

G&G Christmas Gift Guide

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area stores this holiday season!*



A place to call home

A fictional Christmas story by Donna Sullivan. First printed in the Riley Countian December, 2008.

Alex kicked a pile of snow, looked down at his worn, scuffed tennis shoe and muttered to himself, "What kind of people take children out of their home a week before Christmas?"

"The kind of people who don't want the children hurt the next time their mother blows up her meth lab," the voice of reason inside of him chided.

In his heart, he knew it was the right thing for the authorities to have done. He'd been expecting it for quite some time; in fact, he was surprised it hadn't happened sooner. But a week before Christmas?

The frantic scene replayed itself over and over in his mind: the flash, the explosion, the dancing flames, billowing smoke and sirens screaming through the night; the blue uniformed officers, the soft cries of his sister, the heart-wrenching wail from their mother as the police cars drove off with her children. Alex remembered wondering why he and Anastasia weren't in the same car. He wondered if she'd had time to grab Ollie, her stuffed elephant that she slept with. Most of all he wondered where they were taking them. Would they go to the same place? Would they be back home before Christmas?

That was two days ago, and a couple of those questions had been answered. They did not go to the same place, and there was little chance they would return home for Christmas. The thought caused Alex's insides to twist into knots. Their mother was in jail, and probably would be for quite some time. Somewhere, Anastasia was in a strange place with people she doesn't know.

"She's only five," Alex thought miserably. "She probably thinks I've abandoned her."

"Hey, whatcha up to?" a voice called from behind him.

"Nothin' much," Alex

replied, not looking up to meet the eyes of the young man speaking to him.

"Supper's just about ready."

"I'm not hungry."

"Well, I'm starved. So you better not be late getting to the table, or there won't be much left."

The comment was intended as good-natured teasing, Alex realized. He finally looked up at the gym-short clad figure towering over him. Jason was his name, the oldest of the four children in his foster family. "The coach ran our legs off of us at practice. Said we're all getting flabby and soft from all the Christmas goodies. How was school today?"

"It was all right."

"You need any help with your math homework? You've got Mrs. Marshall, right? Her homework is a killer."

"I do okay," Alex replied. A little part of him felt guilty for rebuffing Jason, who was obviously just trying to make him feel welcome. Alex didn't want to feel welcome. He wanted to go home. He wanted to find his little sister, take her home and have their meager little family together for Christmas. He thought of the rhinestone princess jewelry set he had saved his money to buy her for Christmas, and wondered if it had survived the fire. Probably not, he figured.

"You play ball?" Jason asked, throwing him the basketball he'd been standing there dribbling since his arrival. Surprised, Alex quickly raised his hands to catch the pass.

"Quick reflexes, I like that," Jason said. "Hey, me and a couple of guys from the team coach a basketball team in a league for boys your age. You should come." When Alex didn't answer and just stood dribbling the basketball, Jason charged in for a steal. Alex spun and protected the ball, pivoting on one foot, then drove for the basket on the side of the garage. The ball rolled off his fingers and into the net.

"Impressive," Jason said. "We practice after school on Thursdays." With that he

turned and headed for the house. "I'm not kidding about supper," he called over his shoulder. "If you're late, I'm eating your share."

Alex watched the tall, blonde teen disappear around the corner, then heard the door slam and the thump of his gym bag hitting the floor. He was hungry, although he didn't want to admit it. Supper with this family meant holding hands while a prayer was said, then listening to them tease each other and talk about their day. Although the meals he'd had here so far had all been delicious, he wasn't sure he could take another evening of feeling like the odd man out, of wondering where Anastasia was and what she was having for supper.

If they'd been home, he would have warmed up a can of soup and made her a grilled cheese sandwich, or maybe whipped up a box of macaroni and cheese. They would have eaten it on TV trays in front of the television while Anastasia told him all about her day at kindergarten. At some point, their mother might wander in, or maybe she wouldn't. They would work on Anastasia's little list of reading words before Alex would tuck her in, then spend an hour or two on his own homework.

Alex heard the door open and a woman's pleasant voice call his name. "Alex, supper's ready. Come on in please, we're waiting on you."

Reluctantly he turned toward the house. It wasn't big or fancy, just a plain ranch style house that could have used a coat of paint, yet still seemed comfortable and inviting. There were two bicycles and a trike on the front lawn, and one small, stray shoe that Alex retrieved before heading in the door that took him straight into the kitchen where the family sat waiting.

"I, uh, I found this out in the yard," he said, laying the shoe on the carpet by the door.

"I looked all over for that this morning," Mrs. Warner exclaimed. "Lacey, how in the world did you manage to

lose one shoe in the front yard in the dead of winter?" For an answer the toddler just kicked her now bare feet and squealed happily in her high chair.

The aromas in the kitchen made Alex's stomach rumble as he took his place at the table. As he expected, the family joined hands and bowed their heads while Mr. Warner offered the blessing.

"Father God..." he began. The rest of the prayer was lost on Alex as he sat wondering how it was that Mr. Warner talked to God like he'd been best friends with him all his life. Strange. The only time he'd heard God spoken of in his home was when his mother was angry, and a few choice words generally followed.

When the prayer ended, the table erupted into the clatter of dishes and voices talking over each other, then settled into a comfortable silence as the family began to eat. The silence was short-lived, however. After the first few bites, Mr. Warner looked over at the boy to his left. "Tad, how did that science test go today?" Alex concentrated on his beef stroganoff, which just may have been the best thing he'd ever tasted, while the Warner family caught up on each other's day.

"Mommy, pass me the..." But rather than finishing her request and waiting for the rolls to be passed, the child sitting next to Alex, who he believed to be named Carrie, reached for them herself, knocking over her milk glass, which spilled in Alex's lap. He jumped up in surprise, as Carrie looked ready to burst into tears. Mrs. Warner quickly rose and grabbed the napkins of everyone around her to mop up the milk. Alex waited. Would she smack the little girl upside the head for ruining her wonderful meal? He hoped not.

"Now, Carrie, what have I told you about waiting for things to be passed?" Mrs. Warner scolded gently. "See what happens when we reach? Poor Alex is all wet."

"It's all right," Alex muttered, reaching for one of the napkins to soak up some of the milk from his pants.

"I'm sorry, Alex," Carrie said softly.

"Really, it's okay," he said. He guessed that Carrie was about five years old, just like Anastasia. His sister had spilled milk on him more times than he could begin to count. He gave her a shy smile, hoping she would understand that he really wasn't mad.

