



Holiday Guide

2024

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Frost, Fashion, and Fun

Celebrate in style with Apricot Lane Boutique

By JANE LEBAK

With the holidays on the horizon, there's only one place a well-put-together woman wants Santa to shop: Apricot Lane Boutique in Franklin.

"For the holidays, it's important to express your style in a festive way," says Marta McNulty, owner of Apricot Lane. **"With so many events to attend, a woman can create an endless wardrobe by mixing and matching just the right pieces. This is where we excel."**

Marta's store blends modern styles with boho feminine vibes, combining a delightful mix of pieces to give the wearer her own distinct look.

Marta says, "I love creating themes, so every display highlights specific colors or textures." Marta developed her keen eye for pairing the perfect pieces working as a visual merchandiser with H&M's flagship store in Boston, and later with

Bloomingdale's. "I learned the importance of color combinations and showcasing variations of a style. Customers gasp when they see all the inspirations for different types of outfits."

For this holiday season, Marta has her finger on the pulse of the fashion world. "I'm thrilled by this year's signature looks," she says. **"We've got elevated jackets, cozy sweaters, and metallic tops. Women are experimenting with boot-leg, flare, and wide leg jeans at every conceivable length. And that's not to mention our collection of holiday dresses."**

Fashion isn't limited to clothing, either. Apricot Lane features holiday slippers, body-wash infused sponges, and biodegradable face masks. Want to look amazing while sledding? Apricot Lane has detail designed winter hats, scarves,

Apricot
Lane
BOUTIQUE

Business
spotlight

and ponchos. Apricot Lane also showcases very special up-cycled earrings, handmade in Franklin by the Comer Teng Studio.

The boutique recently began selling the popular **Kendra Scott** jewelry collection, consisting of a countless number of styles. The staples, Elisa



necklace, or Elaina bracelet would make the perfect holiday gift.

Customers can see Apricot Lane's fashion selection on their Facebook or Instagram pages, but part of the experience is touching the clothing, trying on the individual items, and then combining them to create a personal style.

"There's no limit to what you can find," says Marta. "We feature well established brands like **Good American, French Connection, Elan** or **Skies are Blue**. But we also showcase up and coming brands like **Molly Bracken** or **Vero Moda**. If you love contemporary, we've got **RD Style, Vintage Havana**, and **Hidden** jeans. For those who tend more toward modern classic style, we have **Another Love, Vervet denim**, or **Dex and Black Tape**."

Apricot Lane has spacious try-on rooms, large enough for a stroller or a curious toddler. It's important that customers feel unhurried, so they can

take the time to discover their own style.

"My customers will tell me about their lives and their dreams," says Marta. "That gives me a sense of how they want to look and feel. From there, it's only a small step to identifying just the right elements to unlock the style they were searching for all along."

Launch your holiday season wearing a new outfit and a smile. Check out Apricot Lane's fashions on Instagram and Facebook, under **@ApricotLaneFranklin**, or visit the shop at **342 East Central Street in Franklin**.

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Business spotlight

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Call Jen Schofield, 508-570-6544 or email: jenschofield@localtownpages.com for info on our December Holiday Guide.



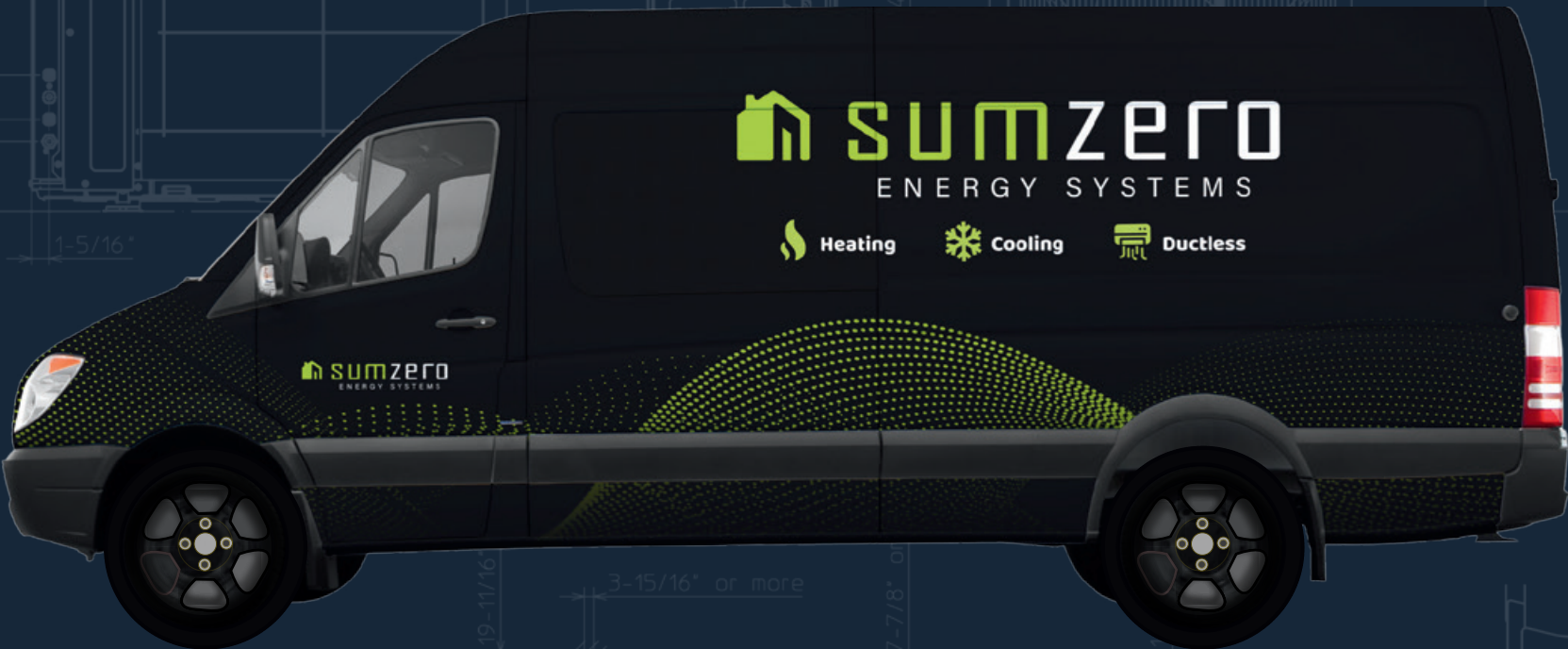
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Holiday Recipes

GINGERBREAD PEOPLE

Recipe and photo submitted by Susan Pollard

Ingredients:

- 1 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/3 cup shortening
- 1 1/2 cups dark molasses
- 2/3 cup cold water
- 7 cups all-purpose flour*
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions:

Mix brown sugar, shortening, molasses and water. Stir in remaining ingredients. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours. Heat oven to 350°. Roll dough 1/4 inch thick on floured board. Cut with floured gingerbread cutter or other favorite shaped cutter. Place about 2 inches apart on lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake until no indentation remains when touched, 10-12 minutes; cool. Decorate with colored frosting and candies, if desired.



