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Volume 45
Number 25

Wednesday, November 25, 2026

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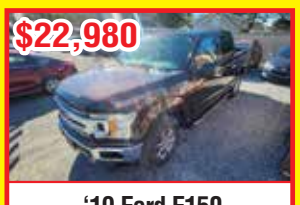

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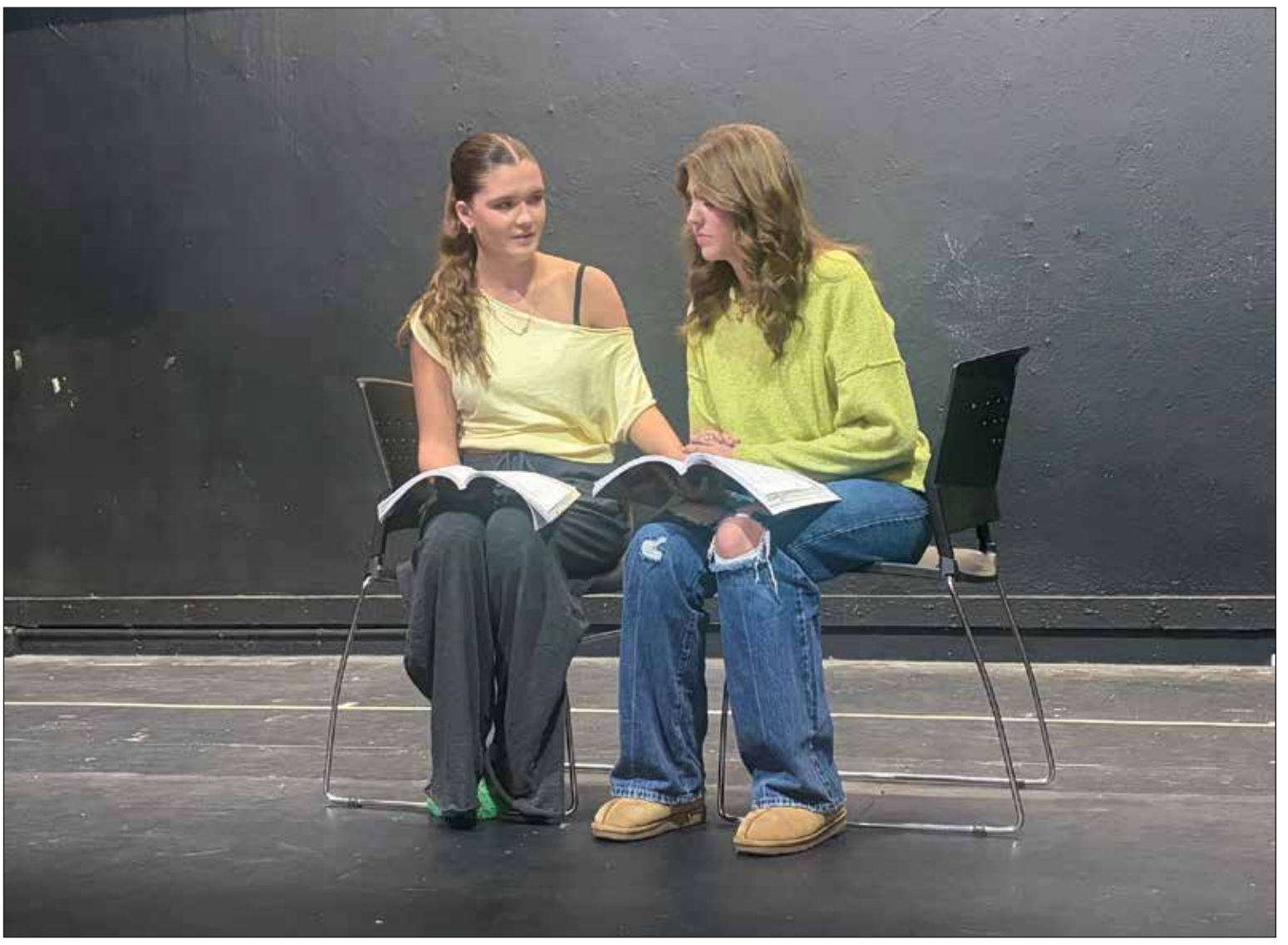
Reitz Theater to stage Disney's 'Descendants'

By Andy Stine
astine@altoonamirror.com



— Photo courtesy Reitz Theater

Alyssa Catalano and Remi Osselborn rehearse a scene of Descendants recently.

DuBois' Reitz Theater will stage the musical of Disney's "Descendants" on Dec. 4-6 and Dec. 11-13. Performances are at 7 p.m. except for the Sunday matinees (Dec. 6 and Dec. 13), which will begin at 2 p.m. Tickets are $20 and can be ordered at reitztheater.com or call the box office at 814-375-4274.

This will be the fourth musical that the theater has staged this year, which is more than average for the crew, according to media specialist and Reitz Theater board member Andy Benson.

"It depends on what our membership is willing to put on for people — whatever the directors and people like that are interested in doing," Benson said. "We do five shows a year. Sometimes we do three musicals and two plays. Next year, we have two musicals and three plays. It varies on what we want to do."

The theater is just coming off a performance of "Heathers" in October. "Heathers" was a musical that Benson described as edgier and risqué than the average musical.

"We sold very well, and I figured we probably would, but you never know until it really happens, of course," Benson said. "You can do risque and edgier content if you do it right. The people had a great time."

"Descendants" is a story based on the children of famous characters. Imprisoned on the Isle of the Lost – home of the most infamous villains who ever lived – the teenaged children of Maleficent, the Evil Queen, Jafar and Cruella De Vil have never ventured off the island ... until now. When the four troublemakers are sent to attend prep school alongside the children of beloved Disney heroes, they have a difficult choice to make: should they follow in their parents' wicked footsteps or learn to be good?

"The whole cast is all age 18 and under," Benson said. "The vast majority of the kids are local high school students, and some are middle school students."

While this is the Reitz Theater's final performance of 2026, plans have already ramped up for the 2027 season. The first performance of the year will come on Tuesday, Feb. 2, with the musical "Groundhog Day the Musical." The group will also do the show on the two following weekends.

"We would usually never do a show on a Tuesday normally, but we wanted to do that because we knew there would be a lot of people in the area for the celebrations of Groundhog Day, and we wanted to capitalize on that," Benson said.

The theater also has "God of Carnage," "Cinderella," "Death by Chocolate" and "It's A Wonderful Life" lined up for next year.

Auditions for "Groundhog Day The Musical," are coming up on Nov. 30 and Dec 1-2. Those auditioning will need to prepare a song to sing and will be asked to read as a part of the audition as well.

For more information and tickets for upcoming performances, visit the theater's website at https://sites.google.com/view/thereitztheater/home.



