struggles, so you have to meet them where they are," explains the good doctor. She wakes up every day knowing she is blessed, even when days are hard. "My mom taught me to always be true to myself and my beliefs," she states. When Jodi was in her mid-20s, a difficult situation happened with her family. They had never experienced a serious hardship, and it rocked their world. "It was hard to get through, but I am so proud of how my family came together through this situation. We could have easily fallen apart, but instead, we became each other's strength," she admits. Jodi credits God for putting that difficult time in her life to help make her a better physician.

As a wife and working mom, Dr. Stutts knows how hard it is to balance it all. "I think it really does take a village," she explains, "and it is critical for women to realize that self-care should be an important part of their schedule." Understanding how easy it is for independent women to think they can do it all, she reiterates the importance of carving out some time for what makes you happy. "Above all," she smiles, "remember that laughter is the best medicine and life isn't worth living if you can't find a little humor in it every day!"

lighting *each day* with
HUMOR

"I THINK EVERYONE IS UNIQUE and awesome in their own way, but I do tend to find the humor in just about everything," smiles Dr. Jodi Stutts of Iredell Family Medicine in Mooresville. "I have the gift of making people laugh in even the most challenging and difficult moments." Laughter is a unique gift for a physician to draw from when treating patients. Jodi has been a practicing physician for almost 13 years. The Newton, New Jersey, native moved to Gainesville, Florida, at the age of 16, where she graduated from the University of Florida; she then earned her medical degree from the University of Florida's School of Medicine. Jodi completed her residency at Wake Forest University's Family Medicine program at Baptist Hospital.

Married for nine years to her husband, Jayson, the couple credits a blind date for bringing them together. Jodi and Jayson were set up by their friends, but neither one was looking for a serious relationship. "My husband likes to tell people he knew he was getting my phone number at the end of the date because I suggested we share dessert after dinner," she laughs. The couple was married a year later in Charlotte and moved to Mooresville to begin their lives together. A Mooresville native,




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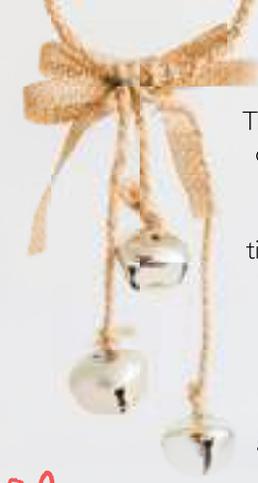


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“DECK THE HALLS” originated as a tune for dancing, hence the lyrics “Follow me in merry measure,” which basically mean “Let’s boogie!”



The composer of **“SILVER BELLS”** originally titled the song “Tinkle Bells,” but his wife explained to him that “tinkle” had an alternative meaning.



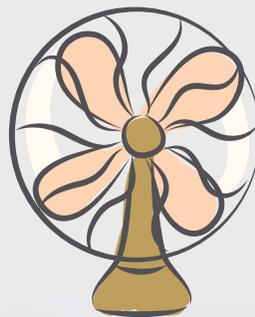
In the 1950s, Boston church leaders tried to have the song **“I SAW MOMMY KISSING SANTA CLAUS”** banned because they thought it promoted physical intimacy.

8 SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT CLASSIC

christmas songs

The first American Christmas carol to mention Santa Claus was **“UP ON THE HOUSE TOP,”** which was written in 1864.

A 1945 Californian heat wave was the inspiration for the song **“LET IT SNOW.”**



“DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR” was actually written during the Cuban Missile Crisis as a prayer for peace due to the impending threat of nuclear war.



Today the cost of the 364 gifts referred to in **“THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS”** would be \$114,651.18.



The BBC would not play **“I’LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS”** on the radio during WWII because controllers didn’t want to lower the morale of troops.



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By: *Cyndy Etler* | Photography By: *Chelsea Bren*

ONE MIGHT DESCRIBE ROBIN WHITLOCK—an investment professional who defines herself as sentimental—as a paradox. Is that even possible? To be a woman who is skilled with finances while viewing the world through her heart? For Robin, not only is this possible, but so is everything else.

Robin started school at UNC Chapel Hill. She had multiple scholarships and the intention to go on to pharmacy school. It was clear from the starting gun: this is a woman with brains, with skills. Her lofty initial goals shifted when a friend needed a hand with her retirement planning service. Robin stepped in to offer bookkeeping and accounting support, then ended up working for the firm, eventually moving into the position of VP of finance and administration.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Robin decided to expand her purview. Rather than limit herself to accounting and bookkeeping, she branched into work in income tax planning and finance and retirement planning.



