

TODAY'S family

November 2025

Cuyahoga

**Great gifts for
the animal lover
on your list!**
See page 7 for info!

**Lyndhurst teen
violinist shines
on and off the
stage**

**Montessori
School Of
University
Heights**

A tradition of
learning and love

**Cuts N Curls
in Solon**

The new go-to party
destination for families

**How tutoring
can help your
high schooler**

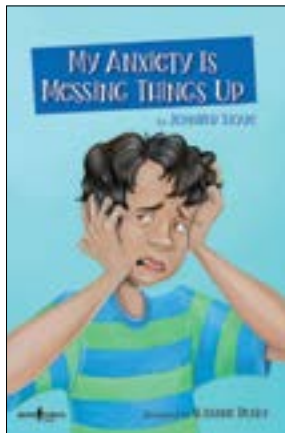
**Making school
fundraising
fun again!**

Local schools can skip the candy drives
and have world-renowned magician
Rick Smith Jr. perform at their school
See page 4 for all the details!

**National
Adoption
Month**

How you can give a forever
home to children in need

Today's Family BOOK CLUB



My Anxiety is Messing Things Up

By Jennifer Licate (author) and
Susan Beaky (illustrator)

Oscar is a perfectionist with an anxiety problem. He puts pressure on himself to excel in everything he does. That's why he earns good grades, wins awards, plays sports, performs in the band and makes friends easily. But all his accomplishments come at a price...

Oscar is wracked with anxiety. He's so afraid of falling short of expectations or disappointing his parents, his teachers and

his pals, he can't sleep. He tosses and turns every night. The more sleep he loses, the moodier and more irritable he becomes. Exhausted and stressed, Oscar lashes out at his best buddies. Now his anxiety is topped with feelings of guilt and shame.

When a caring teacher notices Oscar's distress, she invites him to join a school support group for students who struggle with anxiety. What will he do? Is Oscar too embarrassed to seek help, or is he so tired of being tired, he'll try anything for some sleep and relief? *Grades 4–8.*



Dog's First Baby

By Natalie Nelson

Dog likes his routines: spending time with his humans, eating, sleeping, and playing. But one day, the arrival of a new being changes everything. It's hard to know what this creature is—is it a dog, or something else?—but as Dog investigates, he may come to appreciate his loud, silly new sibling. She does drop food

on the ground, after all.

With *Dog's First Baby*, Natalie Nelson captures the wonder and humor of a new family member through a dog's eyes. Sure to delight kids and dog parents alike, this board book promises to be a repeat read aloud. *Ages 2–5.*



Hazel Is All That

by Chad Otis (author, illustrator)

Hazel has things all figured out—she is one clever girl. So, when she encounters a snarling dog in the park, she knows that dog is mean. And as her walk continues, she identifies a sweet dog, a sad dog, a naughty dog, and many more. But then something happens that leads Hazel to experience all kinds of different reactions herself, and she takes a second

look at the dogs. Soon she sees that dogs—and people!—are not just one thing. We're each our own special mix of all sorts of emotions and behaviors. We're all that—and more. And what of the snarling dog? A surprise is in store for Hazel and the reader! *Grades preschool–3.*



contents

- 4 MAGIC GIVES BACK**
A fun way to raise thousands for your school
- 6 HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES**
Lyndhurst teen violinist shines on and off stage
- 7 FREE MOVIE TICKETS**
If you know someone who deserves a little spotlight, let us know! We will thank you with movie tickets.
- 8 TUTORING**
Huntington Learning Center can help your high schooler to excel
- 10 CHRISTMAS CONNECTION**
Annual show returns to the I-X Center
- 11 CUTS N CURLS FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**
Solon salon makes every child feel special
- 13 MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS**
A tradition of learning and love
- 18 HUMOR ESSAY**
How the day after Thanksgiving became known as Black Friday



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Today's Family Magazine is distributed free of charge for families living in and around Cuyahoga County.

Cover Photo
iStock / By OlyaKomarova

Give the gift of cinema: Atlas Cinemas gift cards

More entertainment for your dollar!

Looking for a holiday gift that's both thoughtful and versatile? Atlas Cinemas gift cards are the perfect choice. Available in any denomination above \$10, these cards can be used for movie tickets, concessions, and even reloaded for future use. Whether it's for a family outing, a date night, or a solo escape, an Atlas Cinemas gift card offers a personalized cinematic experience.

Think theater tickets and snacks are expensive? Let's be real: some fans don't blink to drop \$50 for parking, \$200 for a single Cleveland Browns ticket, \$15 per beer, and \$8 for a pretzel—that in the end just supports a billionaire owner who appears to not care about winning.

Yet when it comes to a movie ticket and popcorn at Atlas, suddenly it's "too pricey." At least at the theater, you get entertainment, comfort, and a warm seat—not frostbite and a side of disappointment. Plus you get satisfaction of supporting a locally-owned business with people who were raised and live in northeast



Ohio.