Makes about 2 1/2 dozen 2 1/2 inch cookies.

** If using self-rising flour, omit baking soda and salt*

**DIWALI DELIGHT:
COZY APPLE HALWA**

Submitted by Stuthi Balaji

With the crisp fall air and Diwali just around the corner, there's no better time to enjoy a cozy, indulgent dessert like Apple Halwa. If you've recently gone apple picking and

find yourself swimming in apples, this recipe is your golden ticket to transform them into a rich, spiced delight. Sweet, aromatic apples meet warm cinnamon, decadent ghee, and a crunchy medley of nuts in this irresistibly comforting dessert. Whether you're serving it for Diwali, Thanksgiving or savoring it after a day of fall festivities, Apple Halwa is the perfect way to elevate your seasonal harvest!

Ingredients:

- 2.2 lbs apples (7 to 8 medium-sized) or 7 cups chopped apples
- 5 tbsp sugar (optional, adjust as needed)
- 3 tbsp ghee (or use coconut oil for a vegan version)
- 2 tbsp water
- 2-3 strands saffron (optional)
- 1 tsp cinnamon powder
- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tsp vanilla extract (or 1/2 teaspoon vanilla essence)
- 10 almonds, chopped
- 10 cashews, chopped

Directions:

- 1. Roast half of your nuts in 1 tbsp ghee

until golden brown and set aside.

- 2. Warm 2 tbsp of water, add saffron and set aside.
- 3. Rinse the apples thoroughly in water and drain them using a colander.
- 4. Peel the apples, quarter them, remove the seeds, and chop them into small cubes. You should have about 7 cups of chopped apples.
- 5. Heat 2 tbsp of ghee in a pan over medium-low heat.
- 6. Add the chopped apples and sauté for 5 to 6 minutes, stirring occasionally. Some apples will soften while others might stay firm.
- 7. Add the 2 tbsp of saffron water, cover the pan, and cook for 12 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the apples become soft and mushy.
- 8. Use a spoon or potato masher to mash the apples, leaving some small chunks if desired.
- 9. Add sugar based on your taste and the sweetness of your apples. Stir well to combine.
- 10. Continue cooking and stirring the mixture for 9 to 10 minutes until it thickens, and you see ghee at the sides of the pan.
- 11. Add cinnamon powder, cardamom powder, vanilla extract, and chopped nuts, reserving some for garnish. Stir well to incorporate everything.
- 12. Cook for an additional 3 to 4 minutes until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan and comes together.
- 13. Serve the apple halwa warm, garnished with the roasted nuts.

Notes:

Leftovers can be refrigerated and stored for up to a week.
Use sweet apple varieties to reduce the need for sugar.
For a vegan version, substitute ghee with neutral oil like coconut oil.
Feel free to adjust the spices to your liking, and use any nuts or dried fruits of your choice.

PEPPERMINT MOCHA COOKIE BARS

Submitted by Jen Schofield

These fudgy peppermint mocha cookie bars are infused with peppermint and espresso flavors, making them reminiscent of a popular holiday-time drink.
Prep Time: 20 mins
Cook Time: 25 mins
Cool Time: 30 mins
Chill Time: 1 hr
Total Time: 2 hrs 15 mins
Servings: 16

Ingredients:

- White Chocolate Frosting:
- 1/2 cup white chocolate chips
- 1/3 cup heavy cream

1/8 teaspoon peppermint extract

Cookie Bars:

- 2 tablespoons instant espresso powder
- 2 tablespoons hot water
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 1/4 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 1 large egg, at room temperature
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract
- 1/2 cup dark chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup finely crushed peppermint candy canes, plus more for decorating

Directions:

Place white chocolate chips, heavy cream, and 1/8 teaspoon peppermint extract into a microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at 50% power in 30 second intervals, stirring after each interval, until melted and combined. Place mixture, uncovered, in the refrigerator until completely chilled, about 1 hour. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Line an 8x8-inch square pan with enough parchment paper to have overhang on all sides.

In a small bowl or measuring cup, stir espresso powder and hot water together until dissolved.

In a medium bowl, whisk together flour, cocoa powder, salt, baking soda, and baking powder until thoroughly combined.

Beat butter, white sugar, and brown sugar together in a large bowl until light and fluffy. Add in egg and beat until thoroughly combined. Add in espresso mixture, vanilla extract, and 1/2 teaspoon peppermint extract and mix until combined. Pour in half of the flour mixture and mix until just combined. Add in remaining flour mixture and mix until just combined (dough will be somewhat thick). Stir in chocolate chips and crushed candy canes. Spread dough into the prepared pan in an even layer.

Bake in the preheated oven until the bars look just set, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely in the pan, about 30 minutes.

Remove chilled white chocolate mixture from the fridge. Whip on medium-high speed with an electric mixer until mixture holds stiff peaks.

Spread white chocolate frosting in a thin even layer over the top of the cooled bars and sprinkle with additional crushed candy canes. Cut into 16 bars.

Source: www.allrecipes.com/peppermint-mocha-cookie-bars-recipe-8423140

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PECAN PIE, THE PERFECT THANKSGIVING DESSERT
Recipe and photo ubmitted by Rebecca Williamson

Classic homemade pecan pie features a flaky buttery crust with gooey, crunchy, and rich brown sugar toasted pecan filling. The perfect simple holiday dessert!



