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MAGAZINE

Moni's Angels





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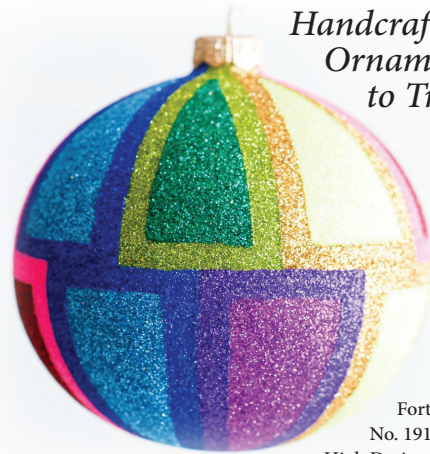


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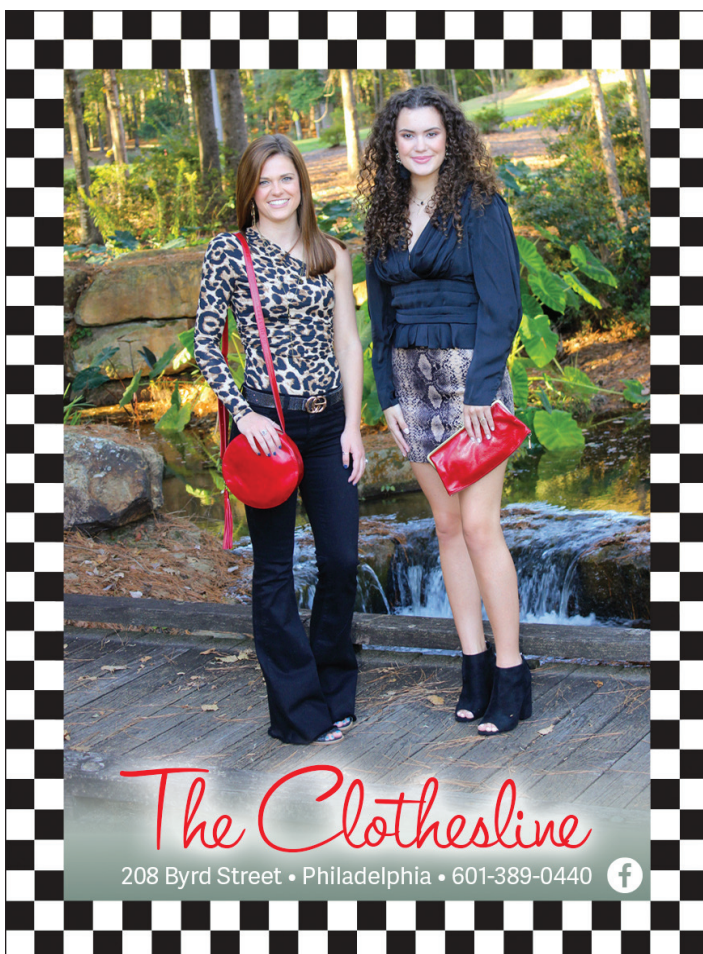
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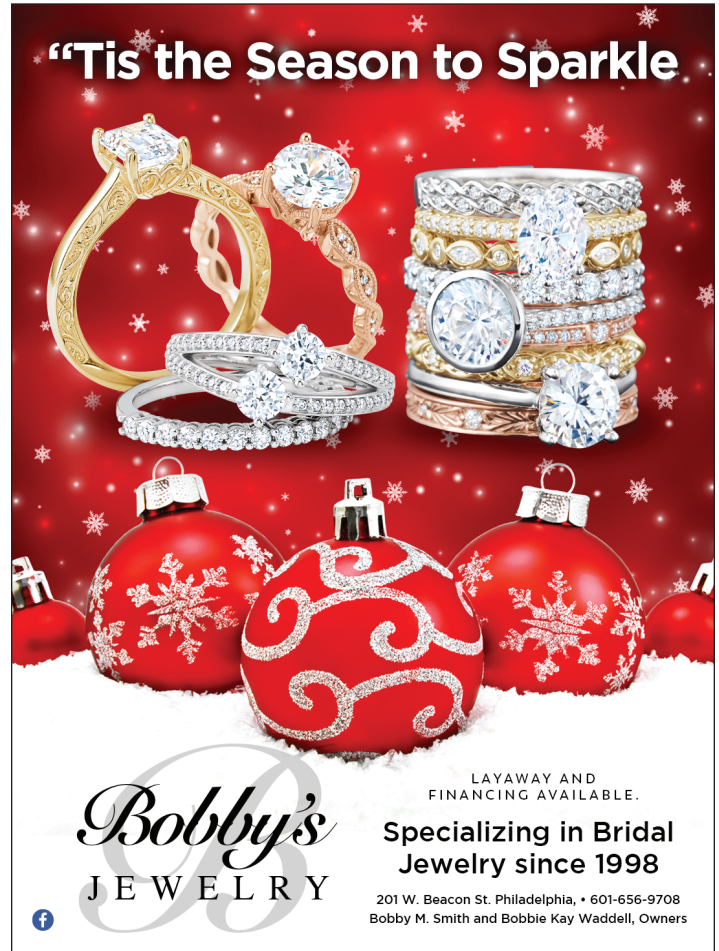