The magic of the theater experience is unmatched. The immersive sound, giant screen, luxury seating and shared energy of an audience create moments that streaming at home can't replicate. From family adventures to a cozy date night, Atlas Cinemas provides a safe, modern, and fun environment to make memories that last far beyond the credits.

This holiday season, give more than a gift—give an experience. Atlas Cinemas gift cards let your loved ones choose when and how they want to enjoy the magic of the movies, making them a present that's truly worth unwrapping.

Visit www.AtlasCinemas.net today.
~Today's Family Staff

A Beary Merry tradition returns to Willoughby Hills

Get ready for one of northeast Ohio's most beloved holiday shopping traditions—the 39th Annual Beary Merry Handmade Arts & Crafts Market, returning to La Vera Party Center in Willoughby Hills on Tuesday and Wednesday, December 2 and 3, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Step into a wonderland of creativity where two full banquet rooms will be filled with handmade arts and crafts from talented local artisans. From cozy winter décor and jewelry to unique gifts that can't be found in stores, this show has become a holiday must for shoppers who love one-of-a-kind treasures.

As always, the event offers plenty of "beary" good fun for a great cause. The Basket Raffle Extravaganza, featuring over 50 themed baskets, will once again raise funds for Susan G. Komen. And thanks to Monreal Srnick Funerals & Cremations of Eastlake, visitors can enter hourly drawings to win a \$25 Beary Merry

Show Gift Certificate—perfect for picking up that special something.

The Beary Merry Show also gives back to the community through its annual toy drive. Guests are encouraged to bring a new toy or cash donation to help brighten the holiday season for local children in need.

Make a day of it by enjoying a delicious lunch or dinner prepared by La Vera Party Center. For those planning ahead, La Vera is also offering family takeout dinners serving four to six people on Wednesday, December 3, with \$10 from each meal benefiting Susan G. Komen. Dinners can be pre-ordered at la-vera.com/bearymerry.

Admission is just \$4 at the door. For more information, please email thebearymerryshow@gmail.com.

Celebrate the season, support local artists, and spread some holiday cheer—it's all part of what makes the Beary Merry Handmade Arts & Crafts Market a heartwarming hometown tradition.



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Tuesday & Wednesday
December 2 & 3
11:00 am – 8:00 pm

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Willoughby Hills, OH 44094

- Two banquet rooms of handmade gift items by crafters.
- Hourly door prize drawing of \$25 Beary Merry gift certificates courtesy of Monreal Srnick Funerals & Cremations.
- 50+ basket raffle to benefit Susan G. Komen for the Cure.
- Lunch, dinner & pre-ordered family take-out meals available.
- \$4 admission.

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Making school fundraising fun again

How schools are ditching door-to-door sales and raising thousands with Magic Gives Back

School fundraising has long been a rite of passage—selling chocolate bars, wrapping paper, or magazine subscriptions to family and neighbors. But ask any parent, and they'll tell you: the novelty has worn thin. Families are tired of buying things they don't really need, and schools are looking for fresh ideas that bring real results without placing heavy burdens on students and staff.

Enter Rick Smith Jr. and Magic Gives Back.

If the name sounds familiar, it should. Rick has wowed audiences around the world with his high-energy magic, appearing on America's Got Talent, Shark Tank, and countless TV specials. He's also a Guinness World Record holder for card-throwing (yes, he can slice through celery with a playing card). But beyond the bright lights and viral YouTube clips, Rick has a passion for giving back to schools and communities.

Over the past decade, his Magic Gives Back program has raised more than \$1 million for local schools. This year alone, he's setting his sights on adding another \$250,000 to that total.

A new spin on school fundraising

Instead of pushing cookie dough or coupon books, Magic Gives Back turns fundraising into an unforgettable event. Here's how it works:

- 1. Kickoff assembly** – Rick and his team host a free, high-energy kickoff at the school. This rally gets students fired up to participate.
- 2. Simple student participation** – Students register online and send email invitations to friends and family to purchase tickets for the big show. No door-to-door sales, no money collection, no product deliveries.
- 3. Prizes and incentives** – Along the way, students earn prizes for reaching fundraising goals. These range from LED light-up pens and pizza parties to meet-and-greet passes with Rick himself. Top performers can even win high-value rewards like TVs, gaming systems, or even the overall grand prize – a \$10,000 trip to

Walt Disney World in Orlando Florida.

- 4. The big show** – The fundraiser culminates in a Las Vegas-style magic and variety show, complete with illusions, audience participation, and state-of-the-art production. Families come together for an evening of world-class entertainment, and schools walk away with thousands of dollars raised.

Results that speak for themselves

The numbers are impressive. Schools typically raise between \$10,000 and \$25,000 with the Magic Gives Back program. Some recent standouts include:

- Mentor Public Schools: Almost \$40,000 raised over three years of shows
- Chagrin Falls: \$24,000 raised over three years

On average, schools partnering with Magic Gives Back net about \$17,000 per event. The program handles the heavy lifting: ticketing, prize distribution, marketing materials, and event production. For schools, the process is almost effortless.