Ingredients:

- 1 batch pie dough
- 2 cups (227 grams) pecan halves
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 cup (312 grams) light corn syrup
- 3/4 cups (150 grams) dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

- 1/4 teaspoon fine salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

Directions:

Prepare the pie crust:
Roll the dough out on a generously floured work surface. Keep turning the dough after every roll to ensure it doesn't stick to the counter and is of even thickness. Add additional flour to the dough, the counter, and your rolling pin as needed. Roll out into a 12 to 14-inch circle, depending on how deep your pie tin is.
Gently roll the dough up and around the rolling pin then unroll and drape over a 9-inch pie tin. Gently press into the pie tin, being careful to avoid stretching the dough. Use scissors or a knife to trim the excess dough, leaving a 3/4-inch overhang. Fold the overhang under itself and crimp or flute. Pierce the base of the dough with a fork.
Wrap the dough in plastic and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or overnight.
Preheat oven to 400°F.
Line the chilled crust with foil, pressing all the way to the edges to ensure they don't slump down. Fill the crust completely with pie weights, granulated sugar, rice, or dried beans.
Place on a rimmed baking pan. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, or until pale and just begin-

ning to brown but not raw. Remove from oven and set aside to fully cool. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F.

Make the Filling:

Place pecans on a rimmed baking sheet and toast in a 350°F oven until fragrant, about 8 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool completely. Maintain oven temperature.
In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs until well beaten. Add the corn syrup, brown sugar, vanilla, cinnamon, and salt. Gradually whisk in the melted butter until combined.
Place pecans evenly in cooled pie crust. Pour egg mixture over the pecans into crust. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes, or until the edges of the filling are set but the center is still slightly wobbly. Your pie should have an internal temperature of 200°F when finished. If the crust begins to brown too much, cover with foil or a pie shield and continue baking. Remove from the oven and let cool completely before slicing and serving.

Note: This pie can be made ahead of time. Place the baked and cooled pecan pie in an airtight container and freeze for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and allow to come to room temperature before slicing and serving.

Source: www.handletheheat.com

CRANBERRY ORANGE BUNDT CAKE
Recipe and photo submitted by Becky Dix

This cranberry orange cake is almost like a pound cake and gets better as it sets. If the tartness of the cranberries is not to your liking, use Craisins for a sweeter cake. Use a Bundt or loaf pan.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 large eggs
- zest of one orange
- about 1 table- spoon juice of an orange
- 1/2 cup butter
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 1/2 cups fresh cranberries

For the Icing:

- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 2 - 3 tablespoons water, milk or orange juice

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray a Bundt pan with cooking spray. Sprinkle the 2 table-

spoons of sugar on the bottom of the pan. Sprinkle 1/4 cup of the cranberries on the bottom of the pan. Set aside.
Cream together butter and sugar until sugar turns a lemon color, about 4 - 5 minutes. Add eggs one at a time and mix in until incorporated.
Add the orange juice and zest. Add the sour cream.
When incorporated, add the flour, salt and baking powder. When this is all mixed together, stir in the remaining 1 1/4 cups cranberries.



Bake for 50 - 55 minutes until a tester comes out clean. Let pan set for 5 minutes after you take the cake out of the oven. Turn over cake unto a wire rack to cool. Mix up your glaze ingredients and spread on top and sides of cake.

Source: recipesfoodandcooking.com



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Holiday Traditions

"Steamrollers," a holiday pastry and tradition

Author recalls sweet treat and sweet memory of her mother

BY SUSAN MANNING

Growing up, the holidays meant my mother's

homemade apple pie was on the menu.

No one made one quite like she did.

It was sweet, with a pinch of cinnamon and perfectly cooked McIntosh apples. The soupy filling was almost healing.

But by far the best part: her homemade crust.

She would mix the ingredients and roll it out with care.

There would not be a single crack in it and definitely no rips. If those happened, it was back to a ball and be rolled out again. She would roll it out evenly because otherwise, she

said, it would not cook the right way.

Once the bottom was draped

that it didn't break apart. She would lay it across the top of the pie and make sure the sides were even all around.

It didn't stop there. To connect the top in the bottom, she pulled a fork out of the silverware drawer, and went carefully around the edges. She would push hard enough to connect the two pieces, but not so hard that they would burn in the oven.

What was left was a pile of doughy scraps. This is where she worked her magic, at least that's what we would say when we were kids.

The scraps were gathered into a ball and then carefully rolled out again, as she had already done with the rest of the crust before it went in the pie. This time, it was a treat for the kids. Yes, we would all enjoy a piece of her pie at whatever dinner was coming up, no doubt with a chunk of cheddar cheese is on top of it, but the steamers were the chef's kiss!

Once rolled out evenly, she would shake a layer of cinnamon across the entire thing, followed by a layer of sugar. Then she



Author Susan Manning's great-nephews, Garrett and Mason White, continue the family tradition by making steamrollers for the holidays. Courtesy photo

would take a butter knife and cut them into rows, about an inch wide. Next up was to put the "roll" in "steamroller."

She would carefully lift one end and start rolling until she reached the other end. Once every strip was rolled, they went into another pie pan and into the oven. What emerged from the oven after 15 minutes or so could only be described as heaven.

The rollers were a little bit

crispy on the outside, very soft and doughy on the inside and had that sweet filling with a little bit of a kick.

The aroma would fill the house so much and so quickly that you had to run to the kitchen when they came out of the oven lest you find yourself out of luck. Too hot to hold easily right out of the oven, they popped in your mouth and were gone until the next holiday.



Author Susan Manning at age 5 with her mother, Bertha, who would make "steamrollers" for the children during the holidays with pie crust scraps. Manning says the sweet treats were "the chef's kiss [and] could only be described as heaven." Courtesy photo

into the dish, the mouth-watering middle of the pie was poured in on top.

The most difficult part was the last. She would carefully roll the top onto the rolling pin so

A holiday tradition of Susan and Gregory Pollard of Wrentham is to have their photo taken each year with Santa Claus on the Wrentham Town Green. Courtesy photo



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Kwanzaa, a seven day cultural festival, Dec. 26 to Jan. 1

According to www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org, Kwanzaa is an African American and pan-African holiday that celebrates family, community, and culture. It was created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga, a professor of Africana Studies, and is a seven-day cultural festival that runs from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1.

Kwanzaa centers around seven principles (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, faith).

Kwanzaa is a time of learning, family and celebration, says the National Museum of African American History & Culture. "During the week of Kwanzaa, families and communities come together to share a feast, to honor the ancestors, affirm the bonds between them, and to celebrate African and African American culture. Each day they light a candle [on the kinara] to highlight the principle of that day and to breathe

meaning into the principles with various activities, such as reciting the sayings or writings of great black thinkers and writers, reciting original poetry, African drumming, and sharing a meal of African diaspora-inspired foods.

"The table is decorated with the essential symbols of Kwanzaa, such as the Kinara (candle holder), Mkeka (mat), Muhindi (corn to represent the children), Mazao (fruit to represent the harvest), and Zawadi (gifts). One might also see the colors of the Pan-African flag, red (the struggle), black (the people), and green (the future), represented throughout the space and in the clothing worn by participants. These colors were first proclaimed to be the colors for all people of the African diaspora by Marcus Garvey [1887-1940]."