"Alex, why don't you go change real quick, then we'll have dessert," Mrs. Warner suggested. He left the table and went to the bedroom that he shared with Jason and Tad. Jason had a single bed on one side of the room, while Tad and Alex had bunk beds on the other side. Tad had offered him the top bunk, but Alex was just fine with the lower one. Alex opened the top drawer of the dresser that Mrs. Warner had assigned him and pulled out a pair of gym shorts. He had arrived with only the clothes on his back, but between Tad and Jason's hand-me-downs and a quick trip to the local department store, Alex had enough changes of clothes to keep him looking presentable.

When he returned to the table, a bowl of peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream was set before him. He had thought the beef stroganoff was good, but that dessert was amazing. And before he could stop himself, he told Mrs. Warner just that. She smiled at him kindly, somewhat taken aback by the compliment from the young man who had been very careful to speak as little as possible to any of them for the past two days.

"I'm glad you like it, Alex. There's plenty more if you would like some."

"Hey, don't be fattening him up," Jason cut in. "I'm recruiting him for my team. We need him to be quick and agile, not bloated and clumsy." With that, the bantering picked up once again as the Warner family and Alex finished their dessert.

"I'll take your plate to the sink for you, Alex," Carrie said when he was done. "Since I spilled my milk on you and stuff," Alex smiled at her.

"You take the plates, and I'll bring our glasses," he

said. "How does that sound?"

"It's a deal," the child responded. "Can you help me with my reading words, Alex?"

The feeling of a knife stabbing into his heart gripped Alex at the question. Who would help Anastasia with her reading words?

"I, uh, I have homework to do. Sorry," he said, then rushed toward the door after practically dropping the glasses into the sink. In his haste to flee the kitchen, he bumped into Jason, nearly causing him to drop his own supper dishes.

"Dude, watch it," Jason teased. But Alex didn't hear him as he rushed towards his bedroom, desperately needing to be alone. He closed the door behind him, then laid down on the bottom bunk. It all seemed unreal to him, as though the real Alex were standing outside, watching a fake Alex with a fake family try to make a fake life seem genuine. But how could it possibly ever be real and genuine without Anastasia? How could he ever really be happy without his little sister in his life? He silently willed away the hot tears that were welling up in his eyes, but it was no use. For two days he had remained stoic, emotionless, but he just couldn't do it anymore. A strangled sob finally found its release and before he could stop it, Alex felt all of the pain of the last two days, come bursting forth. His whole body shook for long moments, before his pain suddenly and unexpectedly turned into anger. Anger at his mother for putting them in this situation. Anger at his father for leaving them three years ago. Anger at this God that Mr. Warner talked to that allowed this kind of thing to happen. He punched his pillow repeatedly before the anger finally began to wane. The sobs slowly eased as he laid there, his breathing ragged, his tears finally spent.

"Alex," a soft voice from above him said, startling him.

"Tad?"

"Yeah, man, I'm sorry. I

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didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I was up here reading when you came in."

Alex was profoundly embarrassed. Now Tad would think he was some kind of a baby or something. He might even tell all the kids at school. Unsure of what to say, Alex just lay in silence.

"It's okay, Alex. I know how you feel." Alex remained silent. How could this kid possibly know how he feels? Had he ever had the heat shut off because his mother couldn't pay the electric bill? Had he ever poured water on his cereal because there was no money to buy milk? Had the cops ever come to his house and drug him away in the middle of the night? Yeah, I'm sure he knows how I feel, Alex thought angrily. But he didn't say a word. After awhile Tad climbed down from his bunk and went out to join the rest of the family for the evening. But Alex stayed in his bed. He had homework, but couldn't make himself do it. What was the point, anyway?

The next morning at breakfast, Mrs. Warner announced that after school, they would be doing some baking, then delivering plates of Christmas goodies to a few of the neighbors. Carrie was excited, Tad rolled his eyes, and Jason reminded her that he had basketball practice and wouldn't be home until 5:30.

"No problem, we'll wait till you get here to make the deliveries," she said. Jason gave her a quick kiss on the cheek before grabbing his books and gym bag and heading for his car.

"Hey, can Alex and I catch a ride?" Tad asked.

"Sure," Jason replied. "But hurry up, don't make me late."

Alex and Tad grabbed their book bags and followed him out to his car. It was a slate blue Pinto that looked like it had been painted with a steel wool pad.

"You sure you can take showing up at school in something this cool?" Jason teased.

"My reputation could be permanently ruined, but it's too cold to walk," Tad replied, tossing his bag in the back seat before jump-

ing in the passenger side front seat. Jason folded the front driver's seat forward so Alex could crawl in the back. With his knees practically touching his chin, Alex rode in silence the twelve blocks to school.

"You got Mom and Dad's Christmas present yet?" Tad asked.

"I'm working on a couple of things in my woodshop class," Jason replied. "You?"

"If I told you, I'd have to kill you," Tad replied.

"You little weasel," Jason yelled. "Trick me into telling you what I'm doing, then keep yours a secret. I ought to make you walk the rest of the way." The brothers laughed and Alex just stared out the window, thinking of the rhinestone princess jewelry set and his little sister that would probably never see it.

That afternoon, there was baking as promised and the smells that emanated from the kitchen almost lured Alex off the front steps and into the house. But he willed himself to stay right where he was, despite the cold that had already made his fingers and toes go numb. At 5:30, the Pinto pulled up to the curb and Jason headed up the walk.

"What are you doing sitting out in the cold?" he asked Alex as he approached the porch.

"Not much," Alex replied.

"Tough day?" Jason folded himself down onto the step next to Alex.

"The usual."

"Listen, Alex, I know this is a hard thing for you. But believe me, it will get better."

"Believe you? Look, that's a great thought, but you have no idea."

"Yes, I do."

"Right, you... Mr. 'I have the greatest family in the world and I play basketball and make straight A's.' Try having your mother blow your house up and nearly kill you, then tell me you have a clue what I'm going through."

"She didn't blow our house up, but she did nearly kill me," Jason said softly.

Alex turned quickly to look at Jason.

"What are you talking about? Mrs. Warner would

never do something like that."

"Mrs. Warner isn't my real mother. She started out as my foster mother, then adopted me when I was five."

"No way."

"My real mother was high on crack cocaine and wrecked her car with me in it. She didn't make it. They said it's a miracle I survived."

Alex was silent. He thought about Tad's comment last night from the top bunk. He had said that he knew how Alex felt.

"What about Tad?"