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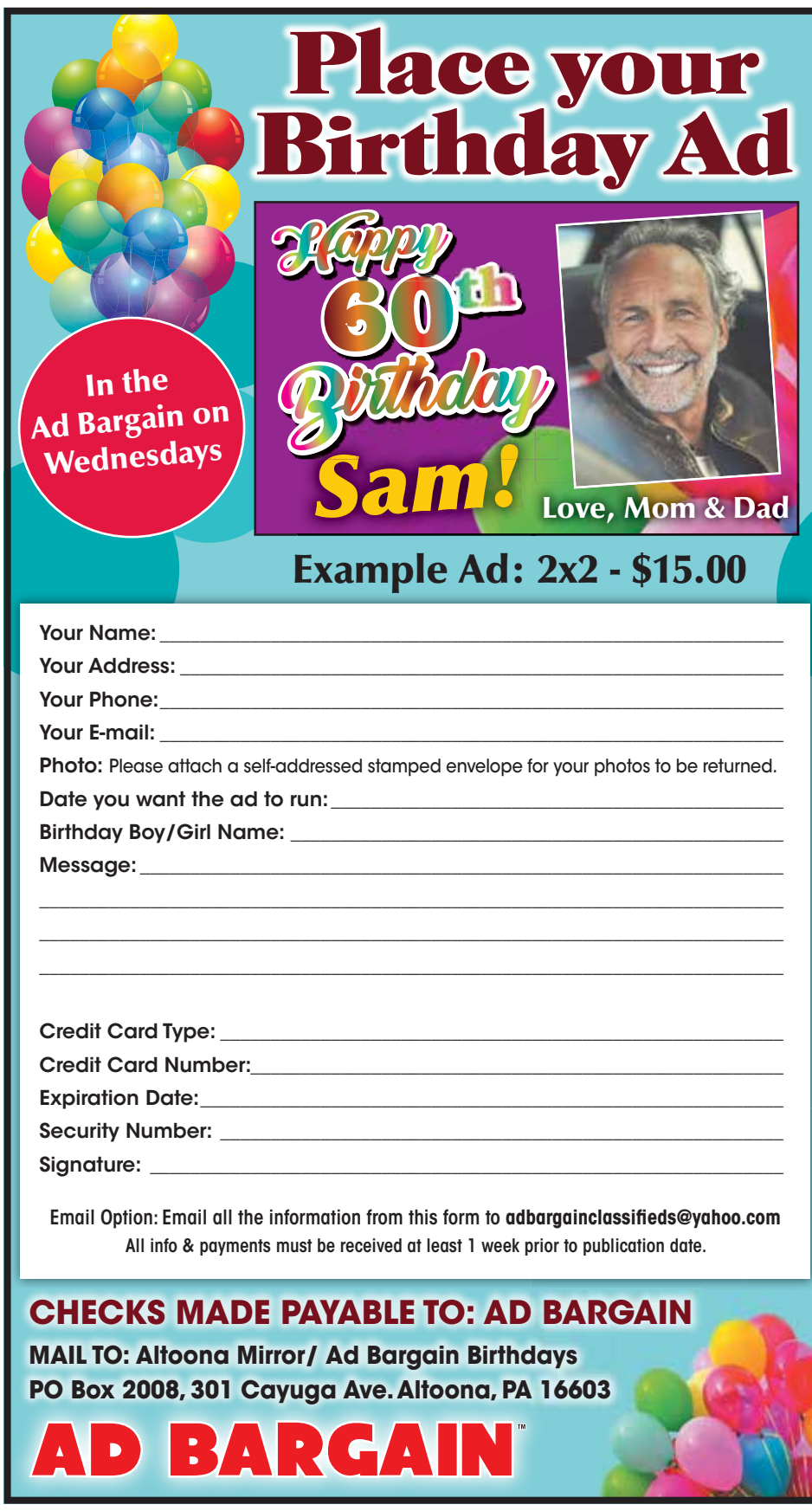

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Watch Auctionzip.com ID #1220 for photos. Terms: cash, approved check, or credit card with a 5% fee. Announcements made on the day of the auction take precedence over any and all printed material.

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2026 SEASON OF SHARING RECIPIENT: Victory Therapeutic Horsemanship

HISTORY: The Altoona Mirror Season of Sharing is a holiday fundraiser that aims to combine the power of the local newspaper, the expertise of the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation and the generosity of our central Pennsylvania readers.
Season of Sharing has become a holiday tradition, and the money raised benefits a specific charity or charities each year.

Over the past 21 years, Season of Sharing has raised more than $516,695 for local charities, with last year's total of $48,183 to Dreams Go On.

PAST RECIPIENTS:
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2007 Shriners Hospitals for Children
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2010 Zack Hinish Foundation
2011 Big Brothers Big Sisters of Blair County
2012 Home Nursing Agency's Healing Patch
2013 Miracle League of Blair County
2014 Mountain Lion BackPack Program
2015 Family Services Teen Center & Shelter
2016 Salvation Army Emergency Disaster Services
2017 Hurricane Relief
2018 Blair County Suicide Prevention Task Force
2019 Skills Of Central PA
2020 Altoona Food Bank
2021 Blair County Library System
2022 St. Vincent De Paul Assumption Chapel Food Pantry
2023 Sweat For Vets
2024 Central PA Humane Society
2025 Dreams Go On

THIS YEAR'S RECIPIENT: Victory Therapeutic Horsemanship is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that was founded to provide veterans in central Pennsylvania a much needed equine therapy program.

Studies have repeatedly shown that therapeutic riding has a massive positive effect on combat veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI), and coping with pain and physical injuries. Through working with horses they aim to empower our veterans and offer a gratifying outlet in which to work through their ailments. Equine therapy is proven to improve the quality of life of veterans and their families.

They provide their programs at absolutely no cost; proudly serving those who served our country.

HOW TO DONATE: The first and easiest way is to fill out the coupon below and mail it along with an envelope to the address listed below.

You can also drop off the coupon and your contribution at the Altoona Mirror, 301 Cayuga Ave., Altoona PA 16602.

The funds raised through the Season of Sharing will be administered by the Central Pennsylvania Community Foundation. 100% of the donations to the Season of Sharing will go directly to that year's charity.

Of course, donations to the Season of Sharing are tax deductible.

Deadline for donations is Jan. 31, 2027.

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Special Advertising Feature

SHOP LOCAL SMALL BUSINESS Saturday

November 28, 2026

THE MANY REASONS TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY



Small business is big business across much of North America. According to a 2024 report from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, nearly 98 percent of all businesses in Canada are small businesses, which the Government of Canada defines as firms with one to 99 paid employees. Small businesses boast an equally notable presence in the United States, where the Small Business Administration reports such establishments account for 99 percent of the nation's firms.

With such a profound presence in both Canada and the United States, it's no wonder small businesses are championed at a point in time when shopping takes center stage. Small Business Saturday occurs each year on the Saturday after American Thanksgiving, making it part of a weekend that is often characterized as the start of the holiday shopping season. With small businesses set to take their well-earned turn in the spotlight, consumers can ponder the many reasons to support Small Business Saturday this year.

- Small businesses are significant employers. The term "small business" can be misleading, particularly in terms of job creation. While small businesses are generally described as firms with fewer than 500 employees, recent data from the SBA indicated small companies accounted for two-thirds of employment growth across the U.S. over the last quarter century, ultimately generating around 13 million jobs during that time period. Small businesses also are big-time employers in Canada, where the ISEDC notes such firms employed 46.5 percent of the nation's total private labor force in 2023. Those jobs are filled by consumers' family members, friends and neighbors, and supporting these employers ensures those individuals can keep earning.
- Small businesses help to fund vital local services. Another notable reason to support small businesses is their role in creating strong local tax bases. The revenue generated by successful, local small businesses strengthens communities because it translates into tax income for local towns, which benefits schools, community organizations and public safety.
- Small business spending is more likely to stay in the local community. Another way supporting small businesses benefits communities relates to where consumers' dollars go once they're spent. Data from the American Independent Business Alliance indicates 48 percent of each purchase at a local independent business was recirculated locally. By comparison, just 14 percent of purchases at chain stores was recirculated locally. That means more than three times as much money is staying in communities when consumers buy from locally owned businesses compared to chain retailers.

There's no shortage of reasons to support Small Business Saturday. This year, consumers can do their part and give local small businesses, and the communities they call home, their unwavering support by shopping local on Small Business Saturday.