A few things you might not know about Kwanzaa, according to www.history.com:

Kwanzaa was created in the 1960s in the aftermath of the deadly Watts Rebellion (also known as the 1965 Watts Riots).

Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili.

Each family celebrates Kwanzaa in its own way.

Many people celebrate both Kwanzaa and Christmas.

Homemade and educational gifts are encouraged.

Source: www.history.com/topics/holidays/kwanzaa-history

A kinara is a candleholder for seven candles used in celebrating the festival of Kwanzaa. Each night, one candle is lit to represent one of Kwanzaa's seven principles - unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Here, Cameron Crosby, 5, of Medway poses with a kinara and Three Kings candle holders. Courtesy photo

Bancroft Public Library staff share their holiday traditions

The staff at the Bancroft Memorial Library in Hopedale shared their holiday traditions.

Director Keely Bethel-Penny's family holiday tradition is going to Old Sturbridge Village for Christmas by Candlelight. There are string lights, hanging lanterns, a bonfire in the common, houses open with fires burning inside and samples of food to try. Learning about the history of Christmas and to experience how it was celebrated back then is just beautiful.

Youth Services Librarian Laura cooks up a storm



Old Sturbridge Village Christmas by Candlelight. Source: Keely Bethel-Penny.

every Christmas Eve to celebrate the Feast of the Seven Fishes with her family.

Senior Library/Tech Services Assistant Sue kicks off Christmas by handing out a candy cane to every family member after their Thanksgiving dinner wraps up.

Library Assistant Jean celebrates with her family Christmas Eve by playing holiday-themed charades and singing the 12 days of Christmas.

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As another holiday season quickly approaches, remember books always make thoughtful gifts. There is truly something for everyone, and here are a few to get you started.

Unwrap some Christmas magic with **Little People, BIG DREAMS: Advent Calendar Book Collection** of 24 mini books from the iconic series by Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara. Continuing the celebration countdown theme, **Tis the Season: A Lift-the-Flap Advent Calendar Full of Christmas Poems** illustrated by Richard Jones is filled with festive poems, hidden surprises, and a magical fold-out display.

Historical fiction perfect for younger readers ages 8-12, is the latest by bestselling author Alice Hoffman entitled **When We Flew Away: A Novel of Anne Frank Before the Diary**. It is a stunning novel about one of contemporary history's most acclaimed figures, exploring the little-known details of Anne Frank's life before she went into

hiding. Every *Wings of Fire* fan will want to add **The Dragonet Prophecy: Limited Edition** to their shelves! The first book in the #1 *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling *Wings of Fire* series takes flight with a gorgeous



collector's edition including beautiful new cover art and exclusive extra materials inside. From beloved Saturday Night Live alum Kate McKinnon, comes a madcap new adventure about three sisters, a ravenous worm, and a mysterious mad scientist in **The Millicent Quibb School of Etiquette for Young Ladies of Mad Sci-**

ence, perfect for ages 8-12.

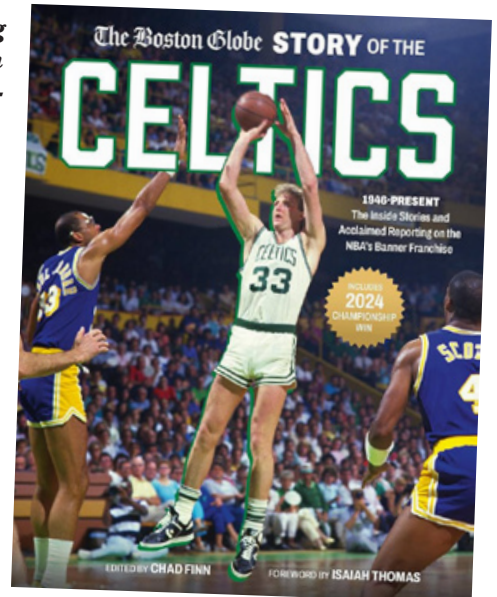
For young aspiring chefs, check out **Look and Cook Breakfast: A First Book of Recipes in Pictures** by Valorie Fisher, a companion title to *Look and Cook Snacks*. These easy-to-follow and engaging visual recipes will have kids ages 4-8 making their favorite breakfast dishes for the whole family to enjoy. For little ones, also try **The Little Chefs** by Rosemary Wells, great for anyone who has tried to whip up something special for someone they love, and stumbled. It's a splendid volume of three stories in one darling-sized book in a beautiful package from the beloved creator of *Max and Ruby*. **ARTificial Intelligence** by David Biedrzycki, is a picture book about Robot, who knew he was ART-ificially different ever since he was a little chip. A funny and heartfelt picture book exploring AI, art, and creativity.

Fiction for Adults - Bring some magic into your life with the novel **Before We Forget Kindness**, the fifth book in the bestselling *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* series by Toshikazu Kawaguchi, about a café in Tokyo where customers can travel through time, which has sold over two million copies worldwide. **The Wedding People**, a novel by Alison Espach, is a propulsive and uncommonly wise novel about one unexpected wedding guest and the surprising people who help her start anew, set in Newport, RI.

Moving on to non-fiction - If you're looking for interesting history with a literary theme, try **Book and Dagger: How Scholars and Librarians Became the Unlikely Spies of World War II** by Elyse Graham, the untold story of the academics who became OSS spies, invented modern spycraft, and helped turn the tide of the war. **The Serviceberry** by Robin Wall Kimmerer, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, is a bold and inspiring vision for how to orient our lives around gratitude, reciprocity, and community, based on the lessons of the natural world. This slim

volume is highly recommended! **Hiking Hidden Gems in America's National Parks** by Ted Alvarez takes you to the lesser-known hikes in these exceptional destinations—avoid the crowds and enjoy the epic views of our national parks' best-kept secrets. **The Boston Globe Story of the Celtics: 1946-Present: The Inside Stories and Acclaimed Reporting on the NBA's Banner Franchise** lets you experience the

illustrious and passionate history of The Boston Celtics, the winningest team in NBA history, as it happened through the articles, features, and lens of their hometown and