The date was November 3. It would have been Robin's maternal grandmother's birthday. Robin had been very close with her grandmother before she died, unexpectedly, in 1999. It was a bittersweet day, compounded by the pressing decisions she had to make in several elements of her life: relationships, family, and work.

Scott, too, was carrying emotional weight that day. He had recently lost his own best childhood friend in the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon. When Scott and Robin were introduced there in the back of the church, Robin knew he was the one. "It seemed that we were both searching," Robin says, "for something that we had not discovered until that day."

A year and two months after their November 2011 wedding, their son William Ross was born. Joyfully professed by Robin as "the love of our life," William Ross's birthday holds its own significance. He arrived a few days before his due date, on Robin's father's birthday. Nine months later, Robin's father would pass on due to complications of illnesses stemming from his military service in Vietnam.

ROBIN UNDERSTANDS AND CARES FOR THE PEOPLE IN HER LIFE, AND THEY UNDERSTAND AND CARE FOR HER. SHE BRINGS THIS QUALITY TO HER WORK WITH HER CLIENTS AND PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS, FOLKS WHO ARE NEARING RETIREMENT, OR HAVE ALREADY RETIRED."

Realizing that she enjoyed fostering client relationships, Robin took another leap forward, this time into an entrepreneurial role. She partnered with CPA planners to open a bookkeeping and income tax planning firm. She would later unite with a friend, who is now her business partner, to create Infinite Wealth Advisors, a retirement planning service ... and later, to create a wholesale marketing firm, RIA Sources.

The common thread through all this growth is the relationships Robin has nurtured over the years. Robin understands and cares for the people in her life, and they understand and care for her. She brings this quality to her work with her clients and prospective clients, folks who are nearing retirement, or have already retired. Indeed, this quality of understanding and connecting with others extends all the way back to Robin's childhood, when her best friend correctly predicted that she would work, in some capacity, with seniors.

Hand-in-hand with Robin's connection to others is her sentimentality, a trait she shares with her husband, Scott. The couple "met cute" at a wedding in Wilmington. A friend's cousin was getting married, and the friend asked Robin to attend. She wasn't looking for love post-ceremony at the back of the church; she was looking for the door. But Fate, or some other force, had different plans.

Robin first visited the Lake Norman area with a college friend during her UNC Chapel Hill days. Having spent family time on Lake Tillery as a child, she felt

happy and at home here. She has lived in the area since the 1990s, when, Robin notes, the community had a much smaller feel.

The relaxed lake environment is a good one for folks with a hard-working, entrepreneurial personality. For Robin, who has responsibilities at not one but two businesses, finding time to enjoy life and family can be a struggle. When asked how she is able to manage it all, Robin throws a curveball, stating that in addition to tending to her businesses, her husband and her son, she is also her mother's caregiver. She moved her mother closer to her home, to enable the 24-hour care her mother needs.

Once her son was born, Robin found balance in delegation. "I had to determine where I wanted to expend my energy," she says. "It is hard to pry myself away from work, but I needed to establish boundaries and balance between work and family."

Brains. Drive. A selfless streak that she extends from her friends and family to her business partners and clients. When you look at Robin Whitlock, you might see a paradox. For me? I see an absolute powerhouse.





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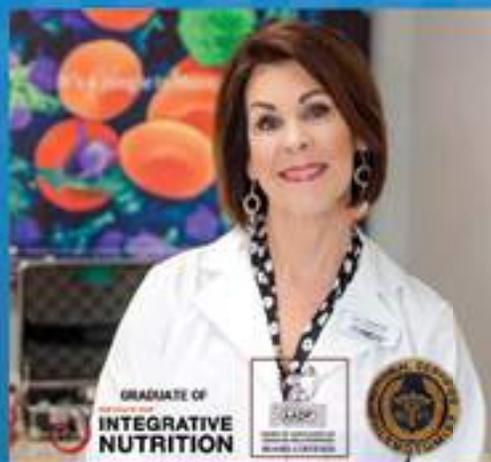
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Charlotte Police Officer **RACHEL THORNTON** orchestrated the reestablishment of a memorial for two teenage girls, Laura Barnette and Mandi Meador, who were killed at that site in an automobile accident in 1995. The memorial, which had been in place for 20 years, had been accidentally uprooted and destroyed. The plaque for the tree was handmade by Officer Thornton and a bench, etched with angels' wings, was donated by Crane Renovations.