"His mom ran off when he was a baby. His dad beat the daylight out of him when he was eight. Broke his arm and gave him a concussion. He came here as a foster child, too, and they adopted him about a year later."

Alex didn't think he could handle hearing Carrie and Lacey's stories, knowing they would likely be equally as bad. "So you're all four adopted?"

"Well, not quite. Carrie got adopted two years ago, but Lacey is still a foster child. But things aren't looking very good for her going back to her mother. If parental rights are severed, she'll become an official Warner."

Alex just sat and let that statement soak in. When parental rights are severed. He hadn't given any thought to the future beyond Christmas. What if he and Anastasia were separated permanently and he never saw her again?

"I have a sister," he said at last. "Her name is Anastasia and she's five years old and I've always looked out for her, and I'm afraid I'll never see her again." Before he knew what was happening, Jason had put his arm around Alex and he found himself sobbing for the second time in two days.

"It's going to be all right," Jason promised after several minutes. "Trust me on this one."

Supper that evening was a rushed affair as Mrs. Warner was anxious to start her cookie plate deliveries. Each of the four Warner

children and Alex carried an armload of plates to the van, with Mr. and Mrs. Warner bringing up the rear with their own arms full of goodies. Mr. Warner drove, stopping each time his wife identified the home of the next recipient. Sometimes they all piled out of the van to greet the lucky friend or neighbor that would soon be feasting on their afternoon's labors, and other times she went to the door alone. Alex watched as she stood in the glow of the porch light and offered a warm hug to go along with the treats. She is truly a kindhearted person, he thought.

That night, as he lay in bed, Alex wondered what would prompt people like the Warners to take in kids like Jason, Tad, Carrie, Lacey, and now him? It was a mystery to him, one that he pondered for many long minutes before finally drifting off to sleep.

The next day was an early release day from school, and Christmas was now just three days away. His new classmates were excited, speculating on what their gifts would be and talking about all their plans for Christmas break. Alex just sat listening quietly. He'd been so worried about Anastasia that he hadn't even given a thought to what he might like for Christmas himself, or what he might do during the long vacation from school.

For the next two days, everyone in the Warner household was kept busy getting ready for Christmas. From vacuuming and dusting to decorating and gift wrapping, there was a chore for everyone, including Alex. He was so busy, in fact, that the sharp pain of his situation was beginning to fade to a dull ache. Only when he thought of Anastasia did it become fresh once again.

After supper on Christmas Eve, Mrs. Warner called Alex to the bedroom. She held out a new outfit for him, nicer than anything he had ever owned. "It's for the Christmas Eve service tonight," she explained. "I hope it fits." With that, she turned and left the room,

closing the door behind her. Alex just stared at the black slacks and purple button-up shirt and tie.

"Alex, hurry up in there, I need to change," came Tad's voice as he banged on the door. Alex quickly showered and changed into the new clothes, which fit him perfectly. When he emerged from the bedroom, Tad scurried in and began his own metamorphosis.

"Look at you, all spiffed up," Jason teased.

"You look very handsome," Mrs. Warner said kindly.

Once everyone was dressed and ready, the family hurried through the cold night air into the van. Mr. Warner drove out of their cul-de-sac and onto the city streets, navigating his way to their church, several miles away. Cars filled the parking lot, and Mr. Warner pulled up to the door to let his wife and the girls out. The boys stayed in the van while he found a parking space, then the four of them walked together to the door, where Mrs. Warner and the girls waited. The family walked into the sanctuary together, made their way down the aisle and found a pew that would seat them all. Mr. Warner guided them all to their seats, taking his own place beside Mrs. Warner, and leaving a place at the end for Alex. The organ softly played Christmas carols, and dozens of unlit candles lined the railing in front of the altar. Alex sat quietly with his head bowed, wondering about this family that had taken him in and this God they seemed to care so much about. Alex had never prayed a prayer in his life, but found himself silently asking God to please watch over Anastasia.

A rustling beside the pew caught his attention and he looked up, expecting the usher he'd seen passing out programs to give him a handful to pass down the pew to the Warners. Instead, he looked up into the blue eyes that had been haunting him for the past week. Anastasia. He stifled the cry that nearly burst out of him as she threw herself into his

arms. She made no effort towards silence and gleefully shouted his name. "It's my brother," she said to the smiling people around her. Alex could only hold her close, his tears falling into her neatly combed curls.

The organ music swelled as the service began. The Warner family scooted down the pew to make room for Anastasia and Alex leaned down and whispered to her that she needed to be quiet now. She sat with her tiny hand on his knee and leaned against his arm. Alex was pretty certain he had never been so happy in his life.

After a couple of songs by the congregation, the pastor took his place at the podium. "At this joyous time of the year, we believe it is important to remember that there are those for whom Christmas is a bittersweet time, those who have experienced loss in their lives. As is our custom, we offer you the opportunity to light a candle this Christmas Eve, in memory of your loved one who is celebrating Christmas in heaven with our Savior."

Movement to Alex's left caused him to look over. Mr. and Mrs. Warner were among those who had risen to make their way to the candles on the altar. They squeezed past Alex and Anastasia and stood in line to light a candle. Alex shot Jason a questioning look, and Jason moved down the pew toward him. He leaned close and whispered, "It's for their son, Micah. He died of leukemia about seventeen years ago when he was five."

Alex was stunned. These two people had lost their only child, then opened their home to strangers from horrific circumstances. Why would they do that?

After lighting their candle, Mr. and Mrs. Warner held hands as they made their way back to their seats. Alex saw Mrs. Warner wipe a tear from her eye. His heart ached for them both.