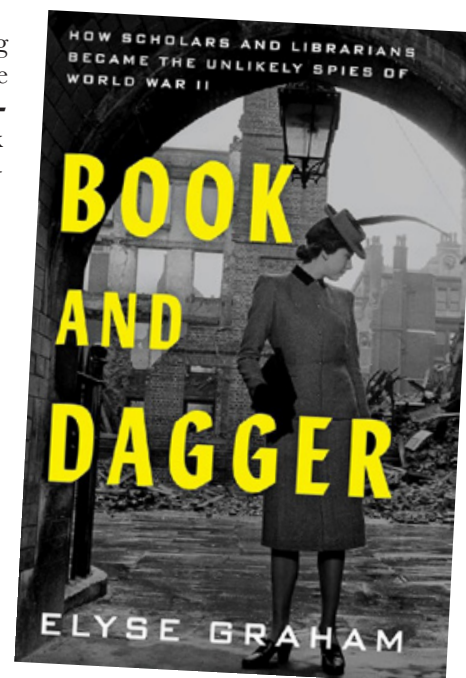


of 80 Culinary Trailblazers from Samuel Adams Brewing the American Dream by Jennifer Glanville Love, displays an exclusive journey where 80 Culinary Trailblazers share their favorite recipes and inspiring stories, celebrating innovation, entrepreneurship, and the spirit of American ingenuity. In her long-awaited memoir, **Be Ready When the Luck Happens**, Ina Garten—aka the Barefoot Contessa, author of thirteen bestselling cookbooks & beloved Food Network personality, shares her personal story with readers hungry for a seat at her table.

For regional treats - **New England Cocktails: An Elegant Collection of Over 100 Recipes from the Northeast** by Matthew Reed Baker is an elegant collection of over 100 recipes inspired by the Northeast.

Explore the Northeast through the most notable wineries, breweries, and distilleries in the region with **Drink the Northeast: The Ultimate Guide to Breweries, Distilleries, and Wineries in the Northeast** by Carlo DeVito.

As you can see, there are plenty of options for giving books during the holiday season. Take a wander around your local bookstore to discover even more! Happy reading!!



national news outlet, *The Boston Globe*.

Here are a few options just for foodies! From the beloved baking authority comes **The King Arthur Baking Company Big Book of Bread: 125+ Recipes for Every Baker**, the most wide-ranging bread book to be published in a decade—with 125 recipes that meet you where you are, whether novice or bread-head, in a stunning package. **Our American Dream Cookbook: Favorite Recipes & Inspiring Journeys**

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Are you dreaming of a ‘green’ Christmas?

Are you looking for ways to have a greener holiday? Consider these tips for an eco-friendly holiday season.



- From onetreeplanted.org and earthday.org:
- **Wrap** – Reuse old wrapping paper, use newspaper/magazines, comics, paper shopping bags, and any fabric (scarves, bandanas, dish towels). Reuse cardboard boxes.
 - **Gifts** – Give gifts from the heart, and offer to help with chores or other tasks. Consider gifting hand-me-downs and heirlooms, along with a written history of the item. Buy local. Gift an experience instead of another item. If someone on your list is impossible to buy for, consider making a donation in their name.
 - **Stocking stuffers** – Instead of cheap items that are soon forgotten, fill stockings with homemade treats and a few small thoughtful gifts.
 - **Cards** – Send eco-friendly holiday greeting cards.
 - **Tree** – Real Christmas trees are more environmentally friendly than imitation ones.
- Recycle your live tree by putting it outside to provide shelter for local wildlife or compost it.
- **Tree lights** – Switch to LED holiday lights which use 90% less energy.
 - **Décor** – Decorate with items from nature (greens, berries, pinecones, pressed leaves, etc.). Make sustainable decorations with materials you already have.
 - **Meals** – Consider using plant-based ingredients, and/or shopping local. Compost leftover food.
 - **Table** - Use reusable utensils, plates, napkins, and tablecloths for your meals.
 - **Donate** – Donate unneeded gifts. Donate/volunteer your time to communities and organizations that are in need.
- For more information, visit onetreeplanted.org/blogs/stories/sustainable-holiday-ideas.





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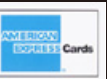



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Robert Roofing and Gutters, Inc. – Honest Service, Quality Craftsmanship, and Winter-Ready Solutions

By JENNIFER RUSSO

A good roof is really the first line of defense for any home, preserving its structure, safeguarding the owners, and providing peace of mind in any weather New England decides to throw at us. Having been a cornerstone of quality roofing services since 1980, Robert Roofing and Gutters, Inc. sets the bar for reliability and superior customer care, building a reputation for itself with top-notch craftsmanship that stands the test of time.

Having worked in the industry from the age of thirteen at his father’s construction company, Robert “Rob” Greene learned from highly experienced roofers that attention to detail, communication, and quality workmanship were integral, and that with it came pride for a job well-done. Starting his own business and now working with his own son Robert “Robbie” Jr. as one of his foremen, this expertise is passed on once again.

As we head toward the winter months, those who live in this area are well aware that it has the potential to be devastating, and preparations need to be made to deal with snow, sleet, ice, and high winds. Having a roof evaluation done should be a part of that annual checklist.

So, what should you be looking for that may indicate you need



some roof care? Learn the age of the house (20+ years can warrant a check), note if any shingles are curled or buckled, or missing altogether, and check if there are any fiberglass strands shining through on the shingles or granules in your gutters or at the end of downspouts. Any or all of these things

could mean that you need repairs or replacement, and it’s best to get this done before winter hits. If you notice any of these things, you can call Robert Roofing to come out and give you a free estimate on any work that may need to be done.

“Don’t wait until spring to have your roof repaired or replaced, as doing so can exacerbate your problems. Any damage your roof has can only get worse during the winter. It’s best to be proactive instead of dealing with emergency

roof repairs at the last minute,” shares Robert.

When warmer months return, having an estimate done to ensure that the winter elements didn’t damage a roof is also recommended, as is making sure the roof has proper ventilation, which can provide many benefits including reduced energy usage, improved air quality, temperature regulation, and help extend the life of your roof.

Robert Roofing works on both residential and commercial buildings. Their crew has years of experience with diverse types of roofing (asphalt, rubber, low-slope, specialty shingles, etc.) and the other services the company provides, such as gutter installation, coil stock metal coverage, soffits, and chimney repointing and flashing.

They stand by their slogan of ‘One call sends a roofer, not a salesman’. Robert feels very strongly that the focus should always be service over sales because the ultimate goal is to make sure you have a good roof AND save

you money. This honest philosophy is built into the very fabric of his company’s mission. If your roof can be restored, they will try their best to do that and not try to sell you a new one. That said, if you do need a new roof, their expert installers will make sure the job is executed flawlessly.