THE TRICKLE-DOWN BENEFITS OF SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES



Small businesses dominate the commercial landscape. Whenever a person chooses to dine at a neighborhood restaurant, work with an independent contractor or visit a local clothing shop, they are participating in a practice that goes beyond any single transaction. Supporting small businesses creates an economic ripple that benefits consumers, workers and even entire communities.

Supporting small businesses leads to the "local multiplier effect." According to research by the American Independent Business Alliance, approximately $53 of every $100 spent at an independent local business stays in the local economy, compared to less than $14 spent at a national chain. This is because small businesses prioritize local suppliers, utilize community services and re-invest their profits locally. This continuous circulation of money directly funds communities through tax revenue that funds local infrastructure projects, public schools and emergency services.

Small businesses also are essential for job growth and employment stability. The U.S. Small Business Administration indicates that small businesses make up 99.9 percent of all American enterprises, employing around 60 million workers, or nearly half of the private sector workforce. Small businesses also generate nearly two out of every three new private sector jobs, says the SBA. By supporting these companies, consumers can help preserve existing jobs and create new opportunities for local job seekers, many of whom are young people or second-chance workers who find their first breaks at independent establishments.

Beyond the financial benefits, local businesses foster innovation and help communities develop character. Unlike large corporations that tend to be cookie-cutter and rely on standardization, independent businesses adapt easily to the unique preferences of the areas where they are located. This helps to cultivate distinct neighborhood identities. Ordinary streets downtown can transform into walkable town centers. According to OneDigital, groupings of local businesses in neighborhoods correlates with stronger civic engagement, higher rates of charitable giving and greater overall community resilience when the economy falters.

Small businesses owners rely heavily on long-term relationships and word-of-mouth. This means that these business owners (and their employees) will be compelled to deliver superior customer support, accountability and a specialized expertise that cannot be matched by huge corporations. This personalized service will bring customers back time and again.

Supporting small businesses is a direct investment in the community. Every dollar spent at an independent business provides benefits for people who call that neighborhood home.













705 - Bargain Counter

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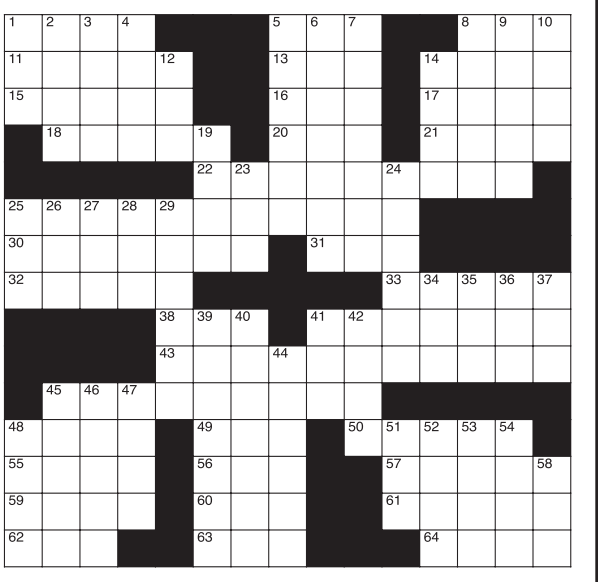
AD BARGAIN Crossword Puzzle

Solution on page 6



CLUES ACROSS

1. Insect feeler
5. Central processing unit
8. Part of (abbr.)
11. Typical
13. Tall, rounded vase
14. __ Alto, California city
15. Lustrous, velvet-like fabric
16. "Fresh Prince of __ Air"
17. Hebrew calendar month
18. British surgeon who discovered bone disease
20. Agreement between debtor and creditor (abbr.)
21. Elongated part of anatomical structure
22. Acts slowly on
25. Keeps a little too safe
30. Greek seaport
31. "Baba O'Riley" rockers
32. Vision
33. Potassium nitrate in mineral form
38. Midway between northeast and east
41. Not a pro
43. Give a new look
45. Sensational
48. Nobel Prize-winning physicist
49. Annoy constantly
50. Vaccine developer
55. Lying down
56. Type of language (abbr.)
57. Flat-bottomed boat
59. Smallest or slightest
60. Bind
61. Speeds
62. The products of human creativity
63. Consume food
64. Ancient Greek sophist

CLUES DOWN

1. A young canine
2. As fast as can be done
3. Soviet moon probes
4. Sharp spasm of pain
5. One who adheres to a specific art movement
6. Show parts of
7. Unfasten
8. San Diego ballplayer
9. Santa
10. Rocky peaks
12. "Matt Houston" actor Horsley
14. A written agreement between two sides
19. Beginning to end (abbr.)
23. Greek goddess of the dawn
24. Not written in any key
25. Organized missions
26. Seven
27. Work unit
28. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!
29. Broadway legend Bernadette
34. Belonging to a thing
35. Vietnamese offensive
36. Bitterly regret
37. Make a mistake
39. Newborn child
40. A combined landmass
41. Satisfaction
42. Hilly peninsulas in Denmark
44. Young swine
45. Type of sword
46. Siskel's partner
47. Brood of pheasants
48. Hindu model of ideal man
51. Suitable in the circumstances
52. La __ tar pits
53. Unstressed-stressed metrical foot
54. California wine country
58. Badly

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Clearfield County Farm Bureau wins Premier County Award

HERSHEY – Clearfield County Farm Bureau was honored with the prestigious Premier County Award at Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's 76th Annual Meeting on Sunday, Nov. 15. The award, presented annually, is the highest honor bestowed upon a county Farm Bureau in Pennsylvania.

Clearfield County Farm Bureau also secured Overall Achievement Award for county Farm Bureaus with up to 400 members. This award celebrates a county Farm Bureau for its outstanding performance in the six program areas evaluated by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB).

"The work done by county Farm Bureaus is at the core of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. From attending our state legislative conference and meeting with their elected officials to hosting local community members for educational farm tours and educating our youth about the value of agriculture, county Farm Bureaus are the embodiment of Farm Bureau's grassroots efforts," said PFB President Tommy Nagle. "Over the past year, Clearfield County Farm Bureau demonstrated the highest level of excellence in a wide variety of program areas to earn the Farm Bureau Premier County Award."

Coming just behind Clearfield County Farm Bureau, McKean/Potter/Cameron County Farm Bureau finished in second place for the Overall Achievement Award for county Farm Bureaus with up to 400 members.

In the category of county Farm Bureaus with over 401 members, Adams County Farm Bureau won first place for the Overall Achievement Award.

From Nov. 15-17, hundreds of Farm Bureau members from throughout the state attended Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's Annual Meeting at the Hershey Lodge to celebrate Pennsylvania agriculture and decide policy for the organization on issues affecting farm and rural families.


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Trout stocking event honors Joe Waroquier

Squirrel Tails for Trout recently held a special trout stocking event in honor of Joe Waroquier of Clearfield who passed away in May.

The event was held at the Buck's Pizza parking lot next to the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. Waroquier's son, Gary was pleased that so many individuals assisted in the release of the fish.

Squirrel Tails for Trout founder, Pat Domico, reported that the group released about 400 trout as John Duck of the state Fish and Boat Commission assisted them.

Waroquier, a veteran of the Korean conflict, was a member of the Clearfield BPOE and American Legion for many years. According to his obituary, he was the president of Waroquier Coal and director of the PA Coal Alliance. He was also a director at County National Bank and a member of the West Side United Methodist Church.

"Joe will long be remembered," Domico said.

Domico thanked everyone who helped make the event a success, including Rep. Dallas Kephart, Clearfield County Commissioners John Sobel and Tim Winters, the Clearfield Scouts under the direction of C. Alan Walker and Terry Malloy of Jim's Sports Center.

"It was a great day," Domico noted.

The Squirrel Tails for Trout program collects squirrel tails which are sent to Sheldons' Inc. in Antigo, Wisconsin, where the hair is used to make the popular Mepps lure.