As one parent put it: "Tickets were easier to sell than cookie dough and wrapping paper. Plus, the whole family had a great night out!" – *Shannon Mitchell*

Another parent shared: "We raised over \$15,000 for our school and had an amazing time. Rick and his crew definitely put the FUN in FUNdraiser." – *Alicia White*

Why it works

Part of the magic lies in the experience. Unlike traditional fundraisers, where families often feel pressured to buy something they don't want, Magic Gives Back gives them a reason to be excited. Parents get a night of professional-grade entertainment without driving downtown or paying steep ticket prices. Kids get to be part of something big, earning prizes and bragging rights along the way, and schools benefit financially while strengthening community spirit.

The program is also completely risk-free for schools. Thanks to local sponsors like Calvetta Brothers



Floor Show, Window Nation, and Mr. Heater, the production, prizes, and marketing tools are all covered up front. Schools simply pick a date, help promote and share in the proceeds.

Looking ahead

Rick Smith Jr. has built his career on astonishing audiences, but he's just as passionate about inspiring the next generation. With Magic Gives Back, he's found a way to merge both. "I wanted to create something that was more than just a show," Rick explains. "It's about building excitement, bringing families together, and helping schools reach goals they never thought possible."

This school year, his mission is clear: raise another \$250,000 for local schools and keep growing from there.

Bringing the magic to your school

For schools searching for a better way to raise money—without overburdening families—Magic Gives Back offers a solution that's both fun and profitable. Imagine turning your school auditorium into a Vegas-style theater for one unforgettable night, and watching your community rally behind it.

As one happy parent summed it up: "It was a great night of family fun. We left entertained, inspired, and proud to support our school."

To learn more or to bring Magic Gives Back to your school, visit MagicGivesBack.com, call 440-821-9549, or email rsj@ricksmithjr.com.

~Article by Dan Miller

~Photos courtesy of Rick Smith Jr.



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\$10 per participant. Call for times.



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An hour of gym time and a half-hour of celebration time
\$195 for 10 children & \$20 for each additional child. JSG provides white paper plates, forks, tablecloths, napkins, and clean-up.

Jump Start Gymnastics

23700 Mercantile Road, Beachwood

Rear of National Biological Building

(216) 896-0295

Website: jsgymnastics.com

Email: jsgymnastics@jsgymnastics.com



Liam performing his first solo in fifth grade at Greenview Elementary.
Photos courtesy of Christine Schaefer

Lyndhurst teen's passion for the violin hits all the right notes

At just 13 years old, Liam Schaefer of Lyndhurst has already built an impressive musical résumé—and he's just getting started. A student at Memorial Junior High School, Liam first picked up the violin in fourth grade when he was 9 years old. Guided by his grandfather, a retired choral director, his natural talent quickly began to shine.

"His grandfather really took him under his wing," says Liam's mom, Christine. "That bond helped Liam blossom into the musician he is today."

By fifth grade, Liam earned a spot in the honors orchestra, and the following year he joined the Suzuki Orchestra, a program built around the renowned Suzuki Method—an approach that nurtures musical skill through encouragement, repetition, and listening, much like learning a language. Liam's dedication paid off when he advanced from second chair to first chair, the leadership position of his section.

In seventh grade, he was nominated to perform at the OMEA Solo Ensemble, where he received the highest possible score—a "1." This year, Liam's accomplishments reached a new crescendo as he joined the advanced Suzuki Orchestra as first chair and achieved a personal goal: earning a coveted spot in the Cleveland Youth Pops Orchestra.

"Liam has done so much for himself in these

short years," Christine adds proudly. "He's driven to be the absolute best version of himself."

Along with his musical achievements, Liam maintains a 4.0 GPA, takes honors classes, and participates in multiple clubs and after-school activities. With that combination of talent, discipline and heart, his future looks nothing short of brilliant.

~Article by Dan Miller



Liam (left) playing in October 2025 at Beachwood H.S. for the Ohio Music Education Association Honors Orchestra for District 7 schools.



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If you have a story idea, we'd love to hear from you!

Just send us a quick email about who you think deserves a little recognition. If your idea is a fit, we will have one of our writers reach out to do an article.

And as a "thank you" we will send you four tickets to Atlas Cinemas along with \$20 in vouchers for concessions! Please note: if more than one person suggests the same idea, the tickets will go to whoever sent it in first.)

SCAN FOR EMAIL



Great gift ideas for the animal lover on your list

Seeking inventive gift ideas for the animal lovers on your list? Look no further. The Cleveland Zoological Society has you covered with five easy gifts that also give back.

2026 ZOO SOCIETY CALENDAR

When you give a gift of \$125 or more to the ZooFund, you'll also receive our exclusive 2026 calendar featuring beloved animals at the Zoo. Available while supplies last.

GIFT A ZOO MEMBERSHIP

Give the gift of memorable Zoo adventures all year long! Use the code TFAM25 online for a \$15 discount.

SUPPORT A SPECIES — GIRAFFE

What to get for that someone who has everything? Donate to the Support a Species program on their behalf and help support world-class care for the animals at the Zoo. All donors receive a fillable certificate and animal care fact sheet PDF; exclusive enamel pins and/or plushes with some gift levels.