In addition to providing Norfolk and nearby communities with these services, Robert Roofing is passionate about giving back to their local community as well. With a big heart for those living with addictions and recovering from substance abuse, the business is a strong supporter of sober living facilities in the area.

Robert Roofing and Gutters, Inc. offers roof inspections, installations, and repairs, as well as preventative maintenance, waterproofing, new gutters, window installations, and more. For a full list of services available or to obtain a free estimate, visit www.robertroofingandgutters.com or call 857-247-8709.

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Holiday Events Calendar

Editor's note: This list is not meant to be exhaustive. These are the events of which we were aware at press time. For more December events, watch for our December Holiday Guide.

NOVEMBER 9

• 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Tri-County Regional Voc-Tech High School (main entrance), 147 Pond St., Franklin. Shop for unique hand-crafted products including home décor and housewares, jewelry, paper crafts, pet items, wood crafts, glass crafts, handbags, clothing, and more. \$3 entrance fee over age 12. Sponsored by Franklin Newcomers & Friends.

NOVEMBER 16

• 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., The Original Congregational Church of Wrentham, 1 East St., Wrentham. The Christmas Tree Church Fair. Beautifully decorated Christmas trees will be for sale! Tables will feature local craft vendors, plants, gifts, books, jewelry, baked goods, crafts and sewing, Christmas decorations, Attic Treasures, Silent Auction. Brunch will be served all day and the Children's Area will feature a scavenger hunt, games, crafts, and Santa Claus. www.occhurch.net

NOVEMBER 21-DECEMBER 29

• Southwick's Zoo, 2 Southwick St., Mendon. Winter Wonderland: New England's premier holiday lights display. Take a magical journey through Southwick's Zoo with friends and family to view spectacular holiday lights and handcrafted displays. southwick-zoo.com/winter-wonderland/

NOVEMBER 22

• 6 p.m., Patriot Place, Foxborough. Holiday Tree Lighting of the "Holiday Giving Tree" located at the Dean College Stage outside Bar Louie and Citizen Crust.
• 6:30 p.m., Minney VFW, 16 South Main St., Millbury. First Congregational Church of Millbury Annual Turkey Raffle. Refreshments and various raffles and prizes available.

NOVEMBER 22 THROUGH DECEMBER 25

• Gillette Stadium, Foxborough, times vary. Magic of Lights through experience showcases dozens of displays, festive favorites and captivating digital animations, all brought to life with millions of LED lights, ensuring a memorable holiday experience for the whole family. Pre-purchase tickets. www.patriot-place.com/events/magic-of-lights/?utm-hero

NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 29

• Timed tickets required, The Breakers, Newport, RI. Sparkling Lights at The Breakers. Now in its fifth season, this event brings the magic of the holidays inside and outside this landmark Gilded Age mansion. You'll stroll along a half-mile-long path glittering with hundreds of thousands of holiday lights while music fills the winter air. See

illuminated displays and sparkling surprises along the way. Tour the opulent interior of The Breakers decorated in holiday splendor. www.newportmansions.org/events/sparkling-lights-at-the-breakers-2024/

NOVEMBER 23

• 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Hoboken Club, 252 Central St., Milford. The Women's Auxiliary will hold its annual Holiday Fair featuring unique Christmas gifts from our local crafters, homemade baked goods, raffle baskets, and handmade cappelletti.

NOVEMBER 23- DECEMBER 22

• Saturdays and Sundays, times vary, Galilford's, 5 Southwick St., Mendon. Brunch with Santa. Enjoy this holiday tradition which features a selection of brunch buffet favorites. Reservations at 508-928-0928.

NOVEMBER 23-JANUARY 5

• 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., New England Botanic Garden, 11 French Dr., Boylston. Night Lights: Color Cascade at New England Botanic Garden. Immerse yourself in the magic of the season with a breathtaking winter light display that is unmatched in the region. This year, prepare to be amazed by Night Lights: Color Cascade, a one-of-a-kind winter experience where visitors embark on a spellbinding journey through a mesmerizing array of a quarter million radiant, glowing lights in every imaginable color. nebg.org/nightlights/

NOVEMBER 24

• 7 p.m., First Universal Society of Franklin, 262 Chestnut St., Franklin. Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. Franklin Interfaith Council welcomes all faith communities to an Interfaith Thanksgiving Service. Any donations to this service are applied directly to a fuel assistance fund granted to local community members in need.

NOVEMBER 26

• 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., Milford Youth Center, Milford. After-school Thanksgiving Dinner includes turkey (or other meat options), side dishes, desserts, drinks. Donations of beverages, pre-made desserts, side dishes, gift certificates, etc., are appreciated. For more information, contact jabrant@milfordma.gov

NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 29

• The Garden at Elm Bank, 900 Washington St., Wellesley, dates and times vary. Celebrate the season at the Garden at Elm Bank with dozens of trees, Snow Village model trains, garden lights, hot cocoa, and s'mores. www.masshort.org/festival-of-trees

NOVEMBER 29

• 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., Edaville Family Theme Park, 5 Pine St., Carver. Festival of Lights. Experience one of New England's oldest Christmas traditions. Steam trains, Christmas lights, food, local businesses and crafters, Santa, and vintage amusement rides. seeplymouth.com/event/festival-of-lights-carver/2024-11-29/
• 6:30 p.m., Draper Memorial Park, Milford. Milford Christmas Tree Lighting. Festivities start with concessions at 5:30 p.m., Santa arrives at 5:45 p.m., families can take their own photos with Santa. The Greater Milford Community Chorus will perform. Sponsored by Citizens for Milford. For more information and weather updates, visit Facebook. [com/CitizensforMilford](https://www.facebook.com/CitizensforMilford)

NOVEMBER 29-30

• 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., Olde Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge. Christmas by Candlelight, tickets required. Experience the history of Christmas festivities, relish old traditions and create new ones. Also various dates in December. www.osv.org/event/christmas-by-candlelight/

NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 1

• 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Fri. and Sat.), 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Sun.). Worcester Center for Crafts, 25 Sagamore Rd., Worcester. Holiday Festival of Crafts is a one-stop holiday shopping opportunity for unique, handmade gifts in a range of prices for men, women, and children. worcestercraftcenter.org/events/holiday-festival-of-crafts-331/

NOVEMBER 29-JANUARY 4

• Winterlights sponsored by The Trustees, timed tickets required, various locations. Experience the sparkle of the holiday season as Winterlights returns to three special places: Naumkeag in Stockbridge, Stevens Coolidge House & Gardens in North Andover, and Eleanor Cabot Bradley Estate in Canton. Enjoy dazzling light displays, festive music, seasonal treats, and time outside among the trees and snow. Event runs through Jan. 4. thetrustees.org/program/winterlights-massachusetts/

NOVEMBER 30

• 18th Annual Holiday Stroll to include a scavenger hunt, birthday bash celebrating the town's 300th anniversary, trees and booths at Blair Square, caroling, tree lighting, Santa and more. Noon to 5 p.m., various locations, Holliston. www.celebrate-holliston.com/

NOVEMBER 30

• 5:30 p.m., Medway Christmas Parade starts at Medway High School and ends at Choate Park, Medway. Followed by lighting

of the town's holiday lights and a fireworks display.