So much of what hap-

Continued on page 24

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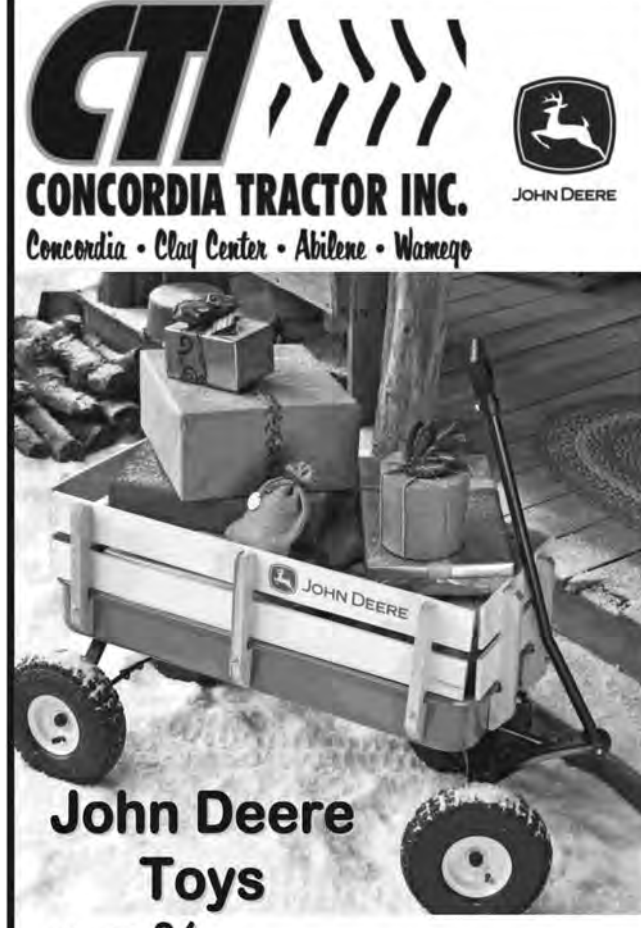
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Screen Machine Sports expands into northeast Kansas; also offering custom apparel for farmers and ranchers

"It's an honor," said Mary Hogan, co-owner of Screen Machine Sports. For the past 14 years this screen printing and embroidery shop has been providing local schools and Ft. Riley military units and their families

all over the world with custom apparel, flags and guidons.

"When our troops open a box from Screen Machine and see their unit insignia and artwork printed on their brand new t-shirts I think it gives

them a sense of unity, and they wear their shirts with pride. It feels like we're doing our part in a small way," Hogan said. Screen Machine has even provided the Commanding General's Mounted Color Guard with flags

and guidons for the inaugurations of Presidents Bush and Obama.

Now, Screen Machine Sports is offering their quality services for farmers and ranchers with a variety of designs and competitive prices to all of rural Kansas.

In 1997 Mary Hogan and Deb Boller took over the small Junction City business and have since created a friendly and spacious retail space. The community, especially local schools, have embraced the business as the place to go for quality and warm, friendly service.

"We take a lot of pride

in our community," said Boller. "Our schools are a central part of this community, and we like to do everything we can to support them."

Screen Machine offers many services including custom artwork by talented graphic designers for farmers, ranchers, and businesses, which can then be screen printed or embroidered on a wide range of apparel, including warm jackets for winter and Christmas.

The retail store offers custom letter jackets, printed apparel for local schools, including Junction City, Chapman, White

City, Fort Riley and Wakefield, collegiate licensed products from KSU and KU, and custom heat pressed names and numbers while you wait.

Screen Machine Sports serves a wide range of clients — from farms to hunters to non-profit organizations, and they are ready to work with new clients all over Kansas, whatever their needs may be, and if you can't make it to Junction City, Mary or Deb will be just as glad to work with you over the phone (785) 762 3081 and have your order shipped right to your door.

Celebrate the season with music, ornament-making, open house at Pioneer Bluffs

On Saturday, November 26, you'll find much to do, see, and hear to celebrate the holidays at Pioneer Bluffs near Matfield Green. Listen to music, create your own tin Christmas ornament, and tour the Rogler Prairie Heritage Center in the newly renovated 1916 granary. All activities are free. Hot cider and cookies will be served throughout the day.

- At 4 p.m., multi-genre artist Gary Gackstatter will perform original acoustic music on guitar and mandolin, accompanied by percussionist Chris Mayer. Gackstatter, whose pen and ink drawings are currently on exhibit in The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs, is a well-known professional musician from St. Louis, Missouri. He is a two-time recipient of the Kansas Governor's Arts Award, as a conductor and visual artist. Gackstatter has composed five symphonies, combining music with other art forms.

- From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., adults and youngsters are invited to make their own tin Christmas ornament in The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs under the guidance of artist Antonia Zoutenbier, the Gallery's proprietor. Zoutenbier is a tin designer who learned the traditional craft in New Mexico.

- The Rogler Prairie Heritage Center in the renovated 1916 granary will hold an open house, also from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The granary renovation, the first major restoration project at Pioneer Bluffs in nearly 100 years, is now complete.

Current exhibits in The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs will be open through December 31. They include Gackstatter's drawings; watercolors by Gackstatter's wife, Gretchen; and the abstract work of New Mexico painters and sculptors Mike Edge and Toshi Miki. Edge also added a new sculpture to the Pioneer Bluffs sculpture garden. For information, contact (620) 753-3484 or gallery@pioneerbluffs.org.

The Gallery at Pioneer Bluffs is in the 1908 home of Henry and Maud Sauble Rogler and open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays (including holidays) until December 31. After the winter recess, the Gallery will reopen in March 2012 with shows by Emporia photographer Dave Leiker and El Dorado/Santa Fe contemporary painter Anna Patricia Keller.

Pioneer Bluffs, on the National Register of Historic Places, is located one mile north of Matfield Green or 15 miles south of Cottonwood Falls on Flint Hills National Scenic Byway K-177.

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Special holiday event planned at the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve has announced that the historic ranch house and headquarters area will be decorated for the holidays with cedar, natural berries, pods, and buck brush representing an 1880s historic holiday setting from November 26-December 31, 2011.

On November 26th from noon to 4 p.m. experience the Spring Hill Ranch at the height of the holiday season. Let your senses indulge in the aroma of cedar, orange peel, and cinnamon, while strolling through the lively ranch house filled with period costumed characters enjoying a holiday party and playing historic music. Visitors will see people dressed in historic costume enjoying the afternoon as they decorate the tree and read *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*. All preserve activities are free and open to the public.



Friends of McCain Holiday Home Tour December 4

Five beautiful homes will be featured during the Friends of McCain Holiday Home Tour in Manhattan on Sunday, December 4. The homes will be open from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with the final tour beginning at 4:45 p.m. The tour is a fundraiser for Kansas State University's McCain Auditorium and will showcase local homes decorated for the holiday season. Money raised from the event will support the McCain Performance Series and its education and outreach activities.

The tour will feature the residences of K-State President Kirk and Noel Schulz; Dave and Kristen Dreiling; Mike and Karen Sheffield; Bill Meredith; and Prairiewood Retreat and Preserve, owned by Kail and Rebecca Katzenmeier.

Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door, and will be available (cash and check only) in Manhattan at Ann A Lee's, Bluestem Bistro, Radina's (Aggieville and West locations), Dillons (both locations), Hy-Vee, Ray's Apple Market (both locations), and Rod's Card and Gift Shop from October 15 through December 4. They may also be purchased by credit card online at www.found.ksu.edu/hometour through November 21. Tickets purchased online will be mailed to the purchaser. Tickets are non-refundable.