SHOP AT THE ZOO GIFT SHOP

From cuddly plush versions of beloved species to sustainable jewelry and exclusive Zoo apparel, you'll find a unique array of gifts and stocking stuffers for loved ones of all ages at the Zoo's gift shop. Members always receive a 15% discount!

SUPPORT US WITH YOUR AMAZON PURCHASES

Select the Zoo Society to receive a portion of the proceeds from your Amazon purchases (at no cost to you!) with SmileAssociate: clevezoosociety.org/amazon.

For more info on any of these holiday ideas, visit ClevelandZooSociety.org/holiday and cross a few people off your 'nice' list!



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From middle school to high school: what students need to succeed

They also consider the rigor of a student's course load, standardized test scores (SAT or ACT), and involvement in extracurricular activities such as sports, clubs, leadership roles, or community service.

Colleges seek well-rounded students who challenge themselves academically—through honors or advanced placement (AP) courses—and show dedication outside the classroom. Building strong study habits, organization, and time management skills early in high school lays the foundation for success in these areas.

How tutoring can help

If your student is feeling overwhelmed or unsure of their progress, now is the perfect time to take action. A trusted tutoring program can help students:

- Catch up on skills they may have missed in middle school.
- Stay on track with current coursework and manage increased expectations.
- Get ahead by preparing for advanced classes or upcoming test prep.

At Huntington Learning Center, certified tutors provide personalized instruction tailored to each student's unique needs. Whether your child needs help with math, reading, writing, or study skills,

their individualized programs build academic skills, confidence, and motivation for long-term success.

Support starts now

The shift to high school can feel overwhelming, but your child doesn't have to navigate it alone. With the right preparation and consistent support, students can finish the semester strong and stay motivated throughout their high school years.

If you're wondering how to help your child thrive this year—or searching for tutoring near you—Huntington Learning Center is here to help. Call 1-800-CAN-LEARN or visit them online at HuntingtonHelps.com.

Let's make this school year—and this transition—a success, together.

~Article submitted by Huntington Learning Center

~Photo credit: HuntingtonHelps.com

Huntington Learning Center – Mentor

8000 Plaza Blvd., Unit H
440-205-8283

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A lesson in gratitude, one little card at a time

One year before Thanksgiving, I stumbled upon what I thought was a great idea to help spark dinner table conversations and introduce my family to the concept of gratitude. I grabbed a small tin, covered it with Thanksgiving-themed craft paper, and added pens and small cards in festive fall colors.

That evening, I explained the idea and pulled out a few cards I'd already written—like “Share something you're thankful for.” I told everyone that, in the days leading up to Thanksgiving, anyone could add a question, comment, or note of thanks to the tin. Each night at dinner, we'd pull one out to read and discuss.

Some cards were heartwarming, like being thankful for having a warm home—or the one my youngest drew with a picture of what she was most grateful for: our dog. Others inspired conversation, such as “What's your favorite Thanksgiving food?” or “What dish reminds you of a special memory?”

And then there were the silly

ones—usually crafted by my giggling daughters when they thought no one was looking. “Would you rather have it rain mashed potatoes or turkey?” “If you had a pet named Potato, what kind of animal would it be?” “Would you rather eat dirt pie or mud pudding?” Their faces lit up as they waited for one of their goofy questions to be drawn and read aloud by Mom or Dad.

Then there were the true head-scratchers, the kind that made us laugh even harder: “Are you more thankful for your family or your couch?” and “Would you rather be a turkey or a pumpkin?”

Maybe the lesson of gratitude snuck in along the way. Mostly, though, those cards encouraged conversation, silliness, and plenty of laughter. And now, each time we pull out the seasonal decorations, that little tin is there—a reminder to be grateful for all the joy and togetherness we've shared around the table.

Maya Angelou once said, “Be present in all things and thankful for all things.” In hindsight, I may have



been the one who learned the most from that tiny tin filled with handwritten notes.

The next time you're gathered around your own table, you don't need a special tin or fancy cards. Time spent listening and laughing with the people you love makes even an ordinary Thursday feel like Thanksgiving. But just in case you need a prompt to start – turn to the person next to you and tell them one thing you appreciate about them.

~Article by Stacy Turner

Create and decorate your own gratitude tin and cards or purchase them online!



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Now Enrolling!

The Cleveland Christmas Connection returns November 21–23

Special guest Karolyn Grimes (“Zuzu” from It’s a Wonderful Life) appears all weekend

Northeast Ohio’s most anticipated holiday shopping tradition, Cleveland Christmas Connection, will return to the I-X Center one last time on November 21-23, 2025—before moving to a new venue next year. The show is not going away; it’s simply saying farewell to the I-X Center after a memorable run. Guests can shop from 550+ unique exhibitors featuring artisan gifts, festive décor, gourmet treats, and more, alongside fan-favorite attractions and new hands-on experiences.