NOVEMBER 30 – DECEMBER 1

• 7 p.m., Vaillancourt Folk Art's Blaxton Hall, Sutton. "A Christmas Carol" performed by his great-great grandson, Gerald Charles Dickens. The two-hour performance, including an intermission, will ignite the wonderment of the season through the immortal words of Dickens' classic ghost story. Gerald Charles Dickens adopts different voices, expressions, and mannerisms to portray each of the story's twenty-six characters in this acclaimed one-man show. Due to the complexity of a one-man performance, the show is not recommended for children under the age of 8 years old. Tickets range from \$35 - \$100. bit.ly/4h8aw42

THROUGH NOVEMBER 30

• VFW playground, Upton. Autumn StoryWalk™. Stroll through the playground, reading each poster panel with your child. Fill out the QR code at the end to enter a chance to win a copy of the book, The Scarecrow's Hat by Ken Brown (one entry per child). Sponsored by the Upton Public Library.

DECEMBER 1-JANUARY 5

• 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., New England Botanic Garden, 11 French Dr., Boylston. Night Lights: Color Cascade at New England Botanic Garden. Immerse yourself in the magic of the season with a breathtaking winter light display that is unmatched in the region. This year, prepare to be amazed by Night Lights: Color Cascade, a one-of-a-kind winter experience where visitors embark on a spellbinding journey through a mesmerizing array of a quarter million radiant, glowing lights in every imaginable color. nebg.org/nightlights/

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DECEMBER 1-29

• Southwick's Zoo, 2 Southwick St., Mendon. Winter Wonderland: New England's premier holiday lights display. Take a magical journey through Southwick's Zoo with friends and family to view spectacular holiday

lights and handcrafted displays. southwick-zoo.com/winter-wonderland/

DECEMBER 1-25

• Gillette Stadium, Foxborough, times vary. Magic of Lights through experience showcases dozens of displays, festive favorites and captivating digital animations, all brought to life with millions of LED lights, ensuring a memorable holiday experience for the whole family. Pre-purchase tickets. www.patriot-place.com/events/magic-of-lights/?utm-hero

DECEMBER 1, 6-8, 13-15, 20-23, 27-30

• 2 p.m. to 8 p.m., Olde Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge. Christmas by Candlelight, tickets required. Experience the history of Christmas festivities, relish old traditions, and create new ones. www.osv.org/event/christmas-by-candlelight/

DECEMBER 1

• 8 a.m. to noon, Saint Blaise Church, 1158 S. Main St., Bellingham. Breakfast with Santa with a special visit from everyone's favorite jolly old elf.
• 3:30 p.m., Hillcrest Village, Rockwood Rd., Norfolk. Santa Parade and Holiday on the Hill. Featuring King Philip HS Marching Band, Santa & Mrs. Claus, Rudolph, Santa's elves, Frosty the Snowman, the Grinch, Buddy the Elf, Norfolk police and fire departments, scouts, color guard, varsity and chief Cheerleaders, town officials, and more. Photos with Santa at 4 p.m., Norfolk Public Library community room, BYOCamera.
• 4 p.m., United Presbyterian Church, 51 Cottage St., Whitinsville. Cookies and Carols. Kick off the Advent season with the singing of Advent and Christmas Carols led by a guest organ player (William Cudmore, who has played for the Woo Sox) and pianist (Eileen Straub, the church's Minister of Music). There will be activities for the kids and singing of seasonal songs. For more information, call 508-234-8220.
• 7 p.m., Vaillancourt Folk Art's Blaxton Hall Theatre, Sutton. "A Christmas Carol" performed by his great-great grandson, Gerald Charles Dickens. The two-hour performance, including an intermission, will ignite the wonderment of the season through the immortal words of Dickens' classic ghost story. Gerald Charles Dickens adopts different voices, expressions, and mannerisms to portray each of the story's twenty-six characters in this acclaimed one-man show. Due to the complexity of a one-man performance, the show is not recommended for children under the age of 8 years old. Tickets range from \$35 - \$100. bit.ly/4h8aw42

DECEMBER 4

• 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Upton Public Library, Upton. Make a winter hat with paper, coloring materials, scissors, and cotton balls to make our winter creations. For ages 3+. No registration required. While supplies last.

DECEMBER 5

• Dean College, Awpie Way, Franklin. Dean College's Holiday Lighting Ceremony to include lighting of a Christmas Tree, a menorah, and a Kwanzaa kinara. Entertainment and performances by Dean students. www.dean.edu

DECEMBER 7

• 7:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., Saint Joseph's Parish Center, 145 Holliston St., Medway. Santa Breakfast. Food, activities, crafts for kids, silent auction, pictures with Santa. Cost is \$11 for adults; \$8 for seniors and kids; kids under 3 are free. Family max is \$31. Pictures with Santa are \$20, and each family will receive a thumb drive with 3 to 5 photos on it.

• 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., St. John's Episcopal Church, 237 Pleasant St., Franklin. Christmas Fair. Fresh wreaths and greenery, crafts, raffle, silent auction, gift baskets, cookie walk, snack bar, and more. www.stjohnsfranklinma.org

• 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., St. Christopher Church, 950 W. Boylston St., Worcester. Christmas Festival featuring fun for the whole family. Games, raffles, food, and more. For more information, call 508-853-1492.