(from left to right): Jane Bolton, mother of Laura; Todd Crane; Sherry Harkey, mother of Mandi; and Officer Thornton



LORI GENTILE, MD, recently completed a breast surgical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. She specializes exclusively in the treatment of breast diseases, with clinical expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Her surgical practice is based out of her Cornelius office.



ANDREA MORROW, owner of Frugal Re-shop's in Kannapolis, celebrated her grand opening in 2018. Frugal provides high-quality new and gently-used merchandise.



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Nov. 29th-
Dec. 1

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6-9pm
Downtown Davidson

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Thursday-Saturday
Nov. 29th-
Dec. 1

2

10TH ANNUAL COMMUNITY NATIVITY FESTIVAL

Times Vary
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7036
McIlwaine Rd., Huntersville

This family-friendly, free community event features nativity displays from around the world, a stable with nativity costumes for dressing up, children's crafts, a scavenger hunt, and musical performances.



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4

Saturday,
Dec. 8

22ND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS LIGHT BOAT PARADE

5-11pm
Peninsula Yacht Club, 18501 Harbor Light Blvd.,
Cornelius

See the lake come alight with Christmas cheer, and celebrate on land, too, with concessions, music, and Santa's arrival by boat!



Saturday,
Dec. 1

36TH ANNUAL NORTH MECKLENBURG CHRISTMAS PARADE

1pm
Main Street in Davidson to just south of
Catawba Avenue

Everything—and everyone—from antique tractors and horse-drawn wagons to fire trucks and Santa Claus himself parade down Main Street in this long-standing Lake Norman tradition.

5

Monday,
Dec. 31

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT NOON

9am-Noon
Discovery Place Kids, 105 Gilead Rd., Huntersville

Stations will be set up throughout the museum to create noise makers and decorations until 11:45 a.m. At noon, meet at the Town Hall Stage for the Big Fun Dance party and countdown to the Big Balloon Drop!



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Who knows, you just might find yourself in next month's

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View more *Scene* photos on our Facebook page at:

 [Lake Norman Woman](#)



Debra Blanton of The Shoppes at Home, Heart & Soul in Cornelius with LKNW's Stephanie celebrating our October Pink Pages issue



The LKNW gals (sans editor Leslie) at a recent staff meeting



Publisher Dana Nieters and Editor Leslie Ogle at Margaritaville Hollywood Beach Resort in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida



LKNW's Stephanie with Dr. Peter McIlveen, co-owner and practicing physician at North Carolina Weight & Wellness, at their Ribbon Cutting & Open House in October



Dana Nieters with Caitlyn Yaede, a senior at Mooresville High School. Dana served as Caitlyn's mentor on her senior project.



The ladies at Mainstream Boutique in Mooresville with LKNW's Stephanie (middle)