Children under the age of 13, strollers, toddlers, babies, and pets will not be admitted and photography inside the homes is not permitted. The homes may be viewed in any order the ticket holder chooses.

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 Tuesday-Saturday: 11-8

Join us on December 4 for a special Christmas Tradition at the historic Volkman Cabin. Snuggle up to the wood burning stove and sample warm cookies just out of the oven as you try to imagine the family as they prepare for Christmas Day.

Heritage Center Museums
 412 S. Campbell
 M-F 9-3; Sat 10-5; Sun 1-5
 785-263-2681

christmas in the cabin.

HOMES FOR THE HOLIDAYS
 Tour Abilene's beautiful homes decorated for the holiday season!

First Saturday in December 4-8 p.m.
 First Sunday in December 1-5 p.m.
 1-800-569-5915 for ticket information

Come early on Saturday and join the fun for AN EVENING OF CHRISTMAS MAGIC in historic downtown Abilene!

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 email: tkuntz@eaglecom.net
www.mrksfarmhouse.com

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 Great home cooking in a friendly country atmosphere. We accept reservations, and drop-ins are always welcome!

Holiday happenings around the state

Strawberry Hill Christmas Tree Farm
Dates: 11/1/11 - 12/23/11
Join families and friends as you experience a traditional Christmas opportunity.

During November and December families and friends experience a traditional Christmas opportunity to choose and cut their own Christmas tree following a hayride to the fields. The tree has its loose needles shaken on the tree shaker. The children are told the tree is getting to do the Hokey Pokey. It is then netted. The Barn Shop has numerous fresh wreaths, centerpieces, door and window swags and grave pieces. Crafts and gifts available along with hot cider and cookies. Group tours available with reservations. Special orders are available. Photos may be taken earlier in the season for Christmas cards.

794 Hwy 40
Lawrence, KS 66049
Phone: (785) 841-0916
www.strawberryhillchristmas.com

Wrap It Up art exhibit and sale
Dates: 11/5/11 - 12/26/11
Find that perfect Christmas gift at the Manhattan Arts Center's most popular commercial exhibit.

Dozens of local and regional artists will bring their best work to the MAC for this exhibit and sale. The best part about this exhibit, unlike other art shows, is that when you make a purchase, you can "Wrap It Up" and take it with you.

1520 Poyntz Ave
Manhattan Arts Center
Manhattan, KS 66502
Phone: (785) 537-4420
www.manhattanarts.org

Winter Wonderland
Dates: 11/18/11 - 12/31/11
Winter Wonderland at Lake Shawnee.

See the one million lights and dazzling displays while winding through a two-mile scenic drive. Event runs 6-10 p.m. Open seven days a week. Admission is \$8 per vehicle and Buses: \$1 per person. There are special days for children, seniors and pets.

3435 SE East Edge Road
Lake Shawnee
Recreational Area
Topeka, KS 66605
Phone: (785) 232-0597

Christmas Craft Mall
Dates: 11/19/11 - 12/28/11
Over 70 exhibitors! Mon-Sat: 9am-7pm, Sun: 1-6pm. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The Christmas Craft Mall brings artists and crafts people from all over the area to set up shop and offer one-of-a-kind shopping!
1709 Main

Great Bend, KS 67530
Phone: (620) 792-3108
Christmas in Historic Lecompton
Dates: 11/19/11 - 12/31/11
Three floors of old-time Christmas decorations and trimmings and Vesper music performances.

Fifteen-foot, native Red Cedar Christmas tree. Vespers Music performance is on December 4 at 2pm.

640 E Woodson
Lecompton, KS 66050
Phone: (785) 887-6275
www.lecomptonkansas.com

Isle of Lights
Dates: 11/20/11 - 12/30/11
Spectacular Christmas Lights Display

Winfield Isle of Lights is nearly a mile-long drive-through holiday extravaganza! Features hundreds of thousands of Christmas lights in displays such as Toyland, Reindeer Road, Candyland, Zooland and much more!

N Main and Welfelt Dr
Island Park
Winfield, KS 67156
Phone: (620) 221-2418

Christmas Wonderland
Dates: 11/24/11 - 12/24/11
Open Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights! Opening Thanksgiving Night at 6 p.m. Friday 6-10 p.m. Saturday 6-10pm Sunday 6-9 p.m.

Bring your entire family and enjoy thousands of lights, animated light displays, a playground for children, and let us capture a priceless photo with Santa! Enjoy shopping in our new Christmas Wonderland store, which offers over 4,500 square feet, packed full of thousands of lights, holiday ornaments and decor, and well over fifty decorated trees!! Directions: Exit I-70 at Russell, exit #184, proceed north and take the first left. Christmas Wonderland is located directly behind Subway-let the lights lead you from the Interstate!!!

Highway 281 and I-70 crossroads
Russell, KS 67665
Phone: (785) 483-4826
www.kansaschristmaswonderland.com

Christmas on the Square
Date: 11/25/11
Downtown holiday light festival around the historic Courthouse square

Festival with carriage rides, Santa Claus, retail window guessing games and shopping.
1815 M St
Downtown Belleville, KS
Phone: (785) 527-5524
Toll Free: (866) 527-2355
www.bellevilleks.org

Holiday Ceremony and Santa's Arrival
Date: 11/25/11
Annual holiday kickoff.

The holiday season officially begins with the "rescue" of Santa off the rooftop

of Weaver's Department Store.

901 Massachusetts
Lawrence, KS 66044
Phone: (785) 842-3883
Phillipsburg Christmas Opening and "Celebration of Lights" Festival
Date: 11/25/11

The Chamber of Commerce invites you to Phillipsburg for the annual Christmas Opening.

Phillipsburg Area Chamber of Commerce & the HOPE Foundation invite you to Phillipsburg; the "City of Angels", for the annual Christmas Opening & the "Celebration of Lights" Festival at the Phillipsburg Community Building.
425 F St.
Phillipsburg, KS 67661
Phone: (785) 543-2321
www.phillipsburgks.us

The Oak Ridge Boys Christmas Show
Date: 11/25/11
Time: 7:30 p.m. Ticket Prices: TBD
214 SE 8th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66603
Phone: (785) 234-2787
Toll Free: (800) 745-3000
www.tpactix.org

Chase County Country Christmas
Dates: 11/25/11 - 11/26/11
A holiday festival in Chase County, the heart of the beautiful Flint Hills.