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# Contents



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## M Tootsie's unique business model a hit with local shoppers

By John Lee

M. Tootsie's offers a unique shopping experience because it is a boutique and cafe all rolled into one in a historic building on the Square downtown.

Customers can shop for the perfect Christmas gift, and then can sit down to a bowl of warm homemade soup and a handmade sandwich.

M. Tootsie's in August moved into what was for decades the Monroe Williams Department Store on the northeast corner of the Square diagonal from the Neshoba County Courthouse. The building went on to house the Coffee Bean and other establish-

ments including a pizza place.

Things are in full swing for the Christmas season with a wide variety of merchandise, such as wooden plates, dough bowls, jewelry, purses, clothes, and many different Christmas decorating options.

"I got the name for this business from my daddy, who passed away four years ago," said Mickie Williams, owner of M. Tootsie's. "His nickname for me was 'Mickie Tootsie.' This one's for you, Dad."

M. Tootsie's was originally located at 416 Church Avenue along with another business and the grand opening took place in March. She then moved

in July and officially re-opened in August.

Ever since she was a young girl, she has dreamed of owning the Monroe Williams building, and after over 60 years finally bought it when the pandemic closed another business there.

"I've worked in retail all my life, and I just loved the Monroe Williams building as a young girl because of the atmosphere and it's easily accessible from two different streets," she said. "The big 'MW' on the front of the building drew me since my initials are also 'MW.' I just knew it was meant for me."

Williams said her favorite part of running the boutique is the people.

"The best part of being able to run this business is seeing everybody," she said. "I'm a big people person. I love people, and I've worked in retail all





Mickie Williams, right, stands with her son, John Thomas Williams.



Pictured from left to right are Mickie Williams, Regina Smith, Morgan Murphy, Gracie Brown, Kelsi Ainsworth, and Ann Watkins.



my life. I've decided that even at 63 years old, I'm gonna do this myself. It really brings me joy and I absolutely love the Christmas season."

Despite the pandemic, M. Tootsie's has been doing very well.

"I think everyone is ready to come out of their houses and see people, and are especially looking for another place to eat and relax," she said. "Wear your mask and come on in. We have free WiFi, so you can get on your computer, do your homework, read a book, listen to Christmas music, have a snack, and just enjoy the hometown feeling."

Along with the boutique, M. Tootsie's also has the cafe with lunches from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. daily. Each table in the cafe has a unique twist, which is a can of Tootsie Rolls to fit the theme of the store.

"Our selection of items for Christmas is huge. We've got Mississippi Santa ornaments, Christmas trees, Christmas cups, towels, and all sorts of stuff for the season," she said. "After you're done shopping, you can sit down for lunch and enjoy the delicious food options we have."