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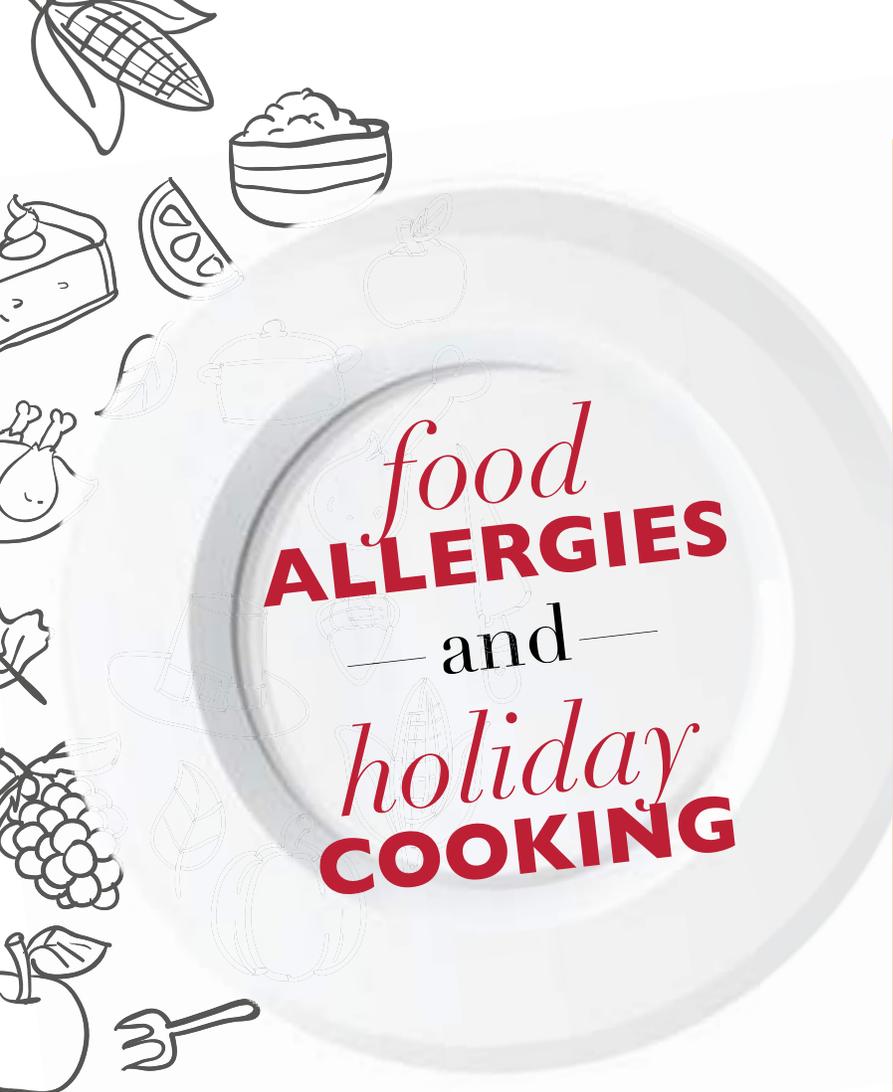
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ACCORDING TO THE American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI) more than 50 million Americans have an allergy of some kind, and four to six percent of the entire population have food allergies. The most severe allergic reaction is anaphylaxis which can be life-threatening. It affects your breathing and heart rate and causes a dramatic drop in blood pressure.

Ninety percent of food allergies come from eggs, milk, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, wheat, and soy, notes the ACAAI. And food allergies are a tricky business—they can develop at any age; they can persist or disappear altogether over time; they can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, or cardiovascular system; onset of reaction can be within minutes or hours; and the duration of the symptoms can vary as can the amount of food ingested to trigger the allergic reaction.

For the millions who suffer from food allergies, the holidays can be especially challenging. Here are some tips to help you through all the upcoming events where food itself is the celebration—



There are more gluten-free products on the market than ever before, but there are naturally gluten-free foods as well such as quinoa and rice. Dips like chutney and hummus on rice crackers with fresh fruits and veggies make a delicious appetizer.



Soups make a great dish with a holiday flair. Try ingredients like squash, pumpkin, leek, or sweet potatoes. Cornstarch or arrowroot with water and chicken stock are superb thickening agents.



For milk or soy allergies, try substituting coconut milk instead of the usual cream, soy, or nut milks.



For your main meat or even tofu recipes, be sure to avoid pre-marinated or pre-spiced foods. You can make your own flavorings by using olive oil and fresh herbs such as rosemary, thyme, marjoram, and garlic.



For dessert, focus on fruits that are in season such as apples, pears, or cranberries.



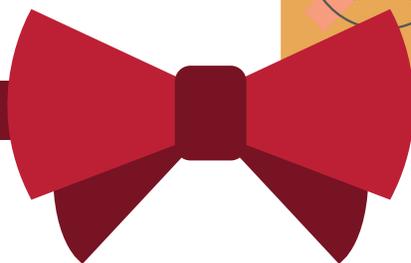
Learn to read food labels carefully and avoid prepackaged foods. They often have trace ingredients and additives that could trigger a reaction.



While labels have helped in the deciphering of ingredients, there is a lot of ambiguity. Phrases such as “may contain,” “might contain,” “made on shared equipment,” or “made in a shared facility” can be confusing, and there are no laws that require those warnings and no standard as to their actual definition.



Eating out requires even more scrutiny as cross-contamination is everywhere. The best advice here is to speak with your server and the chef to apprise them of the severity of your particular allergy.



For more information on food allergies, visit the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology at www.acaai.org.

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KEEP CALM, GET YOUR *organize* ON!