For those that want to be the first to shop, a limited number of early bird shopping tickets are available for Friday from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Unwrap exclusive vendor discounts and enjoy limited priority shopping away from the crowds. Tickets are available for advance purchase online only. Doors will also be opening at 8 a.m. on Saturday for additional morning shopping.

2025 features & attractions:

550+ Exhibitors & Artisan Marketplace –

Handpicked gifts you can see, feel, and taste—from custom ornaments and handmade jewelry to seasonal décor, stocking stuffers, and gourmet treats.

Special Guest: Karolyn Grimes (“Zuzu”) – Meet an actress from the classic holiday film “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Throughout the show, she’ll



be sharing her cookbook filled with 200 recipes inspired by the fictional town of Bedford Falls, memorable stories from the set, and fun trivia.

NEW: Cookie Connection Classes – Allie’s Sweet Tooth, a show favorite, will host cookie-decorating classes designed for all skill levels—ideal for families, friends, and festive team outings. Classes will be offered throughout the weekend at the Cookie Connection, reserve your spot in advance online or sign up when you arrive at the event. Spots are limited.

SantaLand & Holiday Photo Ops – Stroll a decorated entryway to Cleveland’s tallest Santa—30 feet high—and capture selfies with Santa, Mrs. Claus, and the Elves. Kids can also bring their letters to Santa to mail in the Santa Mailbox.

Sugar Plum Shoppe – Curated goodies and gifts sure to delight kids of all ages—featuring over 3,000 prewrapped gifts (under \$9.00 each), perfect for pint-sized wallets.

Tinseltown Train Area – A whimsical, family-friendly favorite returns to charm rail fans and little conductors alike. It showcases an extensive model train display and Christmas Village. Guests will have the opportunity to operate the train and receive a junior engineer certificate upon participation.

Live Entertainment – The holiday spirit comes to life with live entertainment on the stage where guests can relax and kick up their feet and sing along to festive entertainment. Flower Entertainment will offer face painting and balloon creations all weekend in SantaLand.

Convenient Shop & Drop – Guests can leave their purchases and pick them up when they are ready to leave. And when you pick up your purchases, make life easier and take advantage of gift wrapping for a donation to benefit Prayers from Maria.

Save on Admission – Bring two cans of vegetables to the event on Friday, November 21 to support The Greater Cleveland Food Bank and get \$4 off general admission.

Hero Day – On Sunday, November 23 all active military personnel, veterans, police, fire and first responders are invited to attend the show free of charge. Simply present a valid ID at the box office.

Visit ClevelandChristmasConnection.com for hours and more info.

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Cuts N Curls for Boys & Girls

Where every child feels special, seen, and stylish

Cuts N Curls for Boys & Girls isn't just a salon — it's a destination where kids laugh, play, and leave feeling confident. Designed with families in mind, this one-of-a-kind children's salon combines professional hair care with a fun, welcoming environment that transforms haircuts into joyful experiences.

Every detail at Cuts N Curls for Boys & Girls is intentional — from colorful stations and themed styling chairs to trained stylists who specialize in working with children of all abilities, including those with sensory sensitivities. The salon's private sensory room has become a cornerstone of its mission, offering a calm, judgment-free space where every child can relax and shine.

Beyond great hair, Cuts N Curls has become a go-to party destination for families. Their birthday and paint splatter parties offer a one-of-a-kind celebration experience — complete with colorful decor, personalized themes, and hands-on fun in the paint splatter room. Whether it's a first haircut celebration, a creative birthday bash, or a group play date, the team makes every event unforgettable.

Families can also shop in the on-site boutique featuring gifts and accessories from favorite brands like Melissa & Doug, TY, and handmade hair accessories crafted by local moms.

"Our goal has always been to create a space



where every child feels safe and celebrated," says Lindsey Terry, owner of Cuts N Curls for Boys & Girls. "From haircuts to parties, we want kids to walk out smiling — and parents to feel supported every step of the way."

For more information or to book an appointment or party, visit www.cutsncurls.net or follow them on social media.



Thanksgiving Quotes

For those of you who cannot be with family this Thanksgiving, please resist the urge to brag.

—Andy Borowitz

Thanksgiving: when the people who are most thankful are the ones who didn't have to cook.

—Melanie White

Candy Land It's Wild in Ohio

November 22–January 4

An indoor magical wonderland brings this favorite family game to life!

Free fun for the whole family, the indoor holiday tradition continues as the Candy Land game comes to life, but with a natural twist, taking you on a colorful adventure as you discover what's wild in Ohio. In addition, enjoy a themed craft, scavenger hunts, hands-on exhibits and much more!

Shop at The Nature Store for unique nature-themed gifts and enjoy hot chocolate in Snowshoe Lodge. Special weekend programs: Saturdays feature animal chats and s'mores around a campfire, while Sundays offer meet-the-keeper chats in the Wildlife Center animal yard. Snowshoe rentals are weather permitting. Registration or tickets not required.

Wild Weekends

Each Saturday, enjoy an outdoor campfire with s'mores from noon to 3 pm and animal chats at 11 am, 1 and 3 pm. On Sundays, experience meet-



the-keeper chats in the Wildlife Yard at 11 am, 1 and 3 pm.