Some of her ingredients and the bologna come from Williamsville — or more formally Williams Brothers Inc., founded 1908 — where her husband Sid Williams is part of the family. The soups and sandwiches are both homemade and handmade. She hopes people will come visit the store and make themselves at home.

"We aim to make everyone feel comfortable and to enjoy the atmosphere of M. Tootsie's," she said.

Regina Smith, assistant manager, has been working at the store since it

opened in April.

"Everything about this store is comforting. I was never a coffee drinker before, but I've come to love it now because of M. Tootsie's," she said.

Martha Hancock has been coming to M. Tootsie's ever since it opened and has enjoyed every minute of her time there.

"I like to shop downtown, so this is a perfect place for me, whether I want to shop or get something to eat."

There's such a big variety of things to buy, she said. "This place is so homey."

M. Tootsie's Boutique is located on the Square at 422 E. Beacon Street and is open from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily. For more information, visit the M. Tootsie's Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/MTootsies](http://www.facebook.com/MTootsies). - ■





*"The main thing is to remind people of what Christmas is about, and that's the birth of Jesus," Howard said. "It's not about COVID, it's about Jesus coming into the world, and ultimately dying on the cross for our sins."*



# Celebrating Christmas

By John Lee

**W**ith the Christmas season moving front and center, the Rev. Dr. Dan Howard plans to celebrate the birth of Christ safely and just as vigorously in the middle of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic if not more.

Howard, pastor of The First Baptist Church of Philadelphia for two decades, admits this year is different with coronavirus challenges and limitations, but the main thing remains the main thing.

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"The main thing is to remind people of what Christmas is about, and that's the birth of Jesus," Howard said. "It's not about COVID, it's about Jesus coming into the world, and ultimately dying on the cross for our sins."

First Baptist will be having their Christmas Eve service, which has been a long tradition even before his time.

"Christmas Eve services are very important to us, since they're very special and spiritual," Howard said. "We'll be making sure to socially

distance and spread out, have families sit together, and everyone will be wearing masks. We want to make sure to follow the guidelines so we can keep having services."

The main challenge this year will be accommodating the usual large crowd.

"Our sanctuary is usually packed for Christmas Eve, so that'll be tough to work with considering we'll need to spread out and social distance," he said. "But we will have a service, no matter what."









Howard said that people being able to come back to the church after they were closed down earlier this year really showed how much people missed being able to gather together and worship.

"It makes you realize how nice worshipping together actually is, and it's something we take for granted," he said. "When you're suddenly not allowed to do it, you see how important it really is. I'm looking forward to things getting back to normal."

Besides the Christmas Eve service, First Baptist also puts together Christmas Blessing Boxes, which are packed with food for hungry families during the Christmas season. The boxes include things like a ham, green beans, rolls, yams, desserts, and more.

"The blessing boxes are a great thing," he said. "Our church members are very generous and giving people."

Howard stressed again the most important thing about the Christmas season is Jesus.

"We really need to celebrate Jesus,

***"We really need to celebrate Jesus, remember who he is, and what he's done for us," he said. "Focusing on him is the most important thing."***

remember who he is, and what he's done for us," he said. "Focusing on him is the most important thing."

William Smith, the choir director at First Baptist, has been busy planning the annual Christmas Cantata held in early December.

"We've been spread out in the sanctuary practicing," Smith said. "If it ends up being canceled, we'll do something on the Sunday night before Christmas."

The service is called Lessons and Carols and includes choral anthems, congregational singing, and narration.

The Cantata this year is based on the musical "Glorious Light of Christmas" by Marty Hamby. "We won't be singing all of the songs," he said.

Historically, the Cantata has been very well supported by the community

and it's usually the biggest thing they do all year.

"We're going to keep singing and praising. Praising is one of the best weapons Christians have against all enemies of the soul," he said.

Barney Nowell and his wife Lavinia have been members of The First Baptist Church since the mid 1950s and are currently listening to the church services on the radio.

Nowell said that he and his wife have been regularly preparing themselves for the radio services, but really miss going to the services in person.