The money paid for the tails is then sent to the fish farm that provides fish for the annual stocking events.

Domico started the organization in 2005.

To donate to Squirrel Tails for Trout or for more information, call 814-577-1869.



— *Courtesy photo*

Trout stocking volunteers gather for a photo during the Squirrel Tales for Trout event held at Buck's Pizza parking lot, next to the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. About 400 trout were stocked during the event.

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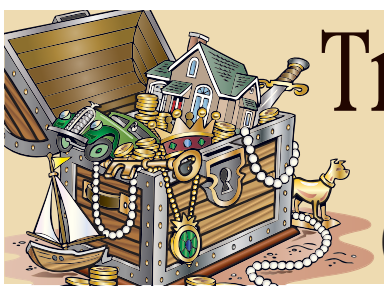
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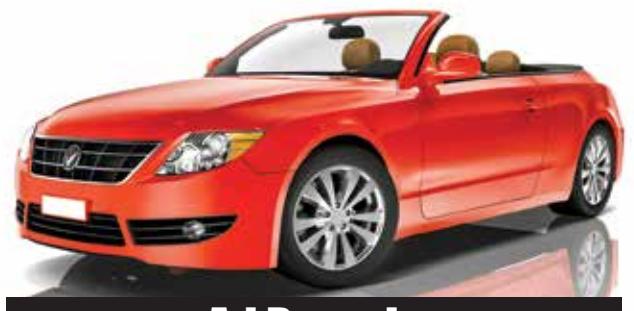
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Obituaries

Mary Ann "Mem" Ammerman

Mary Ann "Mem" Ammerman, 91, formerly of (North) Philipsburg, died Thursday, November 12, 2026, at Embassy of Hearthside, State College.

Mary Ann was born on May 6, 1935, in Philipsburg, a daughter of Joseph M. Bartko and Mary (Smotzer) Bartko Socie. She was a graduate of the Philipsburg High School. During her working career, she was employed as an administrative assistant with the Baltimore Life and then the Freeman Insurance Agency offices formerly located in Philipsburg. Mary Ann was married on October 17, 1965, in Chester Hill, to Lawrence B. "Larry" Ammerman. He preceded her in death on January 21, 2024. She was also preceded in death by her parents, step-father, Harry Socie, and a brother, Joseph Bartko. She is survived by three sons: Jerry (Stacy Mann) Ammerman, of Philipsburg, Larry Joe Ammerman, of Hawk Run, and Mark (Jennifer) Ammerman, of Warriors Mark; five grandchildren: Cody James (Jessica) Ammerman, Hunter Thomas (MacKenzie) Ammerman, Lilian J. Ammerman, Vincent S. Ammerman and Victor S. Ammerman; one great-grandchild, Colbie Lynn Ammerman; one sister, Josie (George) Voyzey, of Philipsburg; three brothers: Jack (Sydney) Bartko, of Arizona, William (Shelby) Socie, of Houtzdale and Harry (Mary) Socie, of West Decatur; and numerous other extended family members. Mary Ann was a lifelong and active member of Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Chester Hill. She was also a member of the St. Ann's Guild and served on the church board for many years. Her faith in Jesus Christ was the foundation of her life. A lifelong and devoted follower of Christ, she lived with unwavering faith, finding strength, comfort and guidance in Him throughout her life. She also enjoyed cooking, baking, tending to her garden, and spending time with her grandchildren May her memory be eternal Vechnaya pamyat A Burial Service was held Friday, November 20, 2026, at Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, 420 Laura Street, (Chester Hill) Philipsburg, with Archimandrite Jacob Piruta, officiating. Interment held at Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Cemetery, (Hudson) RD Philipsburg. Memorial contributions may be made in Mary Ann's memory to the Nativity of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church, 420 Laura Street, Philipsburg, Pa 16866.Online condolences and memories may be shared at http://www.beezerheathfh.com.

Raymond J. Bumbarger Jr.

Raymond J. "Muss" Bumbarger Jr., 86, of Clearfield, passed away Monday, November 16, 2026, at Penn Highlands Clearfield.

Born July 7, 1940, in Clearfield, the son of Raymond J. and Virginia (Conti) Bumbarger. Raymond had been employed as a truck driver for Penn Furniture.

He was a member of the Clearfield F.O.E. 812. He was an avid hunter, loved playing softball, spending time at camp and was a diehard Steelers and Pirates fan and most of all spending time with his granddaughters and great-grandchildren. Raymond is survived by his four children; Cheryl Clark and her husband Roy of Clearfield, Raymond "Pete" Bumbarger and his wife Kim of Clearfield, Ricky Bumbarger and his wife Lori of West Decatur and Teresa Picard and her husband David of Clearfield, seven grandchildren; April Picard and her significant other Rob Hansard, Danae Steele (Kurt), Michelle Curry (Bill), Amber Shannon (Tyler), Nicole Watro (Kenny), Ashley Hullihen (Nick) and Heather Cleaver (Nick), eleven great-grandchildren; Colten and Harper Shannon, Weston Hansard, Gavin and Oliver Curry, Charlotte and Emma Watro, Kamden and Kennedy Cleaver and Kinley and Wyatt Hullihen, a sister, Mildred Kunkle of TN and numerous nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, his wife of 63 years, Carol L. (Gill) Bumbarger whom he married April 21, 1958, and who passed away April 24, 2021, two sisters; Pearl Passmore and Carol Rauch and a brother, Robert "Bob" Bumbarger. Honoring Raymond's wishes, there will be no public visitation or services.

The family suggests that memorial contributions be made to Hahne Cancer Center, 100 Hospital Avenue, DuBois, PA 15801. The Bennett and Houser Funeral Home, Inc., Clearfield is overseeing the arrangements. To send online tributes please go to www.bennettandhouser.com

Dorothy Elizabeth Paul

Dorothy E. Paul, 77, of Clearfield, passed away Saturday, November 14, 2026, at Embassy of Hearthside, State College.

Born February 7, 1949, the daughter of Charles D. and Annie R. (Lamb) Canipe. She was a homemaker and member of LIFE-NWPA. Dorothy is survived by her husband, George Ensinger whom she married on February 28, 2024, and a son Rodney McGee of Huntingdon. She was preceded in death by her parents and her first husband, Steven R. Paul. Honoring Dorothy's wishes, there will be no public visitation or services. The family suggests that memorial contributions be made to LIFE-NWPA, 103 N. Front Street, Clearfield, PA 16830. The Bennett and Houser Funeral Home, Inc., Clearfield is overseeing the arrangements. To send online tributes please go to www.bennettandhouser.com

Cheryl A. Peters,

Cheryl A. Peters, 83, formerly of Philipsburg, died Friday, November 13, 2026, at Mountain Laurel Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center, Clearfield.