Candy Land It's Wild in Ohio begins November 22 and is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. daily through January 4. The exhibit will be closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Year's Eve at noon and New Year's Day. Admission is free for all ages. Registration is not required. Additional information can be found at www.lakemetroparks.com.

Penitentiary Glen Reservation is located at 8668 Kirtland-Chardon Rd. in Kirtland.

Holiday Haircuts, Gifts & Fun Experiences!



Get your little ones ready for the season with festive haircuts in our kid-centered salon. While you're here, shop our retail section for the perfect presents:

- Melissa & Doug toys
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- Natural hair products
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- This year's most popular gift—Labubus!

Looking for a holiday activity? Book our paint splatter room for a creative, memory-making experience kids (and parents!) will love.

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Cuts N Curls
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6025 Kruse Drive, Solon
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www.cutsncurls.net

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Montessori School of University Heights

A tradition of learning and love

For more than 56 years, the Montessori School of University Heights has nurtured curiosity, confidence, and compassion in young children. Founded in 1968 by Betty and Jack Hissong, the school continues to thrive under the thoughtful guidance of Maria Wood, who carries on the founders' vision with warmth and dedication.

"My two sons attended the school," recalls Maria, now head of school. "While they were enrolled, I began working here as an assistant Montessori guide. I later completed my Montessori training and internship under Betty Hissong. When she retired in 1999, I was honored to become both lead guide and head of school."

The school was originally housed in a rented space from the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school system. It later moved to the First Baptist Church on Fairmount Boulevard—technically in Shaker Heights but just across the street from University Heights. "When we moved to the Church of the Good Shepherd in 2000, I considered changing the name," says Maria. "But parents urged me to keep it because of the reputation and name recognition the school had built, and the connection families feel to it."

Today, the Montessori School of University Heights remains at its current location within the Church of the Good Shepherd, where it continues to lease space and maintain a strong partnership with the congregation. The one-class primary environment serves children ages 3–6 years old, typically with about 30 children guided each day by four to five caring adults.

Children enter at age 3 and remain for three years, growing through the full Montessori cycle. Maria explains, "It's important for children to enter at age 3 and remain for the entire three-year program. During these early years, children have what Dr. Montessori called the 'absorbent mind' and experience sensitive periods for learning. Those years are when the Montessori approach truly helps to develop a sound foundation for future learning and growth."

A Montessori education encourages independence, hands-on learning, and respect for each child's natural curiosity. At Montessori School of University Heights, these values are beautifully complemented by the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, which helps each child develop a loving relationship with God. Special celebrations at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost are among the most memorable moments of the year. "The third-year children prepare the room, everyone dresses for the occasion, and they share activities such as dramatizing the nativity or the Last Supper," says Maria. "The children bring food to share with those in need and then enjoy a feast together. Alumni often tell us these are among

their fondest memories."

The school's small size and dedicated staff create a close-knit, family atmosphere where friendships flourish among children and parents alike. "Parents often linger on our playground and picnic area, sharing lunch and conversation," says Maria. "That sense of community is something truly special."

Staff longevity also contributes to that feeling of family. One of the current assistant Montessori guides is both an alumna and a former parent. "She likes to say she's been here a very long time," Maria laughs. "We've had other alumni and former parents serve as assistants, and that continuity makes our environment even warmer."

Over the years, many alumni have returned to visit—or to enroll their own children. "Welcoming our alumni back as parents is one of our greatest joys," Maria shares. "It's a beautiful reminder of the lasting bonds that begin here."

Each year ends with a highlight that captures the spirit of the school: the annual play created entirely by the oldest children. They choose a book, make the scenery and puppets, memorize the story, and even compose an original song. The result is a joyful celebration of "creativity, cooperation, and confidence."

From tentative 3-year-olds to self-assured 6-year-olds, every child at the Montessori School of University Heights is guided to grow at their own pace, in their own way, surrounded by care, faith, and belonging—a legacy that continues to flourish with every generation.

Montessori School of University Heights is located at 23599 Cedar Road in Beachwood. For more information call 216-381-8388 or visit www.ms-uh.org.

~Article by Dan Miller

~Photos courtesy of Montessori School of UH



Greater Cleveland Aquarium hosts Hunger Network Drive

Seven-day event offers a \$7 discount on admission when you donate a nonperishable food item or necessity

This holiday season, take the opportunity to fight food insecurity as you dive into an aquatic adventure.

Back for its 11th year, Greater Cleveland Aquarium is partnering with Hunger Network for “Nourish Our Neighbors,” a seven-day drive collecting canned proteins like tuna and chicken, shelf-stable milk, nut butter, whole grain cereals and healthy and nutritious nonperishables—as well as essential personal and household hygiene items including toilet paper, deodorant and diapers.

Each guest who drops off an item from Hunger Network’s wish list (see graphic to bottom right) at the Aquarium ticket counter between Wednesday, November 12 – Tuesday, November 18, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., will receive \$7 off their same-day admission. Aquarium members will receive one raffle entry for each item they contribute for an opportunity to win a special prize package that includes a back-of-house fish feeding experience, a gift shop prize basket and a \$100 voucher for a Music Box Supper Club concert.