A Chase County tradition! It all begins on Friday evening at the "Strong City Seasonal Express" which is all about the children. Every child receives a surprise with an extra something special for those who come in their pajamas. The conductor leads the Lighting of the Caboose count-down followed by the drawing for the Fantastic Treasure of Toys. Get a good night's rest because Saturday is full of activities! Start the day with a hearty biscuits & gravy breakfast and head on over to the Fabulous Fruitcake Toss. Be sure to get your turn at propelling fruitcake across the river with a gigantic slingshot. It's fun for young and old and it's free! Other activities throughout the day include: Children's Craft Workshop, Holiday Homes Tour, "Best of Chase County" Silent Auction Baskets, and Horse-drawn Carriage Rides. Be sure to save some energy for shopping Chase county style. Why brave the big city with all the lines and harried salespersons? Come to Chase County where the lines are short and every purchase comes with a genuine smile. Fill your shopping bags with unique and value-laden gifts. In addition to all your favorite stores there is also the Strong City Arts & Crafts Fair. As evening approaches the best is yet to come. Enjoy the music and entertainment before the Lighted

Parade delivers Santa just in time to light the Chase County Courthouse and Historic Cottonwood River Bridge. Come join the countdown! We know you'll love Chase County and how we celebrate Christmas! Come on down and enjoy our hometown fun and friendly atmosphere.

318 Broadway
Throughout Chase County
Cottonwood Falls, KS 66845
Phone: (620) 273-8469
Toll Free: (800) 431-6344
chasecountychamber.org

Holiday Luminary Walk
Dates: 11/25/11 - 12/3/11
Stroll down candlelit trails through the gardens and woods and around the ponds at the Overland Park Arboretum & Botanical Gardens' Holiday Luminary Walk. This annual event will be held from 5 to 8:30 p.m., two weekends, Friday and Saturday. Admission is \$6 for adults and \$5 for children, ages 5-11. Those 4 and under are free. No pets please. "The warm holiday ambience makes this highly acclaimed event very special," said Teri Shields, a Friends of the Arboretum member. "This is a rare opportunity for those who appreciate nature to experience the thrill of the nighttime woods."

8909 W. 179th Street
Overland Park, KS 66085
Phone: (913) 685-3604
www.opabg.org

Santa House
Dates: 11/25/11 - 12/23/11
Visit Santa! Open from 5 p.m.-8 p.m.

Come and see Santa in his one-of-a-kind sparkling little humble house. Kids will have the chance to tell Santa what they want for Christmas and have the opportunity to take a picture for that captivating moment.

1400 Main
Jack Kilby Square
Great Bend, KS 67530
Phone: (620) 792-2836

Memory Lane Christmas Light Display & Tree Farm
Dates: 11/25/11 - 12/24/11
Over 30+ various light displays on the mile-long road and Christmas Tree Farm on site.

Enjoy this mile-long road with over 30 light displays ranging from toys of the "olden" days to displays telling the Christmas story, then enjoy hot cocoa, a visit to the gift shop and go home with one of your favorite trees, hand-cut, shaken and netted especially for you.
Source of the Governor's Christmas Tree for 2006.
2710 Vermont Rd
Rantoul, KS 66079
Phone: (800) 296-6745
Toll Free: (800) 296-6745
www.pleasantridge.com

Seelye Mansion Christmas Tours
Dates: 11/25/11 - 1/8/12
Tour the Mansion all decorated for Christmas, call for hours.

The Seelye Mansion is one of the finest homes in Kansas. A New York architect designed the new home in Georgian style for Dr. and Mrs. A.B. Seelye in 1904. It was built in 1905 at a cost of \$55,000. The mansion contains the original furniture and Edison light fixtures. You will tour 25 rooms, including eleven bedrooms, ballroom, bowling alley, and kitchen areas. Special items of interest are the beautiful dining room, music room with gold French furniture and Steinway Grand piano, library, and the Tiffany-designed fireplace in the grand hall. The Patent Medicine Museum contains many artifacts of the A.B. Seelye Medical Company. Founded in 1890, more than 100 products were sold over a 14-state area. Best known cure-alls included Wasatusa, Fro-zona, and Ner-vena. An important part of touring the Seelye Mansion is enjoying the beautiful yard and gardens that surround the historic home. The patio and fish pond have been restored using 1905 landscape drawings.

1105 N Buckeye
Abilene, KS 67410
Phone: (785) 263-1084
www.seelyemansion.org/

11th Annual Christmas Bazaar
Date: 11/26/11
Trego County's Home Based Business Association presents their annual Christmas Bazaar.

The Christmas Bazaar features a wide variety of items for sale -- "everything from soup to nuts," as they say, so if you're looking for something just a little different, or maybe shopping for your favorite items, be sure to check it out. In addition, beautiful seasonal music is provided plus there are food vendors with delicious snacks and meals and

Cuba Hometown Christmas
Date: 11/26/11
Experience Christmas in the community of Cuba. Caroling, buggy rides, Santa's visit, Christmas light tour, soup supper and refreshments.

Main Street
& Cuba Community Hall
Cuba, KS 66940
Phone: (785) 729-3632
Evening of Lights Christmas Parade
Date: 11/26/11
41st annual evening Christmas parade with lighted floats.
See Garnett glow! Held annually the Saturday evening following Thanksgiving, watch the Town Square come alive, dressed up in festive holiday lights. Enjoy the parade of illuminated floats, marching

door prizes. The Bazaar fills both the Commercial Building and the 4-H Building. Attend the Bazaar and have a fun and memorable day shopping and then stay for the Christmas Tree Lighting and visit with Santa downtown in the evening!

116 N 13th St
Trego County
Fairgrounds
WaKeeney, KS 67672
Phone: (785) 743-6418
www.wakeeney.org

Christmas Open House
Date: 11/26/11
Let us help you get in the spirit!

Come celebrate the season at our holiday open house. You'll not only find award-winning wine, you will also want to check out our gift shop for those on your holiday gift list. Taste some wine and nibble on some snacks while you enjoy your visit to Smoky Hill Vineyards. The winery is open from 10am to 6pm.

212 W Golf Link Rd
Smoky Hill Vineyards & Winery
Salina, KS 67401
Phone: (785) 825-2515
Toll Free: (866) 225-2515
www.kansawine.com

Cuba Hometown Christmas
Date: 11/26/11
Experience Christmas in the community of Cuba.

Caroling, buggy rides, Santa's visit, Christmas light tour, soup supper and refreshments.