By: **Laura VanSickle**

UNTIL RECENTLY, I could guarantee you I would have two conversations with myself every year. The first one would take place the day after Thanksgiving. As I unpacked my holiday decorations, I would immediately start grumbling to myself...

- *How am I going to salvage these crinkled bows?*
- *Where is the garland?*
- *Did I accidentally throw out the star for the tree?!!!*

Right then and there I would make myself a promise. Raising a half-lit string of lights over my head I would swear that this year, when I packed up my holiday décor, I would be organized so decorating next year would be quick and easy!

The next conversation I'd have with myself would take place on January 1. After sticking to my new diet and exercise regimen for a full four hours, my energy would be low, and my resolve to honor

my holiday-packing-plan would be weak. I'd toss the decorations into a few boxes, throw them in the attic, and promise not to berate myself next December.

After years of beating myself up and promising renewal, I finally took action last year. I run a company that preaches the benefits of organization. I've embraced them in my closet, my pantry, and my home office. It was time to bring that discipline to the holiday season!

This year when I roll out the holiday decorations, along with a box that is clearly labeled "Christmas Tree Decorations," I will pull out my star, take a sip of eggnog, and have a very different conversation with myself!



Laura VanSickle is co-owner of ClosetsbyDesign in Charlotte. With free in-home consultations, their designers will assess your space and create a layout that is affordable and customized to meet your individual needs. For more information and locations, visit www.closetsbydesign.com or call 704.588.7272.

DETANGLE YOUR HOLIDAYS

Four steps to help make preparing for the holidays easier.



STEP ONE: I dedicated a space in my garage for decorations, so I could access them easily. I built some large, deep cabinets at the far end of the garage, and left an open space where I could roll our Christmas tree in and out. Just knowing I wouldn't have to climb up an attic ladder or squeeze giant boxes through a tiny crawl space next year made me happier.

STEP TWO: I went shopping for storage items. You don't need expensive bins to be organized. One-gallon plastic bags are a perfect way to protect lights, prevent tangling, and keep track of those little fuses. A rod installed in one of my garage cabinets was the perfect place to store bows. I hung the bows on a hanger, then placed tissue paper in the loops so they'd keep their shape. Ornaments were placed in plastic cups lined with tissue paper, then lined up in a shallow plastic bin.

STEP THREE: Label each box clearly on the top and side and be specific in your labeling, (ie "Greenery," "Lights," "Ornaments") or you can label your boxes by décor location (ie "Dining Room Table," "Mantel," "Family Room"). Don't rush. Go box by box. Even if it takes you a little longer to clean up this year, you will save that time in multiples in years to come!

STEP FOUR: Create a wrapping station. This is the gift that keeps on giving. I dedicated a small space in my laundry room, but you could also use a spare bedroom or home office. A shallow drawer can store tissue paper, slats organize gift bags, a rod holds wrapping paper, and bins on slatwall hold decorative pens, small cards, tape, and scissors. Everything is at your fingertips!

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cheesy Hash Brown Potato Casserole

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INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds frozen hash brown potatoes, thawed (in your grocer's freezer)
- 1/2 cup butter, melted
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 pint sour cream
- 2 cups grated cheddar cheese
- Half-cup onion, chopped
- 2 cups chopped/cubed ham (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray 11 x 14 inch casserole or baking dish with cooking spray.
- 2 In large bowl, combine all ingredients and stir together. Spread evenly in prepared pan.
- 3 Top with some extra shredded cheddar.
- 4 Bake for 45 minutes until top is golden brown.

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{ HERE she IS }

AN LKN WOMAN WHO PERSONIFIES WHAT
MAKES LAKE NORMAN WOMEN SO GREAT

How do you Keep Calm & Jingle On this time of year? Whether it's a stressful time of year or just another day, I keep priority and perspective in check. My family is everything to me so that is priority and even on my worst days, I try to keep a good perspective—knowing that no matter how hard I think things may be, someone else out there has wished for, begged for, and prayed for what I already have, so I try to stay positive and count my blessings daily. I often refer to the Mother Teresa quote: "Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier."

What pumps your passion? I guess you could say my passion is people! And that encompasses children and education where much of my passion remains today. I stayed at home with my children until my youngest started kindergarten. Then I went back to work and taught as a preschool teacher to keep the same hours as my kids. From there I went into administration and eventually operations where I was designing preschools and K-5 afterschool programs for a local education management firm. Preschool-age children have always been my inspiration. I adore all children but the 3-6-year-old kiddos literally melt my heart ... full of innocence, wonder, and unconditional love.