“It’s real-time good karma, with one good deed translating to one good deal,” says Greater Cleveland Aquarium GM Stephanie White. “Give a little to help someone in need, and we’ll give you



a discount to explore nearby lakes and faraway oceans.”

Serving more than 45,000 individuals each month, Hunger Network is one of Cuyahoga County’s largest emergency food providers.

“When we come together as a community, we can nourish more than just bodies, we nourish hope,” says Hunger Network CEO Julie M. Johnson. “Every donation is a lifeline, helping us touch more

lives and ensure that families across northeast Ohio feel supported, valued, and empowered.”

Hunger Network representatives will be on-site on Saturday & Sunday, November 15 & 16, to share the nonprofit’s mission and accept monetary gifts in lieu of physical items. “The winter season brings added burdens for many families, from heating bills to healthcare costs,” Johnson adds. “By partnering with the Greater Cleveland Aquarium, we’re showing that compassion and curiosity can go hand in hand—your gift not only feeds a neighbor, it fuels a movement toward a healthier, more connected community.”

“We’ve been partnering with Hunger Network almost as long as we’ve been open,” says White. “I always find it heartwarming to see parents bring in their children to drop off jars of peanut butter or boxes of pasta so they can play a small role in helping their community thrive.”

For questions about donating, contact Greater Cleveland Aquarium at 216-862-8803 or visit greaterclevelandaquarium.com. For information on other ways you can support Hunger Network visit hungernetwork.org.

Greater Cleveland Aquarium is located at 2000 Sycamore Street on the west bank of the Flats in Downtown Cleveland.

Donate & Save November 12–18 @CLEAquarium

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NETWORK



Donate food or necessities from Hunger Network’s wishlist to **SAVE \$7** on your same-day Aquarium admission.

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A fresh take on Thanksgiving

New traditions for a grateful gathering

Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that can easily slip into autopilot—mashed potatoes, turkey, pie, repeat. The smells, the sounds, and the familiar rhythm of the day all feel comforting, but sometimes a little change can make it even more meaningful. If your family is ready to shake things up (just a bit), here are a few fresh ways to make this year's celebration stand out.

Start a gratitude hour

Gratitude is at the heart of Thanksgiving, but it often gets lost somewhere between the gravy and the game. Try setting aside a short "gratitude hour" during the day. Everyone writes a thank-you note—to a teacher, neighbor, or friend who made their year a little brighter. Read a few aloud or tuck them into envelopes to deliver later. It's a simple tradition that spreads the warmth well beyond your own table.

Mix up the menu

Turkey and stuffing might be the stars, but who says they have to steal the whole show? Invite each guest to bring one dish that's not traditionally served at Thanksgiving—something that reflects their background, travels, or current cravings. Maybe it's Grandma's lasagna, spicy tacos, or a

curry recipe that reminds someone of home. Every plate comes with a story, and your dinner table becomes a delicious celebration of everyone's lives and cultures.

Unplug for a while

Phones, tablets, and TVs have a way of sneaking into the day. Try a "tech-free hour" during dessert or after dinner. Gather for a walk around the neighborhood, a board game marathon, or a few rounds of "remember when..." stories. You might be surprised at how many laughs (and memories) bubble up when everyone is fully present.

Give back together

Thanksgiving is about more than what's on the table—it's about who's at the table, and who isn't. Families can work together to deliver pies to a local fire station, bake cookies for an elderly neighbor, or donate to a food pantry. These simple acts of kindness remind everyone—kids especially—that gratitude grows stronger when it's shared.

Reimagine the gathering

Modern families look different than they used to—blended, long-distance, multicultural—and so do their Thanksgivings. Some



families host "Friendsgiving Eve," a relaxed get-together before the big day. Others switch up locations each year or even meet at a park for an outdoor potluck. What matters most isn't sticking to old traditions, but finding new ways to connect and include everyone who feels like family.

The heart of it all

Whether you're serving turkey or tacos, eating around the dining table or on a blanket by the fireplace, the spirit of Thanksgiving stays the

same—being present with the people you love and remembering what truly matters. As author Brene Brown puts it, "What separates privilege from entitlement is gratitude."

And maybe that's the best new tradition of all—finding gratitude not just on Thanksgiving, but in every ordinary Thursday we get to spend together.

~Article by Dan Miller

~Photo credit: Shutterstock / Monkey Business Images

Great Lakes Science Center opens new early childhood exhibit

Handle With Care is an immersive, 2,000-square-foot early childhood exhibit designed to support early experiences with empathy and engineering for the Great Lakes Science Center's youngest guests.

The new gallery will incorporate STEM learning and fundamental engineering principles while fostering empathy and creativity through imaginative play.