Cheryl was born on August 25, 1943, in Philipsburg, a daughter of the late Bruce D. and Jeanne F. (Finnegan) Peters. She was a graduate of the Philipsburg – Osceola Area High School. Following high school, Cheryl relocated to the Philadelphia / southern New Jersey area to attend nursing school. While she was living in the area she accepted a position with CBS Records at their former Pitman, New Jersey facility. Then in the mid 1970's she relocated to Augusta, Georgia. After a brief time in Georgia, she returned back home to Philipsburg. Soon after returning to Philipsburg, she suffered a traumatic brain injury. Following an extensive rehabilitation process, she was able to return to the workforce and spend the remainder of her working career with Skills of Central Pa., Bellefonte. She was preceded in death by a brother (and sister-in-law) , Edward A. (Barbara Read) Peters; Edward's first wife, Lourdes Peters; two brothers-in-law, Louis L. Meersand and R. Stuart "Butch" Auber; in addition to her parents. She is survived by a sister, Barbara N. Meersand Auber, of Philipsburg; two nieces, Tracy E. Frank (Steve) and Sianna J. Whittington (Michael); three nephews: James "Terry" Meersand (Kim Miron), David "Lane" Meersand (Krista) and Lorne Peters; and numerous other extended family members. Among her favorite pastimes, she was a die-hard Philadelphia Eagles, Philadelphia Phillies and Penn State Nittany Lions fan. She also loved to listen to her favorite singer, Rod Stewart. She was a very social person and could enjoy a conversation with anyone that she met. Guests were received Wednesday, November 18, 2026, fat the Beezer-Heath Funeral Home & Cremation Services, 719 E. Spruce Street, Philipsburg. Interment at Bradford Cemetery, Woodland, Pa. Memorial contributions may be made in Cheryl's memory to the Moshannon Valley YMCA, P.O. Box 426, Philipsburg, Pa 16866. Online condolences and memories may be shared at http://www.beezerheathfh.com.

Daniel L. Grove

Daniel L. Grove, 74, Cresson, passed away November 18, 2026 at home.

Born January 26, 1952 in Ashville, son of Joseph and Ellen (Grimes) Grove. He is preceded in death by his parents; his wife, Janet Grove; and numerous siblings. He is survived by his daughter, Jessica (James Doran) Grove; grandchildren, Caressa (Corbin) Maines, Savannah Doran, and James Doran IV; great grandson, Xander Maines; and numerous siblings. Daniel retired from the National Guard and served during the Vietnam and Iraq wars. He was a member of the Loretto Legion. He enjoyed building model tanks, fishing, hunting, spending time with his dogs, and spending time with family. At Daniel's request there will be no viewing or services. Arrangements are under the care of Gibbons-Penksa Funeral Home, Ashville. Condolences can be made at www.gibbonspenksafuneralhome.com or at our Gibbons-Penksa Funeral Home Facebook Page.

Obituaries Courtesy of: Heath's Funeral Home; Bennett & Houser Funeral Home, Inc Kruise-Spewock Funeral & Cremation Services, Inc; McQuown Funeral; Gibbons Funeral Homes; Beezer-Heath Funeral Home & Cremation Services

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Longtime Hometown Bank leader recognized for work

Manges worked with bank since its founding, helping build reputation

By Walt Frank
wfrank@altoonamirror.com

BEDFORD — Television's loss was the banking industry's gain.

"I aspired to be a TV anchor, that's what my goal was," said Elizabeth "Beth" Manges.

However, Manges found another love — banking.

"I discovered banking was a perfect fit. I liked customer interaction, I liked caring for people, taking care of their needs in banking. I enjoyed lending, seeing the difference you can make in people's lives by what you did," Manges said.

Manges, president/CEO of Hometown Bank, was recently recognized by Pennsylvania Business Central as one of the top women CEOs and leaders for 2026.

"It is very humbling and an honor to receive the recognition. I feel like Hometown Bank and what I've done have grown and been able to go about giving back to the community. I am doing the job I need to do here leading the bank, directing the mission of top customer service is what has made Hometown Bank successful," Manges said.

Manges grew up in the Manns Choice area and graduated from Bedford High School in 1987.

She went to Allegany College of Maryland and received an associate of arts degree in general studies in 1989. She then received a scholarship to go to Towson State University and studied communications and journalism.

While a student at Towson, Manges began her banking career as a teller at Signet Bank. After working for Signet, she moved into operations at First National Bank of Maryland. In time, she returned to Manns Choice to raise her family and accepted a position at Johnstown Bank and Trust. From there, she worked for First American Bank, which became Susquehanna Bank, where she worked her way up to a commercial loan officer.

In 2007, she was approached by Merle Helsel, who was part of a group of businessmen who were looking to start a new bank and wanted to know if she would be interested.

It was Helsel who hired her at First American Bank.

She accepted a position as branch manager at the new Hometown Bank and then advanced to branch operations manager.

"Coming to Hometown Bank was the best career move I ever made," Manges said.

"When we started the bank we were looking for excellent employees that would make it work. I had a list of 17 people to come with us and she was a leader. It was an easy decision to have her come, she was an integral part of the group," Helsel said. "The great thing about her is she has the ability to move projects forward. She is just such a great leader. When we need to consider new offerings, she gets them pushed through as quickly as anyone I have ever seen."

In 2017, she was asked to become president/CEO of the bank.

"I never saw myself doing that and didn't feel I was a candidate. The board came to me and I have been in this position since November 2017. The board saw my leadership skills and strong work ethic, and they were confident I could do it," Manges said.

Helsel said Manges had a lot of background in bank operations.

"It was her leadership skills; that was the most important part. She had a wide background in banking. Beth has done an excellent job as CEO. Her skills have been integral to the success of Hometown Bank," Helsel said.

She called Helsel, Hometown's chairman of the board, the most important mentor in her banking career.

"I have so much respect for him and the person he is. I can't say enough good things about Merle and his dedication to Hometown Bank. Our board backs management, it is great to have a company where the board and management are on the same page, our top priority is our customers. I am very passionate about the bank," Manges said.

Today, Hometown Bank has seven branch offices and about 70 employees.

Manges said she enjoys the people she works with.

"We work as a team. I enjoy being able to help people take care of customers and provide top service. It comes from me on down, everyone knows that. You take care of customers. My door is always open, customers can come in to see me. I have done mortgages, I have helped people get their first home, they can come to me for help that is what it is all about. It is pretty simple taking care of people and listening to what they need," Manges said.

She said she is best known for caring and her connection with Hometown Bank.

"I think it would be my connection with Hometown, just the connection Hometown Bank has to the community, the care we give to customers and how the bank gives back to the community. I am just one of the team, it is all of us just not me. I am just a piece," Manges said.

She serves on a number of community organizations and boards such as Bedford County Development Association, Pennsylvania Bankers Board, the Bedford County Regional Education Foundation, Bedford County Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Salvation Army Bedford Unit.

She is well respected in the business community.

"Beth Manges is a consummate professional and servant leader in our community. She was the first woman president of a local bank. Her rise from a teller to bank president, she has paved the way for other women in the banking industry. She is a wonderful example of servant leadership and someone who wants to do well professionally and for the bank to do well," said Kellie Goodman Shaffer, president/CEO of the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce.

"Beth has always been an inspiration to me and many others in the Bedford County business community. Her unique style of leadership, combined with her accomplishment as the first woman to serve as a president of a local bank, has made her a role model," said Bette Slayton, retired president/CEO of Bedford County Development Association."Beth also has a keen understanding of economic development and what it takes to create meaningful, sustainable progress in a community. She understands the importance of having a clear vision, establishing realistic and attainable goals, and then working to turn that vision into action.Her experience as a business and banking leader brought an important perspective to the BCDA board."

Manges has been active in the Pennsylvania Bankers Association.

"Beth is a leader in the Pennsylvania banking community. As President/CEO of Hometown Bank, she brings the banking viewpoint to multiple organizations in her local community. She has been a reliable Pennsylvania Bankers Association board member, engaging in the critical policy issues that impact the Pennsylvania banking sector," said PBA president/CEO Duncan Campbell. "Beth is the consummate professional. She is a genuinely nice person who cares deeply about her customers, employees and the communities that Hometown Bank supports. Through her 37 years of service to the industry, she has provided critical banking services to many individuals and businesses, always delivered with the utmost concern for her customers' well-being."

In 2020 she was awarded the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce Athena Award for her leadership in her community and workplace. In 2025 she was awarded the distinguished Alumni of the Year by the Alumni Association at Allegany College of Maryland.