"We love to go in person, but we're doing what we have to do to make sure we stay in good health," said Nowell now retired and a former owner at McClain-Hays Funeral Service. "We plan to take part in any services





***“Our goal is to continue to make sure we’re fed spiritually but also as safe as possible, and that includes Christmas,” she said. “I hope that focus stays on Jesus on his birth.”***

they have planned for the Christmas season, whether it’s in person or on the radio.”

Carly Byars Rounsaville is a third generation member of the church, and her husband Tyler has been there a decade.

“We’ve been faithful members of First Baptist and try to attend every Sunday,” Rounsaville said. “We’ve really missed going, but we’ve made sure to watch the services on Facebook,

and we’ve even been doing Sunday School sessions through Zoom.”

Rounsaville said Christmas is a special time to be spiritual and hopes she can take part in it this year safely.

“Our goal is to continue to make sure we’re fed spiritually but also as safe as possible, and that includes Christmas,” she said. “I hope that focus stays on Jesus on his birth.”

Rounsaville said First Baptist’s Christmas Eve service has always been

a special time for her and her family.

“I hope we can do it this year as safely as possible. We’ll have to adapt and make some changes to keep everyone safe,” she said. “Everyone should know to keep Jesus as the focus and everything else will fall into place.”

The First Baptist Church is located at 414 Pecan Avenue. For more information, visit [www.fbcphilly.com](http://www.fbcphilly.com). - ■





ON THE  
COVER

# Moni's Angels

By Duncan Dent





“I am good with clay, I’m not that good with words,” is one of the first things out of Philadelphia native Moni McKee’s mouth when asked about her gift of and love of ceramics.

She was preparing a batch of snowmen on her pottery wheel at her Ridgeland workshop recently, which means she had to go outside and use her clay mixer.

Her clay mixer is an old stainless steel ground beef grinder she acquired from Willis McKee, a distant cousin grocer when she was just getting started 36 years ago.

“He owned a Piggly Wiggly or something in town and when they were switching over their meat grinder he said I could use it and it has been a very good clay mixer for all this time,” McKee said. “It sits outside and doesn’t rust.”

She molds a variety of seasonal fare out of clay, from whimsical angels to bunnies and birds that evoke a certain memory or occasion out of her small workshop.

She just got done with a batch of items for Halloween but she is known mostly for her Christmas creations like Santas and Nativity pieces and, of course, her famous, angels,

which are made one-by-one, no two alike.

“Each one is an individual,” she said.

The angels came sometime after she found herself having to produce a line of holiday-themed ceramics in a crunch nearly four decades ago.

“Never thought I would say I have been doing it for that long but people keep buying them so I keep making them,” McKee said.

She discovered at East Central that she loved working with clay and ceramics. She went on to finish at Mississippi University for Women.

“I realized in college that I enjoyed working with clay,” she said. “Since then clay has been my thing. It’s my life, my passion, my work, my income.”

It is a craft she has perfected. For round snowmen or a big Santa belly, she may use a pottery wheel, but the angels are more free form. She starts with a 25-pound block of clay delivered to her studio.

“The hardest part might be getting the clay from the street to in the door,” she said.

Using a wire, she cuts a sheet off of the block between an





inch and an inch-and-a-half thick. That sheet is then flattened, trimmed and rolled into a freestanding cone.

McKee said she usually gets between four and five sheets off of a block, representing about that many larger angels, but that there is a large amount trimmed off and leftover that becomes a variety of other projects.

Next, detail is added to the cone. Arms, wings, heads and other details are fashioned from a bucket of soft clay. A lot of time is spent fine-tuning the expressions. McKee does not work off molds or patterns and said after she pinches the clay a few times, an expression starts to take shape and becomes a guide for the rest of that angel or figure.

This is just the beginning of a lengthy process. She said ceramics then sit outside, often overnight before going into the kiln that gets up to at least 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. The oven is its own matrix of complications. She said it usually runs on low the evening before she is going to put some figures in. The temperature is steadily raised to its high temperature before the figures go in. After the figures cook it can take a whole day before it is cooled down properly again and she can start the process over.