What prompted you to become a franchisee? Making the decision to leave the education field was an incredibly difficult decision. But, I was spending a lot of time traveling to other schools and working well over 40 hours. I knew my work-home life was simply out of balance. I loved the people I worked with and I was proud of what I had accomplished; however, I needed a change. I could no longer continue to give my 100 percent at my job without sacrificing my number one priority—my family! After a lot of time, effort, and research, Neil and I decided on the Massage Heights model; their aesthetics and family-focused management won us over ... a true family business!

What does 2019 look like for you? My hope is for my new charity, H.o.P.E. (Hour of Peace & Elevation). Our goal for 2019 is to become a Non-Profit 501(c)(3) and offer our services free of charge to as many moms who are in need of an hour of peace and elevation through massage and facials—the charity is for local women who are going through a crisis or emotionally-trying time. We want to help those who are truly in need of focusing their time on their own wellbeing, even if it's just one hour. It is a proven fact that massage therapy will reduce cortisol and increase serotonin which will result in a relaxed, happier, and healthier mom!

Kristy Serdinsky is the owner of Massage Heights-Jetton Village located at 19818 N. Cove Road in Cornelius. She is also the founder of the non-profit Hour of Peace & Elevation (H.o.P.E.), where staff provide an hour of free massage and facial services to women in our community who are facing challenging times. You can reach Kristy at 704.827.5000 or at www.elevatinglives.org.

kristy SERDINSKY

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WITH *or* WITHOUT *christmas*

By: Allan Purtill

ABOUT A DECADE AGO, John Grisham published a short holiday book entitled, *Skipping Christmas*. It tells the story of an empty nest couple who decide to skip the tree trimming, maddening shopping, and endless holiday baking for a cruise ship destined for a warmer climate far away. Sounds delightful, but the neighbors complain about their refusal to participate in the traditional decorating contest. Then their adult child decides to come home at the last minute. The couple discovers it's hard to skip Christmas.

Regardless of your faith or family traditions, it's easy to get caught up in the season. Maybe we're caught in even more traffic and longer lines. Maybe we're caught overspending on gifts not wanting to disappoint those on our list. Maybe we're caught trying to meet the impossible expectations of the season. Do you ever wish you could just sail away?

Though we may have considered it for a moment, most of us will probably not skip Christmas this year. But how essential is our Christmas? For the first 300 years of the Christian religion, there was no celebration of Christmas. In those early years, the church celebrated Easter. No one gave

much thought to throwing a birthday party for Jesus until around the 4th century A.D. The first celebration was called the Feast of the Nativity, then it became "Christ's Mass," which eventually led to the shortened "Christmas." From its inception years after the birth of Jesus, Christmas evolved and changed with the people celebrating it. Maybe it doesn't have to be skipped, but maybe you can feel free to make some adjustments.

I remember the first Christmas with my wife away from our parents, the time our kids decided to sleep in rather than wake early for stockings, and the year my mom, sisters, and I got through without Dad. No Christmas is ever the same. Some of the events in 2018 might not be putting you in a jolly frame of mind. You may wonder where hope lies. For those grieving, the lights and music can increase our pain. As we enter the holiday season, we all would do well to give ourselves the grace to let some things go.

Why not skip an evening party for a truly silent night

at home? Skip a couple of trips to the store in exchange for a few more hours with those you enjoy and love. I wouldn't think of skipping Christmas. In my business, it is a special time of year, but we have the freedom to adapt ... keeping the true spirit of the celebration alive in new ways.

The first Christmas was a simple one. Two parents take shelter in a borrowed room. Their infant son is born a long way from home. The first time parents flee as refugees fearing for life of their child. It was a dark time, but the light still shone. They don't skip the first Christmas. They are living through it, and in their arms they hold the fullness of a love that continues to fill hearts and bring hope for the world.

This Christmas, skip those activities where authentic love, hope, or joy is absent. Create or join those activities where love, hope, and joy are shared with all. Christmas is the celebration of the love that filled a manger and continues to fill this world with hopeful light. May yours be merry and bright!



Allan Purtill is the pastor at Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Huntersville. He enjoys and counsels his congregation as they seek to follow God's unfolding mission in Huntersville and the greater Lake Norman community. The church is located at 10500 Beatties Ford Road and they can be reach at 704.875.2291.

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