"Beth Manges represents the best of what we hope to see in our alumni. She has achieved tremendous professional success, but she has also remained deeply committed to her community and to helping others pursue educational and professional opportunities. Her advocacy for education is particularly meaningful given that an Allegany Community College scholarship helped set her own journey in motion. Her professional accomplishments, community service and commitment to education made her an excellent choice for the Distinguished Alumni Award," the ACM Distinguished Alumni Award Committee stated.

Leah Pepple, ACM's director of PA Advancement and Community Relations, called Manges "an amazing business leader, community supporter, and advocate for education."

"She is a servant leader who empowers others to learn, grow, and prosper. She is deeply invested in the success and well-being of those around her and is committed to making a positive difference in the communities the bank serves. She has a strong desire to help others achieve their education and professional goals," Pepple said. "Beth has meant so much to the local business community because she leads with both excellence and heart. She is a respected business professional whose influence extends far beyond banking. Beth has been an encourager and advocate for businesses, nonprofits, education, and community organizations throughout the region."

Manges has had an impact on Allegany College.

"As vice chair of the Bedford County Regional Education Foundation, the nonprofit organization that supports ACM's Bedford County Campus, Beth helps create pathways to success for students throughout the region. The foundation provides scholarships, tuition assistance, and emergency book funding, while also supporting campus improvements, instructional equipment, and other projects that enhance the student experience. Beth's passion for education is rooted in the belief that every student who wants to pursue a college education should have the opportunity to do so," Pepple said. "In her role as President/CEO of Hometown Bank, Beth has strengthened educational opportunities throughout the region. Under her leadership, Hometown Bank and its Board of Directors provide Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) funding to the Bedford County Regional Education Foundation."

When not on the job, Manges likes to spend time with her family.

Not many people realize that she's the mother of a disabled son, Brandon, who is 33. There are, of course, demands on time, expenses and medical concerns but also unexpected joys and learning to be gained from that experience.

"He has taught me so many lessons, beginning with patience and unconditional love," she said. "I realize now that I can readily apply, both in my life and relations with family and friends, and also in the workplace and in my business. We all encounter obstacles and challenges, and we all have times when we're down at our lowest point wondering how to deal with something but you do deal with it, and you grow from it."

As far as the future, Manges said she plans to retire within the next year or so and the bank has a succession plan in place.

"My family is a top priority for me. I just want to enjoy time with my husband, children and grandchildren that I am not able to do now," Manges said.

Mirror Staff Writer Walt Frank is at 814-946-7467.



Mirror photo by Walt Frank

Hometown Bank President/CEO Beth Manges stands with bank CFO Jeb Kegg. Manges was recently recognized as one of the top women CEOs in Pennsylvania.

The Manges file

Name: Elizabeth "Beth" Manges

Age: 57

Family: Husband, Lynn Manges; sons: David, Brandon and Daniel Grant; 10 grandchildren

Position: President/CEO of Hometown Bank

Education: 1987 graduate of Bedford High School. Associate of arts degree in general studies in 1989 from Allegany College of Maryland. Studied communications and journalism at Towson State University.

Quote: "I'm proud to be part of a locally owned community bank that strives to provide exceptional service to all of our customers."



Photo courtesy of Allegany College

Hometown Bank President/CEO Beth Manges was named the winner of Allegany College's 2025 Distinguished Alumni Award.

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Master the art *of* holiday gift wrapping



The holiday season brings a whirlwind of activity and lots of joy and tradition. There is hot cocoa to be enjoyed by the fireplace, and classic carols playing on the radio. The holidays also are a time when mountains of un-wrapped packages wait in the closet or another hiding spot until they can be decked out in holiday finery.

Some people find wrapping gifts a bit challenging, and others may even dread the task because they lack wrapping prowess. Gift wrapping isn't a complex science. It's a matter of technique, some smart habits and a little patience. Here are some tips, courtesy of 3M Scotch Brand and Vistaprint.

Gather the tools

Before cutting into the paper, it's important to set up for success. That means gathering all of the tools of the trade. Purchase grid-lined, heavyweight wrapping paper to ensure clean cuts. Ditch working on the floor in favor of wrapping on a hard, elevated surface, preferably a counter that is the right height for ergonomic wrapping. Sharp scissors and double-sided tape will create a seamless, invisible finish that instantly makes it look like a professional handled the wrapping.

Measure, then cut

Many people use too much paper, which can cause bulky, messy ends that fold awkwardly. Instead, place the box upside-down on the paper. Then roll the paper over the box until it covers all four sides. Allow 2 extra inches for overlap. For the ends, unroll enough paper to extend it halfway up the side of the box on each end.

Wrap and fold

The next step is to pull the paper tight around the sides of the box and secure it with a piece of double-sided tape along the middle crease. Rubbing along the edges of the paper will create crisp, clean seams. For the ends, fold down the top flap against the box, creating sharp, 45-degree diagonal wings on the left and right. Fold those side flaps inward toward the center, then bring the bottom flap straight up to meet them. Secure the edges with a hidden strip of double-sided tape.

Add finishing touches

Extra embellishments will hide minor imperfections and make any package look even more special. Instead of stick-on bows, wrappers can try tying a fabric ribbon around the middle of the package. Natural accents, such as a real sprig of pine or a cinnamon stick under the ribbon, also are a nice touch.

Wrapping presents takes time, but with practice, anyone can become a gift wrapping whiz.



The reasons to stay local when shopping *this holiday season*





Holiday shoppers have no shortage of retailers competing for their dollars come December.

The National Retail Federation estimated 2025 holiday spending exceeded $1 trillion, and there's little reason to suspect 2026 spending will not match or exceed that amount.

With so much money being spent, retailers have much to gain from attracting holiday shoppers. While big box stores and online retailers may beckon shoppers louder than anyone this December, there's plenty of reasons to look local when buying gifts for loved ones during the holiday season.

• Buying local pays you back. Communities benefit when shoppers spend their money at locally owned businesses. According to the Local Business Institute, $48 of every $100 spent at a locally owned business ultimately recirculates in the community. That means supporting one business in your community indirectly leads to supporting others. And residents should know that a thriving local business sector is great for property values, as buyers tend to be willing to pay more to live in locations with successful shops, cafes and restaurants.

• Buying local encourages additional investment. New Jersey-based Spencer Savings Bank notes the appeal of already thriving business sectors on other entrepreneurs seeking to open their businesses. By supporting existing local businesses now, residents are helping to establish a foundation for future economic growth within their communities. The holiday season is a particularly lucrative time for businesses of all sizes, so that makes it a perfect time for locals to support the establishments in their community.

• Buying local offers more chances to find something unique. Buying local also pays more immediate dividends come the holiday season. Big box stores and online retailers sell the same items to people regardless of where they live, whereas independently owned local businesses tend to feature more unique items that can only be found in their stores. Shoppers looking for unique gifts for their loved ones need look no further than Main Street to find such items.

• Buying local benefits the environment. Eco-conscious holiday shoppers should know that buying local is often beneficial for the environment. Locally crafted and purchased items will not require as much packaging as items purchased from big box stores or online retailers that must protect products from the wear and tear of long distance travel. And that travel also has a negative impact on the environment, as the longer distance it takes to get a product from a warehouse to a consumer's home, the more harmful the transaction typically is on the environment.

The holiday season is a lucrative time of year for retailers, and there are numerous reasons why shoppers should focus their buying power on local businesses this year and in the years to come.



Books young readers will love to find *under the tree*

Modern shoppers have lots of options at their disposal when the time comes to find holiday gifts for their loved ones. While the latest gadgets may be shiny and new, many a shopper still looks to an old favorite when shopping for holiday gifts.