She said this step is the most tricky. While decades of experience have helped her develop a system for consistency she said sometimes she will open the kiln and find a Santa with his head blown off. It is still a delicate enough process that mistakes do happen.

She said a year or two ago she had a batch of animals,



probably for a nativity scene, she wanted to finish for a big show.

"I don't remember why I was so set on finishing I think it was a bunch of donkeys but I probably put them in way too early," she remembered. The next time she checked on them they had all shattered.

"There have certainly been some losses," McKee said.

But once the figures make it out of the oven safely the final touches are put on. McKee decorates and paints her figures. Aqua and pink make frequent appearances, though McKee does not like to limit herself to repeating designs, colors and patterns. Angels consistently get a gold touch. Gold paint and leaf add an extra pop of celestial detail. McKee will even enlist a group of friends to help her paint a batch before a big show.

Her snowmen are partially slated for the Handworks Holiday Market at the Mississippi Trade Mart. McKee has been working to make up for time lost at earlier shows like the Flea Market at the Neshoba County Fair.

"It was a big loss is what it is," McKee said. "It's a big show I have done from the very beginning and I don't think I had missed a year since."

The yearly Fair show has been a great opportunity to see







loyal customers and old friends. Though a heavy rain is expected during the fair, McKee said she has been surprised that the Flea Market has never been completely “washed out,” although she does remember a learning experience early on where she may have been washed out of the Flea Market.

“I remember one year I got the bright idea that I would travel super light and just got some cardboard boxes from the UPS store to use for my travel and set up,” she said.

That year a gully washer came through and “disintegrated” her setup leading her to marshal her figures in the mud. She now carries plastic boxes in case of rain.

McKee graduated from Leake Academy in 1972. She followed her best friend, Lorraine Harpole, to the school. They would go on to be roommates in college. Lorraine is now Lorraine Blount but the pair remain best friends. She lives just 10 minutes away in Madison.

Her friend’s family was one of her first introductions to art. Lorraine’s mother Frankie Harpole was an artist that worked with watercolors. She said she remembers two other Philadelphia women from her childhood, Lallah Miles Perry and Millicent Merritt Howell.

“I just remember their houses were full of beautiful things and beautiful art,” McKee said.

During their time at East Central, Lorraine would talk Moni into trying a design class. It was the beginning of an interest that would follow her for a year to Starkville, where she found a drawing class that proved to be well above her threshold and finally her time at “the W” where she would settle into ceramics.

The drawing class at State had her frustrated but she did not give up. She remembers the professor’s name was Michael Dorsey.

“I must have been one of the worst students he ever had,” McKee said. Dorsey would later judge a show she had entered in Cleveland, giving her an award for ceramics.

During her stint at State, while in a class over her head, McKee would take a trip to Columbus with her late brother, John McKee, to see the W campus.

“I remember he was in town visiting some friends and he took me over there and it was the first time I saw the W campus,” McKee said.

She would finish up at the W where she said she basically lived in the ceramics department building.

After college, with a new love for ceramics and the knowledge to back it up, she moved back home for a time. Her family procured a small four-room A-frame house on their property just across the street from the East Philadelphia Baptist Church. The property still stands and even holds her first gas kiln. While the site is within the city limits, at the time it felt like it was out in the country.

From there, she would work tirelessly to create her ceramics. Even after she made the move to Ridgeland and started having kids she would load up an old cargo van with ceramics to be fired and finished. She would work late into



the nights and said she even saw a few sunrises during her time making the trip back and forth.

“I got a good bit done from that house,” McKee said. “It’s still there and still there with the old kiln I used. Probably never to be used again.”

McKee’s work can be found at a variety of shops. She also likes to “hit the shows” including Mistletoe, Handworks and the Chimneyville Arts Festival. She supplies Madison’s Persnickety with ceramics, usually about three weeks before Christmas. She also keeps a display at M&S Furniture stocked about two weeks before Christmas.

“I really cannot keep up with demand and places always run out but I have been up late the night before Christmas Eve trying to finish some figures to take to Persnickety before Christmas,” McKee said.