• 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., various locations,

Sutton. Sutton Chain of Lights. Celebrate Christmas in historic Sutton with businesses, churches and organizations in town for the annual Christmas and holiday season celebration. Hop on a free trolley for rides to more than three dozen locations to do shopping, enjoy delicious food, kids' activities, hay rides and animals. The Sutton High School Band plays traditional carols and Christmas tunes at 5:30 p.m. on the Town Common, then head into the First Congregational Church for its famous Lake Ripple Roast Beef Dinner. Seating is from 5-7 p.m. with tickets available at the door. suttonchainoflights.weebly.com/

• 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Bancroft Memorial Library, Hopedale. A stop on the Winter Stroll. The library will display photographs of the library through the years as it celebrates its 125th anniversary. There will be treats and activities for kids in the Children's Room. The Friends of the Hopedale Library will have commemorative glass sun-catcher ornaments for sale along with books and homemade crafts. At 2 p.m., local acapella group Holiday Harmony Quartet will fill the Library with songs of the season while guests enjoy hot cocoa and mulled cider.

• Noon to 4 p.m., 6 Cherry St., Ashland. Downtown Holiday Stroll. Take a delightful stroll through downtown to shop and enjoy holiday festivities! As you wander, you'll discover a plethora of local boutiques and pop-up shops, creating the perfect opportunity to check off your holiday shopping list. Also check out activities at The

Corner Spot! Roast marshmallows at the fire pit, buy a wreath from the Boy Scouts, grab some cookies from the Girl Scouts, tell Santa what you want for Christmas, and enjoy hot chocolate, cider, and noodles from Doragon Eatery. And don't forget to collect stamps as you shop. www.facebook.com/events/8146977692075799/?_rdr

• Noon to 7 p.m., downtown Hopedale. Annual Hopedale Winter Stroll & Shop Hop. The stroll takes place at many stops along Hopedale St. and Dutcher St. including many historic buildings such as the Draper Gym, Hopedale Community House, Bancroft Memorial Library, Hopedale Unitarian Church, Union Evangelical Church, and the Little Red Shop Museum. Shop Hop list will also include stops all over Hopedale to visit, shop, eat, and enjoy. friendsofhistoryhopedale.com/winter-stroll

• 4:30 p.m., Auburn High School to City Hall, Auburn. Lighted Santa Parade & Tree Lighting. Live music begins at 4 p.m. at City Hall, parade begins at 4:30 p.m. After parade ends, at City Hall there will be a tree lighting, a visit from Santa, and live music. bit.ly/AuburnSantaParadeTreeLighting2024

DECEMBER 8

• 7:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., Charles River Masonic Lodge, 37 Cottage St., Medway. Breakfast with Santa. Tickets adults \$12, children \$8 (rates subject to change from press time).

• 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Placentino-Miller Cafetorium, 235 Woodland St., Holliston.

Breakfast with Santa to benefit Holliston Lions Charities and the HMAPA. Tickets (cash or Venmo) are \$7 for ages 2-11 years, and \$10 for ages 12 and up. Under age 2 are free. If you bring a donation for Toys for Tots or the Holliston Pantry Shelf, you will receive \$1 off photos. For more information, contact valwani@hotmail.com

• 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Grafton Common, Grafton. Grafton Celebrates the Holidays. Frost Stops, Craft & Vendor Fair, and other fun holiday happenings. www.grafton-ma.gov/809/Events-Activities

• 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Grafton High School, 24 Providence Rd., Grafton. Craft & Vendor Fair. Over 75 vendors featuring baked goods, home décor, jewelry, woodworking, and more. www.graftonrec.com

• 10:30 a.m., various locations, Millbury. 25th annual Millbury Chain of Lights, a town-wide event to celebrate the holidays with local food, shopping and entertainment! Enjoy nearly 40 stops in town for live music, holiday shopping, holiday figures like Buddy the Elf and the Grinch, raffles and food. Old-fashioned trolleys provide free transportation throughout the day. The event is sponsored by local businesses and concludes with a tree lighting and appearance by Santa Claus at the Millbury bandstand. www.facebook.com/millburychainoflights/

• 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 371 River St., Weymouth. Holiday Festival & Winter Sleigh Rides is an inclusive family event featuring sleigh rides through the park, live

music, pictures with Santa, arts and crafts, refreshments, and more. arcsouthshore.org/news-events/event-calendar.html/event/2024/12/08/4th-annual-holiday-festival/466985

DECEMBER 11

• 6 p.m., Upton Public Library, Upton. Winter Paper Trees. Elementary school-aged patrons can share a winter story and then use construction paper and paint to create beautiful skylines of winter trees. For ages 5 to 12. Pre-registration is required.

DECEMBER 12

• 6 p.m., Upton Public Library. Gingerbread Clay Pots. Tweens and teens will use small terracotta pots, hot glue, and paint to make an adorable gingerbread man. For ages 10

• 7 p.m., Franklin Federated Church, 171 Main St., Franklin. "Blue Christmas," a service for those who are having a hard time with the "merry" aspect of Christmas, whether due to grieving or loneliness. The event includes candlelight and comforting songs, readings and reflection.

DECEMBER 14

• 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., Maggiano's Little Italy, 4 Columbus Ave., Boston. Autism Eats Brunch with Santa. The group will have their own private room and delicious buffet. The event is entirely autism family friendly and all behaviors are welcome. Autism Eats gives autism families an opportunity to enjoy restaurant meals without the stress

THANK YOU TO ALL WHO ENTERED!



Southwick's Zoo

Winter Wonderland

New England's Premier Holiday Lights Display



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS:

Winners were chosen at random and notified by phone or email. Tickets are for entrance to Winter Wonderland display only.

Tara L.
Susan G.

Pat B.
William M.

Susan A.
Nancy G.

Sydney G.
Pamela F.

George K.
Nancy F.

Didn't win? Order your tickets online to Winter Wonderland. Visit SouthwicksZoo.com/Winter-Wonderland.

TheYankeeXpress
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FREE PRESS

By entering this contest, you are providing consent for Southwick's Zoo and Our Town Publishing (the publishers of The Yankee Xpress/Blackstone Valley Xpress, Free Press and the newspapers of Local Town Pages) to contact you via phone or email for this promotion or upcoming promotions. Only one winner per household. Cannot be an employee or family member of Southwick's Zoo or Our Town Publishing to win.

Dear Santa,



We prepared early for your visit! We contacted
Robert Roofing and Gutters and had a
New Roof Installed with Seamless Gutters
and had the **Chimney Re-Leaded** to make sure
you have a safe landing area! They handle things
like **Fascia, Soffit, Trim and Siding** as well as
Windows and Skylight Installation too
so that we can watch for your arrival!
- Can't wait for your visit!

Robert Greene
857-247-8709

robertroofingandgutters.com

One Call Sends a Roofer, Not a Salesman*



• Free Estimates • Licensed & Insured • Serving the North Pole, South Shore & Surrounding Areas

*Milk and cookies not required