According to a recent survey conducted by Talker Research, 51 percent of respondents indicated their plan to give a book as a holiday gift in 2025. Books provide hours of entertainment at a fraction of the cost of the latest gadgets or even experiential gifts like tickets to a show or sporting event. That makes books an appealing gift for loved ones of all ages, including children. Kids have much to gain from reading as youngsters. Indeed, research has shown that reading helps kids develop their critical thinking and language skills and can foster a sense of wonder about the world. Shoppers looking for books to give youngsters this holiday season can consider these titles that are among the many recommended by the Association For Library Service to Children.

• Night Walk, by Jason Cockroft. This is an intergenerational story about loss and remembrance that also showcases the wonders of the natural world. The story focuses on a sleepy boy and his grandfather as they follow the favorite path the boy's late grandmother liked to walk through nearby woods.

• Papilio, by Ben Clanton. This is the story of Papilio Polyxenes, a caterpillar going through the stages of metamorphosis. Papilio experiences the ups and downs of growth as she learns to fly, fall, and feed during her transformation from caterpillar to butterfly.

• Safe Crossing, by Kari Percival. Another book likely to inspire or strengthen a love of the natural world, this is the story of the efforts of a community to protect amphibians as they migrate from wooded uplands to a nearby pond.

• The Adventures of Cipollino, by Gianni Rodari. A translation of an Italian classic, this is the story of a young onion (most characters in the book are an animal, a vegetable or a fruit) who leaves his home in an effort to free his wrongfully imprisoned father. Cipollino encounters a colorful cast of characters along the way in this entertaining work that's written for readers nine and up.

• Busted, by Dan Gemeinhart. Oscar Aberdeen is the main character in this tale about an unusual 12-year-old boy who lives in a retirement home. A humorous story unfolds when Oscar and his grandfather are served with an eviction notice from their home at Sunny Days. Desperate to remain in the only home he's ever known, Oscar accepts the help of a fellow resident with a not-so-stellar reputation.

• Rebellion 1776, by Laurie Halse Anderson. A book taking young readers between the ages of 10 and 14 back to 1776 may be ideal as Americans commemorate 250 years of nationhood. In this tale, 13-year-old Elsbeth Culpepper awakes in the spring of 1776 during the Siege of Boston, which turns the city into a war zone. Elsbeth is subsequently forced to confront those conditions as well as a suddenly missing father and an outbreak of smallpox.

These are just a few of the many titles that would make great gifts for young readers this holiday season. A lengthier list of titles can be found at https://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncb.

Inspiring young minds *with great gifts*



The holiday season brings warmth, joy and a desire to gift friends and loved ones with thoughtful presents. Children eagerly await the holiday season because they know the bulk of gifts under a Christmas tree are tagged with their names. While toys and games are suitable treasures, holiday presents can do more than just entertain for an afternoon. They can ignite curiosity, foster problem-solving skills and make learning a good time.

Grand View Research says the global educational toys market is valued at approximately $65.77 billion and is projected to grow in the coming years. This growth is fueled by preferences for focused play, and the proven impact of early childhood development on cognitive skills. Choosing educational gifts for children doesn't mean wrapping up a textbook; it could involve giving them tools to explore the world around them. The following are some educational gift ideas that will foster a love of learning.

• STEM and science kits: Children have a tendency to be natural scientists who often engage in rudimentary experiments all on their own at home. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) gifts channel curiosity into hands-on discovery. There are plenty of gift ideas that fall under the STEM umbrella. Magnetic building tiles or snap-circuit kits teach engineering and physics. Microscopes and nature gear enable backyard exploration. Crystal-growing sets, fossil dig kits or safe household chemistry guides enable kids to experiment.

• Love of language: Setting kids up for success means giving them the tools to learn. Avid readers can benefit from an e-reader or a subscription to an audiobook service. Those who are eager to learn a new language will enjoy books or services that teach a second or third language in an engaging way that makes it easy to master.

• Art kits: Learning doesn't necessarily have to fit within rigid lines. That's the benefit of open-ended activities that encourage focus and creative thinking. Pottery wheels, weaving looms, canvases and watercolors, and other artistic gifts offer ways for kids to learn through self-expression.

• Memberships: Gifts don't always have to fit in a box. Experiential gifts can offer immersive learning that kids will remember long after the holidays. Annual memberships to a zoo, museum or science center can keep kids learning all year long. Subscriptions to music lessons or a junior coding camp are some additional ideas that can help children learn in fun and interesting ways.

By choosing gifts that tap into imagination and discovery, holiday giving will mean that much more for children on the receiving end of such thoughtful presents.

Holiday shopping in an era marked by high prices



Making a list prior to a holiday shopping trip can reduce the risk of overspending on impulse buys.

The holiday season is a special time of year when families and friends gather to celebrate their faith and enjoy opportunities to spend time together. Many a tradition has come to define the holiday season, and exchanging gifts with loved ones is among the most popular customs come December.

Shopping for holiday gifts commands a lot of attention. Holiday shopping also is a costly endeavor, particularly in an era marked by high prices. Despite the rising costs associated with inflation, consumers appear ready to spend this holiday season. According to the Basis 2026 Winter Holiday Shopping Trends study, 35 percent of consumers are planning to increase their holiday spending this season. But 57 percent of consumers acknowledge they intend to look for deals and discounts more actively this holiday season, while one in three admits they will shop while sticking to a stricter budget.

As high prices loom over the holiday season, shoppers can keep these tips in mind to avoid overspending.

• Avoid blind shopping. Starting a holiday shopping excursion without knowing what you're looking for can lead to impulse buying and overspending. Prior to shopping, make a list of the people you will be shopping for and the dollar amount you intend to spend on each person. Once that list has been made, jot down some gift ideas next to each person's name. Gift ideas should reflect how much you intend to spend on each person. This pre-shopping planning should not take long, and it can reduce the risk of overspending and even save time on shopping excursions.

• Track your spending. It's easy to lose track of holiday spending, particularly for shoppers who start months in advance of the holiday season. But tracking all gift-related spending, including dollars spent on items purchased months in advance of the holiday season, is vital to staying within your budget.

• Take advantage of retail holidays at local businesses. Many retailers, whether they're big box stores or locally owned independent businesses, participate in retail holidays like Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Such days offer plenty of opportunities to find great deals. This can be especially true when shopping at locally owned, independent retailers. Big box stores and online retailers may offer great deals, but only limited inventories. By the time shoppers get to the store or visit the website, many of the best deals might be gone, and shoppers will then settle for non-sale items. Smaller businesses may offer store-wide discounts on retail holidays, ensuring shoppers can find great deals throughout the day and not just during the small window when sale items are still available.

• Coordinate with fellow shoppers. Pooling resources with family members is a great way to find great gifts without breaking the bank. If someone on your list really wants a big ticket item like a new tablet or television, coordinate with your family members to pool your resources so that wish can be granted without anyone ending up in debt.

Holiday shopping when inflation is high can be difficult. But there are many ways to shop and save even when prices are high.

Great gifts *for* gram and gramps



Shopping for grandparents can be challenging. Grandparents may insist they already have everything they need, and many are focused on downsizing and decluttering rather than accumulating more items. The best gifts for grandparents generally fall into two categorizes: sentimental keepsakes that celebrate family connections, or everyday comfort upgrades that make life easier and more enjoyable.

According to CNBC, nearly 86 percent of grandparents regularly buy gifts for their grandchildren, spending an average of $805 per year on presents. That's undoubtedly one reason why their children and grandchildren want to give back in meaningful ways. Here are several thoughtful gift ideas that grandparents will enjoy.