She said it is her relationship with these shops, events and customers that gives her work a lot of its satisfaction and meaning.

“Other than the satisfaction I get from my work I really love the customers and their reactions to my work. I enjoy the fact that they love my work. When I started out I did not anticipate that these things would mean so much to a customer,” McKee said.

Moni McKee has two grown children and six grandchildren. Her son, Jon Nowell, lives in Norway with his wife and two children. Her daughter, Nicole, lives in Ridgeland with her husband and their four children. She is the daughter of the late John D. and Dot McKee.

She can be contacted by email at [monimckeeangels@gmail.com](mailto:monimckeeangels@gmail.com). - ■



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HOLIDAY  
TREATS

# Spiked Hot Chocolate

BY DUNCAN DENT



**G**ustavo Arellano, a self-proclaimed nerd, columnist and author of the books “Ask a Mexican” and “Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America” argues he traces the anthropological origins of a variety of foods, drinks and ingredients that have dominated world cuisine from the street taco to the margarita.

There is even a chapter in his 2012 book “Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America” on how tamales found their circuitous way to the banks of the Mississippi to become a Delta delicacy. But perhaps no other ingredient illustrates his thesis quite as clearly as the global spread of chocolate.

The cacao plant grown is native to South America and over time made its

way north to the wooded highland of northern Mexico.

While we think of chocolate today as something sweet and solid eaten in pieces as a treat, it was consumed ceremonial for thousands of years as a drink. Evidence suggests that it may have been fermented and served as an alcoholic beverage as early as 1400 BC and ceramic vessels with residue from preparing chocolate drinks have been discovered at archeological sites believed to be as old as 1900 BC.

The ancient Olmecs used chocolate for religious rituals or medicinal drinks, though little evidence if any remains of how they were prepared.

Mayan culture adopted the cacao bean and prepared a beverage reserved for the upper class. By the time it migrated into the Aztec culture the tradition was expanded to include warriors who made their mark in battle.

Arellano says that beans were processed in a way that required them to be roasted, cracked and de-shelled leaving a smoky, bitter core called the nib. The nib was then ground into a paste and mixed into a pot with boiling water.

“They poured the cocoa water from one pot to another until the liquid foamed,” Arellano says.

Chiles, aguamiel, vanilla and other aromatics were then added to enhance the drink.

Spanish conquistadors were amazed by the drink. One records an incident in which he watched Moctezuma II, ninth ruler of the Aztec empire, consume something like fifty jars of the stuff. When the Spaniards got a hold of it they would add milk and sugar. They would load it onto galleons among their many spoils of the new world and from there it spread throughout Eu-





rope, tinkered with at every juncture and then the world.

Some of the original ingredients in what is by any metric hot cocoa may be suspect, but we present a recipe below that looks at a cup sent around the world a few times and brought straight into your kitchen for a warm and boozy Holiday treat to serve to friends and family. The texture is light

and foamy but the chocolate still has enough body to be enjoyed heartily.

Tequila, something Arellano dedicates the entirety of chapter 13 of his book to, grounds the drink in its native soil while the combination of mint and peppermint schnapps bring a seasonal flair and icy-hot sensation.

This recipe makes four mugs and shouldn't take you any longer than it

would take to play a live version of Neal young's "Cortez the Killer," so whip up a few next time friends stop by to take some solace from the cold.

#### INGREDIENTS:

1/4 cup cocoa powder  
1 tablespoon granulated sugar  
pinch kosher salt  
3 cups whole milk  
4 ounces milk chocolate chips  
4 ounces bittersweet chocolate chips  
4 ounces tequila  
2 ounces peppermint schnapps  
Whipped cream and mint leaf garnish

#### DIRECTIONS:

In a medium saucepan, stir cocoa with sugar and salt. Stir in milk, milk chocolate, and bittersweet chocolate. Heat over medium heat, stirring constantly, until chocolate is melted and mixture is hot. Gently whisk to completely homogenize the mixture. Add tequila and peppermint schnapps. Divide into serving cups and top with whipped cream and mint. - ■



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## HOLIDAY FAVES

# A Christmas Feast

### ROAST TURKEY

1 (18 pound) whole turkey  
 ½ cup unsalted butter, softened  
 salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
 1½ quarts turkey stock  
 8 cups prepared stuffing

#### Step 1

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Place rack in the lowest position of the oven.