Main Street
& Cuba Community Hall
Cuba, KS 66940
Phone: (785) 729-3632

Evening of Lights Christmas Parade
Date: 11/26/11
41st annual evening Christmas parade with lighted floats.

See Garnett glow! Held annually the Saturday evening following Thanksgiving, watch the Town Square come alive, dressed up in festive holiday lights. Enjoy the parade of illuminated floats, marching

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126 S. Kansas St., Waterville, Ks.
785.363.2515/ Weaver Hotel.com
December 3, 2011...
SANTA'S SOUP DAY@ Community Center
Santa visit, Soup & Dessert, Door Prizes
CHRISTMAS @ the WEAVER
Five course dinner w/ Musical Interlude@ Opera House
by reservation
January 14, 2012...
NEW YEARS PARTY
Dinner and Party by Marshall Co. Hist. Railroad Society
January 28, 2012...
CULINARY RETREAT
Cooking classes and more by reservation
Feb. 11, 20012
VALENTINE DINNER @ Weaver Hotel
THE BENDERS @the Opera House
April 14, 2012...
MAGELSON MAGIC SHOW (@ the Opera House)
April 27, 28, 29...
"ANNIE JUNIOR" @ the Opera House)
Play by Waterville Youth Theater
May 26, 2012...
NICKEL DAY(on Commercial Street)
JUNE 16, 2012...
BOB HOPE ROAD SHOW (@ the Opera House)

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Manhattan, KS 66502

bands and see Santa at the end. Warm yourself with the annual fire department chili and soup supper before, during or after parade. Then bring the children for meet 'n' greet and pictures with Santa following the parade!

4th Ave and Oak St
Town Square
Garnett, KS 66032
Phone: (785) 448-6767
www.garnettchamber.org

Festival of Lights Parade

Date: 11/26/11
Festival of Lights parade & tree lighting in historic downtown.

The entire family thrills to the sights of the lighted floats and horses. Help welcome Santa, who arrives on an antique fire engine. Santa lights the community Christmas tree and passes out candy canes to the children. Other events such as the Holiday Art Show also take place that day. Please visit our website for the latest updates!

720 High St
Baldwin City, KS 66006
Phone: (785) 594-3200
www.baldwincitychamber.com

Holiday Art Show

Date: 11/26/11
Holiday Art Show in the newly renovated Lumberyard Arts Center.

The Baldwin Community Art Council will hold their annual sale on November 26 from 10 a.m.-7 p.m. in the Lumberyard Arts Center in downtown Baldwin City. The Festival of Lights Parade will take place at 6 p.m. To reserve space or for questions please call Sherry at 785-766-1793 or Diane at 785-766-0218.

718 High St
Baldwin City, KS 66006
Phone: (785) 766-1793

www.baldwinarts.org/
Homemade for the Holidays Arts & Craft Show
Date: 11/26/11

Large arts and crafts show featuring more than 50 vendors.

Here's the perfect place to do some Holiday shopping. All items on display will be handcrafted by regional craftsmen. A lunch will be offered by the local 4-H Club.

Avery Ave and Kimball Ave

Pottorf Hall, CiCo Park
Manhattan, KS 66502
Phone: (785) 293-5712

Kids Christmas Celebration Story Time

Date: 11/26/11
Fun-filled activities for kids after the Home for the Holidays Parade.

Refreshments will be provided and the event will be filled with an hour of stories, crafts, and the Christmas classic film "How the Grinch Stole Christmas."

1409 Williams
Great Bend Public Library
Great Bend, KS 67530
Phone: (620) 792-2409
www.greatbendpl.info/

Lighted Christmas Parade

Date: 11/26/11
Christmas season with a lighted parade. Come and see the unique uses of Christmas lights on a wide variety of entries. The theme of this year's event is "140 Russell Christmases" The four categories that will be judged are Humor, Theme, Lights, and Religious.

507 N. Main
Russell, KS 67665
Phone: (785) 483-2897
www.russellmainstreet.com

Santa's Christmas Parade

Date: 11/26/11
Celebrate the arrival of

Santa with "Santa's Christmas Parade," starting at 11 a.m. Cars, trucks, floats, bands, children - everyone, young and old, is invited to participate.

The parade, starting at 5th & Broadway will march up the street to 9th Street and proceed to Santa's house. Santa Claus will be the last entry in the parade and will visit with children in his house after the parade.

More events are being planned and will be added soon. So come to Marysville, enjoy the day and visit all of the unique shops in historic downtown Marysville.

8th & Broadway
Downtown Marysville
Marysville, KS 66508
Phone: (785) 562-3101
Toll Free: (800) 752-3965
www.marysvilkansaschamber.org

Victorian Christmas Ball

Dates: 11/26/11 - 11/27/11
The Chase County Victorian Dance Society presents their annual Christmas Ball on Saturday, November 26, 2011 at 7:30 p.m., at the Ball Room at 220 1/2 Broadway, Cottonwood Falls. Period dress (circa 1870s) is admired; but not required. Your finery of any period is acceptable. Live Caller; Live Music. We'll be dancing on an antique wooden floor, so clean, soft-soled shoes, please. Refreshments are available by contribution. The Emma Chase Cafe offers a special Christmas Ball Dinner from 5 to 7 p.m. before the dance, by reservation, please, (620) 372-6020.

220 1/2 Broadway
Emma Chase Music Hall
Cottonwood Falls, KS 66845
Phone: (620) 273-6020
www.emmachasecafe.com

Christmas Lighting Festival
Date: 11/27/11
Shops open with sweet treats, carriage rides, music and parade.

Games and contests, music, refreshments and Santa Claus. Soup supper at Community Center. Collecting toys for Republic Co. toy bank.

4th St
Downtown
Scandia, KS 66966
Phone: (785) 335-3303

Pittsburg Parks and Recreation Christmas Parade

Date: 11/28/11
Annual Christmas Parade features local school marching bands, civic organizations, merchants and Santa Claus.

Downtown Pittsburg
Phone: (620) 231-1212
Toll Free: (800) 879-1112
www.visitcrawfordcounty.com

Christmas Parade

Date: 11/29/11
33rd annual community Christmas parade welcomes Santa and the holiday season, includes approximately 100 floats and entries designed and built by local organizations, churches and businesses.