• Digital picture frames: Grandparents who love staying up-to-date on loved ones' daily lives will enjoy a smart digital picture frame. Unlike traditional photo albums that will get tucked on a shelf, connected frames enable family members to upload photos and short video clips directly from their smartphones in real time, no matter where they live. This means grandparents can see photos of their grandchildren and children pop up and serve as a source of constant joy.

• Accessibility upgrades: Practical technology can remove problems that make daily living challenging for seniors who prefer to age in place. Items like smart plugs paired with a voice assistant will enable grandparents to turn off bedside lamps or holiday lights without bending down or reaching behind furniture. Keyless smart locks eliminate the frustration of fumbling with keys at the front door. Bluetooth item trackers make it easy to locate frequently misplaced items like keys or reading glasses.

• Living history journal: Every grandparent has a unique list of stories and experiences that will be lost forever unless they're preserved. Guided memory journals or digital story-recording services can provide prompts asking grandparents about their life experiences. Over the course of time, their responses are compiled into a keepsake book that honors their life and preserves family heritage.

• Comfort and relaxation: Gifts that focus on everyday luxury can be a hit with grandparents. Examples include a weighted heating pad for the neck and shoulders or high-end adaptive footwear that offers soothing relief. Gourmet teas, meal prep services and other food gifts also can be good fits for grandparents.

When it comes to grandparents, less is often more. When gifting tech, include installation and set-up as part of the gift. This way things are ready to go and do not require extra expertise.

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Mastering Black Friday Shopping

Black Friday is one of the busiest and most profitable shopping days of the entire year.

According to DemandSage and National Public Radio, American consumers spent a record $10.8 billion on online Black Friday shopping in 2024. Around $61 billion in total sales (both online and in-person) were made over the Black Friday and Cyber Monday weekend.

Consumers can land great deals on the day after Thanksgiving, which means individuals who hone their Black Friday shopping skills can reap considerable rewards. The following tips can help shoppers master Black Friday.



• Set a budget. Even though Black Friday may feature some hard-to-beat deals, it's wise to determine how much you can afford to spend before you begin shopping. Shopping beyond your means, even if the prices are low, can exact a financial toll.

• Make a list of recipients. Make a list of the people for whom you will be shopping and some ideas of what to give each individual. This will enable you to look out for particular deals on these items.

• Compare prices ahead of time. It's important to know how much items cost across different retailers before Black Friday arrives to

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understand their true value. This will enable you to determine if a Black Friday sale really is a bargain or if it's possible to get a better price at a different time. Smartphone apps like BuyVia, Shopkick and Shopular let you scan barcodes to compare prices and more.

• Shop online early. NPR says there has been a shift from traditional in-store shopping to online platforms for Black Friday. Many deals now begin on Thanksgiving or even earlier and fall under the Black Friday promotion. Start shopping at home to avoid large crowds and secure limited time deals. In recent years, many retailers have offered more of the same promotions online as they do in stores.

• Be wary of sneaky sales tactics. Some stores will offer "doorbuster" exclusions that highlight slashed prices and utilize marketing tactics like countdown timers to encourage shoppers to purchase items without doing their research. This is when knowing the true value of items can help you spot a deal or inflated prices that were then marked down.

• Limit your stores. If you choose to shop in person on Black Friday, start early in the day and don't run yourself ragged. If you're tired, you may not make the best decisions and could end up spending more than your budget allows.

Shopping smart on Black Friday comes down to employing some savvy financial strategies.



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How to make the most *of* retail holidays

The holiday season is a festive but expensive time of year.

According to the National Retail Federation, consumers budgeted an average of $890 for gifts and other seasonal items in 2025. Since then, the cost of consumers goods has remained high, so it's reasonable to expect shoppers will spend just as much if not more money on holiday shopping in 2026.

Retail holidays like Black Friday and Cyber Monday have long featured great deals on a wide range of items, and the following are some ways shoppers can make the most of these deal-laden consumer events this holiday season.

• Do your homework. It's hard to miss retail holiday deals at big box stores or online retailers like Amazon, which heavily promote their sales for weeks if not months in advance of the season. But these are not the only places shoppers can find great prices on Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Many small, independently owned local businesses also get in on the retail holiday action. Shoppers hoping to capitalize on retail holiday bargains can look to local retailers' social media as days like Black Friday and Cyber Monday draw closer so they get a full picture of all the deals they can access once each day arrives.

• Sign up for perks programs. Many retailers, including locally owned independent businesses, offer perks programs that can add up to great benefits the more customers patronize the establishments. While these will not necessarily lead to lower prices on retail holidays, program members may be able to use accumulated points on holiday season purchases, thus reducing the amount they spend during the holiday season.

• Shop early. Big box retailers and online giants like Amazon advertise big deals on retail holidays, but those deals tend to feature limited inventory. When the inventory is exhausted, the deals are exhausted along with them. Shoppers hoping to take advantage of retail holiday deals at big box retailers and online stores are urged to fully investigate the sales prior to the big day. Check to see if the inventory is capped and when targeted items will officially go on sale. That's often early in the morning, so it behooves shoppers to start shopping early on days like Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Even small, locally owned businesses may feature limited inventory, so it's best to visit such stores when they open if you're hoping to find great items on sale.

• Checkout quickly. When shopping online, many shoppers add items to their virtual carts and then go back to shopping for additional items. But just because a sale item is in your cart does not mean it's yours. If you hesitate when checking out or spend extra time shopping for additional items, the sale item might be already be sold out when you return to your cart to check out. If there are some must-buy items on your retail holiday shopping lists, then purchase them the moment you place them in your cart.

Retail holidays offer great deals on a wide range of items, and shoppers can do much to ensure they procure the sale items they want on these wildly popular days to shop.



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Stocking Stuffers:

Treasures for everyone on your list



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

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

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

Foods and beverages

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

Self-care

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

Tech

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

Kids' play

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

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

Kitchen gadgets that make great gifts



Finding the perfect gift for a foodie can be a bit overwhelming, especially given how many people love to cook at home. A 2023 survey reported by the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association found 81 percent of consumers cook more than half their meals at home.

Everyone has basic pots and pans, but a truly great kitchen gift will strike a balance between utility, efficiency and a touch of luxury. These gadgets can elevate daily meal prep and make memorable presents for the foodie on your list this holiday season.

• Digital thermometer: Overcooking meats, poultry and seafood is a common misstep for novices and experienced cooks. A high-precision, instant-read digital thermometer can yield accurate temperature readings in just a few seconds. A digital thermometer helps to take the guesswork out of grilling steaks, roasting a turkey or even baking bread. The Yummy Life says a digital thermometer can help any home cook produce restaurant-quality results.

• Milk frother: Coffee purchased on-the-go can cost anywhere from $5 to $7 per cup. But coffee enthusiasts can make delicious drinks at home, and a handheld milk frother quickly transforms an ordinary cup of coffee into a café-style latte or cappuccino. A milk frother also can whip up matcha or mix protein powders.

• Pot strainer: Traditional colanders are bulky to store and awkward to wash. A flexible, silicone strainer that snaps onto round pots, pans or bowls of almost any size can streamline the cooking process. It allows cooks to drain pasta water or rinse vegetables directly from the pot, saving cabinet space and time.

• Immersion blender: Immersion blenders can be game-changers in the kitchen. Immersion blenders are ideal for single-serve smoothies and great for mixing sauces or soups. Cordless models save home cooks the hassle of tangled cords and offer full mobility around the kitchen and the potential to mix hot liquids right in a pot on the stove.

• Custom cutting board: A customized wooden cutting board can be engraved to feature a home cook's name or other details. This makes it a functional tool in the kitchen, but also a decorative conversation piece.

Kitchen tools and gadgets are the perfect gifts for someone who enjoys cooking meals at home.



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