#### Step 2

Remove the turkey neck and giblets, rinse the turkey, and pat dry with paper towels. Place the turkey, breast side up, on a rack in the roasting pan. Loosely fill the body cavity with stuffing. Rub the skin

with the softened butter, and season with salt and pepper. Position an aluminum foil tent over the turkey.

#### Step 3

Place turkey in the oven, and pour 2 cups turkey stock into the bottom of the roasting pan. Baste all over every 30 minutes with the juices on the bottom of the pan. Whenever the drippings evaporate, add stock to moisten them, about 1 to 2 cups at a time. Remove aluminum foil after 2 1/2 hours. Roast until a meat thermometer inserted in the meaty part of the thigh reads 165 degrees F, about 4 hours.

#### Step 4

Transfer the turkey to a large serving platter, and let it stand for at least 20 to 30 minutes before carving.

### CORNBREAD DRESSING

2 cups cornmeal  
 1 tablespoon white sugar  
 1 tablespoon baking powder  
 1 teaspoon salt  
 5 eggs, beaten  
 1 (12 fluid ounce) can evaporated milk  
 ¼ cup vegetable oil  
 2 cups chopped fresh mushrooms  
 1 cup chopped celery  
 ½ cup chopped green onions  
 3 tablespoons butter  
 2 (14 ounce) cans chicken broth  
 1 (10.75 ounce) can condensed cream of chicken soup  
 1 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 pinch dried parsley

#### Step 1

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly grease a 9x13 inch baking dish.

#### Step 2

In a 9 inch iron skillet, mix cornmeal, white sugar, baking powder, salt, 2 eggs, evaporated milk and vegetable oil.

#### Step 3

Bake cornmeal mixture in the preheated oven 35 to 40 minutes, or until lightly browned. Allow to cool.

#### Step 4

Crumble the cooled cornbread into a large bowl. Mix in remaining eggs, mushrooms, celery, green onions, butter, chicken broth, condensed





cream of chicken soup, ground black pepper and dried parsley.

#### Step 5

Transfer the mixture to the prepared 9x13 inch baking dish. Bake 45 minutes in the preheated oven.

#### CRANBERRY SAUCE

12 ounces cranberries  
1 cup white sugar  
1 cup orange juice  
In a medium sized saucepan over medium heat, dissolve the sugar in the orange juice. Stir in the cranberries and cook until the cranberries start to pop (about 10 minutes). Remove from heat and place sauce in a bowl. Cranberry sauce will thicken as it cools.

#### PUMPKIN PIE

1 egg  
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup white sugar  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups pumpkin puree  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups evaporated milk  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground nutmeg  
2 tablespoons light corn syrup  
1 recipe pastry for a 9 inch single crust pie

#### Step 1

Preheat oven to 450.

#### Step 2

Add the sugar gradually to the pumpkin puree. Beat well and stir in the flour, salt and spices. Stir in the corn syrup and beat well. Stir in the slightly beaten egg, then slowly add the evaporated milk, mixing until well blended. Pour the batter into the unbaked pie shell.

#### Step 3

Bake at 450 for 10 minutes then reduce the oven temperature to 325 and continue baking pie for an additional 30 minutes or until a knife inserted into the mixture comes out clean.

#### BREAD PUDDING

10 slices white bread, cut into cubes  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup margarine, melted  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup raisins  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
6 eggs  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup white sugar  
2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt  
3 cups hot milk  
1 pinch ground nutmeg

#### Step 1

Heat oven to 375

#### Step 2

In a large bowl, combine bread cubes, melted margarine, raisins, and cinnamon;



mix well, and transfer to a 2 quart baking dish.

#### Step 3

Use the same bowl to beat the eggs. Stir in sugar, vanilla, and salt until sugar is dissolved. Slowly whisk in the hot milk. Pour egg mixture over bread cubes, sprinkle

with nutmeg, and set aside to soak for 5 minutes.