Commercial St
4th-12th Ave
Emporia, KS 66801
Phone: (620) 342-1600
Toll Free: (800) 279-3730
www.emporiakschamber.org

Girard Christmas Parade

Date: 12/1/11
Annual Christmas Parade in downtown Girard featuring local school marching bands, civic organizations, merchants and Santa Claus.
Downtown Girard, KS

Phone: (620) 724-6216
Toll Free: (800) 879-1112
www.visiterawfordcounty.com

Holiday Parade of Lights

Date: 12/1/11
Nighttime Christmas parade along brick streets in historic downtown.

Brilliantly decorated Christmas floats parade the downtown streets heralding the arrival of Santa. After the parade, children swarm to the historic C.N. James Log Cabin for pictures with Santa and warm cocoa and cookies.

600 State St
Augusta, KS 67010
Phone: (316) 775-6339
www.chamberofaugusta.org

Christmas at the Old Depot Museum

Dates: 12/1/11 - 12/31/11
The Old Depot Museum will be decorated for the holiday season, and will be part of Ottawa's Victorian Christmas Celebration!

135 W. Tecumseh
Ottawa, KS 66067
Phone: (785) 242-1250

Christmas Tour of Homes

3rd Annual Christmas Tour of Homes presented by the McPherson Museum and Arts Foundation. 2-4 p.m., tour four charming McPherson homes: two stately Victorian ladies on the southwest side of town, and two smart modern gals on the northeast end, all decked out for the holidays. Purchase tickets prior to the event at the office of Siri Harrell, CPA, third floor of the McPherson Opera House, 221 S. Main, The Bookshelf, 206 N. Main, or at any of the four tour homes on the day of the tour. Homes on the tour are: 203 Crestview Avenue, 1504

North High Drive, 621 South Main and 215 South Walnut. Tickets are \$15/person. All ticket sales contribute to the support of the operations of the McPherson Museum and Arts Foundation.

1130 E Euclid
McPherson Museum
McPherson, KS 67460
Phone: (620) 241-8464
Toll Free: (800) 324-8022
www.mcphersonmuseum.com/

Community Choir Christmas Concert

Date: 12/3/11
Marshall County Community Choir to Perform Christmas Concert

The choir, under the direction of Maybelle Circle, will perform "A Swingin' Christmas" which contains traditional holiday favorites with some new Christmas arrangements. The performance will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Waterville Opera House. They will have a second performance at the Memorial Presbyterian Church in Marysville on December 4th at 2:00 p.m.


204 East Front Street
Waterville Opera House
Waterville, KS 66548
Phone: (785) 562-3668

Festival of Wreaths & Trees

December 2-4.
Sikes Room at Nelson's Landing in Leonardville. Wreaths and trees will be decorated and sold at silent auction to benefit the Leonardville Beautification Project.

Magic of Christmas in Riley

Dates: 12/10
Food, craft and home-based business vendors, 3:30-7:30, Soups Supper 5:00-7, lighted parade at 6:00, Santa arrives at 6:30. Riley County Grade School.



Anntie M's Attic
Ann Walter as the Mad Hatter
You are invited to promenade through women's history while relishing vintage clothing, hats, and accessories that adorned women from the 1870's through 1980's.
Refreshments from Victorian tea to 60's malt shop specials can be enjoyed by guests on request.
For reservations & pricing: call 785-363-2343
Email at annlwalter@bluevalley.net
or use the web:
www.anntiemsattic.vpweb.com
101 E. Commercial, Waterville, KS 66548

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Food scientist offers tips for choosing turkey

Shopping for a turkey sounds simple, but holiday cooks, and particularly first-time holiday hosts, can find labeling confusing, said Karen Blakeslee, K-State Research and Extension food scientist.

To begin, if buying a whole bird, it's best to allow about one pound per person. If choosing a boneless turkey breast, allow one-half pound per person, she said.

Should you choose a hen, or a tom?

"Simply put, a hen is a female and typically smaller in size; a tom is a male and typically larger," Blakeslee said. "The choice depends largely on the guest list. For a small

crowd, choose a hen; for a larger crowd, a tom."

The flavor will be the same, she said.

Fresh or frozen?

"A fresh turkey will be chilled, but at a temperature no lower than 26 degrees F (the temperature at which poultry begins to freeze)," Blakeslee said.

If a fresh turkey is preferred, the food scientist advised ordering it in advance and picking it up a day or two before the meal.

Purchasing a frozen turkey in advance allows consumers to take advantage of sale prices, said Blakeslee, who noted that frozen turkeys must be stored at 0 degrees F or below. She advises shop-

pers to examine the packaging to make sure the turkey is frozen "rock hard."

"With a frozen turkey, consumers are reminded to allow plenty of time to thaw it," said Blakeslee, who recommended placing a frozen turkey (breast side up, and in its original wrap) on a

pan with a lip in the refrigerator to thaw.

Allow 24 hours of thawing time for each 4 to 5 lbs. **Forget to thaw the turkey?**

To quick-thaw a frozen turkey, place the turkey (in its store wrap) in a deep sink or tub of clean cold water.

Allow about 30 minutes per pound for thawing using this method, said Blakeslee, who advised checking progress and changing the cold water every 30 minutes.

A smaller turkey or turkey breast can be thawed in a microwave oven, said Blakeslee, who advised consumers to check manufac-

turer's instructions.

Thawing a frozen turkey in a microwave oven begins the cooking process, and that will need to be continued, the food scientist said.

A frozen turkey can be roasted from a frozen state, but will require significantly more roasting time. The extended cooking time can dry out tender poultry.

A place to call home

Continued from page 19

pened throughout the Christmas service was foreign to Alex and Anastasia, the two of them having never been to church. They watched in fascination as the nativity scene unfolded and marveled at the trumpets announcing the Good News of the Christ Child. Alex had a lot of questions about what it all meant, and planned to ask Mr. Warner the first chance he got.

When the service ended, Alex felt a moment of panic, expecting someone to come for Anastasia, to take her away again. But no one came. Mrs. Warner sensed his confusion and hurried to his side.

"I'm so sorry, Alex. If we'd known you had a sister, we would have taken her into our home right away.

With all the confusion that night and the holidays and all, we just didn't know."

"So Anastasia is..."

"She's coming home with us, Alex."

Alex had seen and heard the words, "Merry Christmas" all of his life. Somehow he'd come to believe that it was all about presents and time off of school. But as he walked out into the cold night air, Anastasia's small hand tucked snugly into his, he realized that there was so much more to it than he'd ever realized. It was about hope, and love. It was about the baby born in the stable. That was the real gift, and it was a gift that changed people's lives forever.

"Merry Christmas, Alex," Anastasia said softly.

"Merry Christmas, Anastasia," he replied.

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