#### Step 4

Bake in preheated oven for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. - ■

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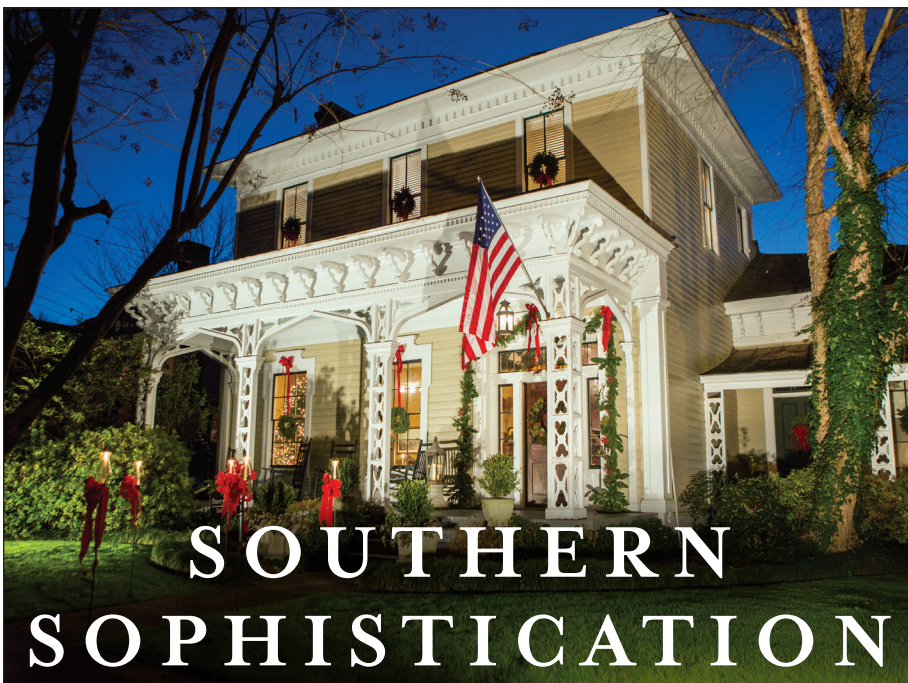


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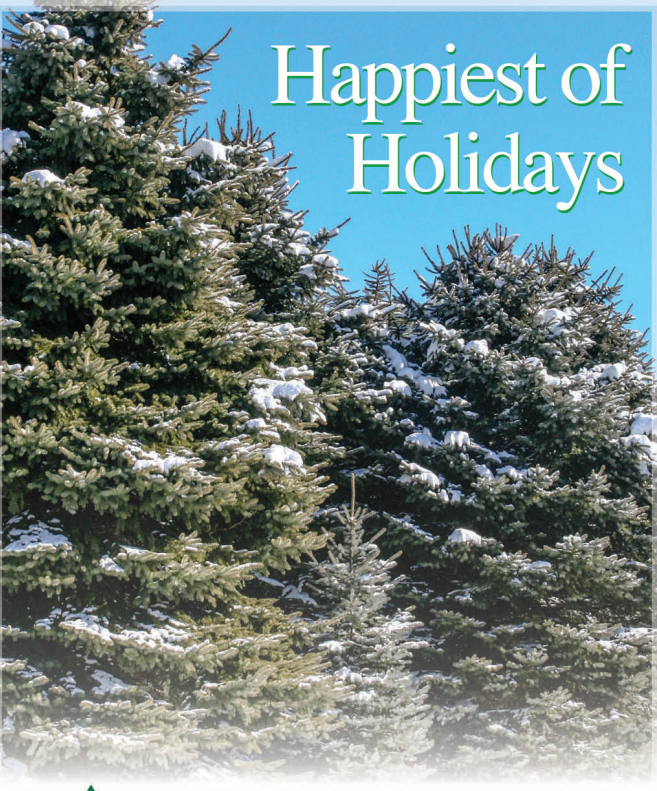


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