As guests enter Handle With Care, they will have the opportunity to create a personalized care package for a loved one. After assembling their care package, guests can head over to the warehouse and distribution area where they can explore a three-tiered climbing structure, sit in the driver's seat of a scale model forklift, and manipulate their package through a



10-foot-tall pulley and conveyor belt system. Finally, guests can deliver their care package to an imaginative play neighborhood complete with houses, apartments and a package delivery truck. The Science Center's littlest visitors will particularly enjoy the small park area that is designed for infants.

For more info visit GreatScience.com.

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Every child deserves a FOREVER HOME

Adoption: An alternate path to parenthood

The perception of adoptive parents may be of a loving wife and husband who are unable to have children of their own. The couple go to a private adoption agency, shell out tens of thousands of dollars and, after what could be a years-long waiting period, bring home the newborn son or daughter they've always dreamed about raising.

Working with a private adoption agency with the goal of adopting an infant is an admirable approach to offering a home to a child in need. But some folks—married or not—find the process to be too costly and drawn out. Fortunately, there are other avenues for adoption, especially if prospective parents are open to providing forever homes for youngsters with special needs, older children, sibling groups or children of different races or ethnicities.

November is National Adoption Month, a 30-day platform for raising awareness and bringing attention to the need for permanent families for minors in foster care. It is an initiative of the Children's Bureau, which is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

"National Adoption Month is a celebration of those members in our community who have taken a chance on children and made them a member of their family," says Eugene Tetrick, supervisor of the Substitute Care Unit (foster care/adoption) for the Lake County Department of Job and Family Services. "These people had the courage and determination to 'change their normal' by bringing a child in need into their home."

Beverly Torres, deputy director at the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services, says many children are in county custody because of abuse, neglect, a parent's mental health issues and other reasons. "When they can't be safely reunified with their caregivers and when parental rights are terminated,

we owe these kids a family. November highlights foster care, and especially adoptive care, for our families and children."

In honor of National Adoption Month, Today's Family answers questions about adopting youngsters currently in the foster care system.

What is the difference between fostering and adopting?

Foster parents are state-certified caregivers, who provide a temporary home for children while social service agencies attempt to reunify youngsters with their families. If reunification with birth parents does not happen, the public agency holding temporary custody of the child receives permanent custody of them, matches them with an adoptive family (most often in the dually licensed foster/adoptive home they are currently in) and works with the adoptive family to finalize an adoption through probate court.

Who is eligible to adopt children in foster care in Ohio?

Prospective adoptive parents must be at least 18 years old, have sufficient income to meet the child's basic needs and be in good physical, emotional and mental health. They may be single, married, part of a same-sex couple or the child's older sibling. If part of a couple, they must be in a stable relationship for at least one year. Education level, religion and home ownership are not factors.

How great is the need?

Every day, children throughout Ohio enter the custody of children services. This results in 2,000 to 3,000 children at any given moment waiting to be adopted in Ohio. The need for adoptive families is great and every child deserves a forever family.

According to Torres, Cuyahoga County has permanent custody of



Zyirrea and Ziyer are lovable siblings in need of a caring forever family. Zyirrea enjoys tablets and girly things. She laughs a lot, especially at funny movies and cartoons. Ziyer enjoys playing with any form of remote-control cars. He is energetic and has beautiful smile that would light up a room. They both love electronic games.

Do you have room in your heart for this dynamic duo? For more information about Zyirrea and Ziyer, please contact Shamara Leonard at 216-881-2216 or Norreen Thomas at 216-881-4662.

almost 900 children. The county has a permanency plan, whether it's through adoption, legal custody, or some other arrangement, for about two-thirds (slightly more than 600) of them; the remainder are still in need of forever families.

Tetrick adds, "From 2020–2025 we finalized adoptions for 40 children. With those adoptions, our foster homes close as their families are now 'complete' when the adoption is finalized. Therefore we are continuously trying to recruit new families to replace the ones that left after they completed their families."

And the need is definitely very real as Lake County has over 70 children in their custody in 2025.

Many people wish to adopt. Why haven't these children found forever families?

It's important to match youngsters with families who are committed to meeting the children's specific needs for the long term. Many children in foster care deal with physical, psychological or behavioral concerns as they all have been exposed to abuse and/or neglect.

"Any time a child moves from one home to another, it's a traumatic experience," Torres explains. "When kids come into our custody, they are experiencing a trauma in their life, a separation, a loss. That comes out in different ways for different children. Sometimes they've been

removed from their home because of mental-health issues within the family that are not being managed in a healthy way, and that child is experiencing the same mental health issue. The specific needs of our children dictate the kind of families we're looking for."

Placing older children, such as teenagers, can be challenging because some people prefer to adopt infants or toddlers. Keeping siblings together can also be difficult if families wish to adopt one child at a time.

What is the cost?

" Oftentimes, those who become licensed as foster and adoptive parents through the county are looking to grow their family through adoption as the costs of private adoptions are too expensive," Tetrick says. "Some costs involved in the adoption process are court costs for the adoption and paying for updated birth certificates, which are minimal comparatively to private adoptions. Adoption of a child in the custody of Lake County costs less than \$200."

Cuyahoga County's Torres says

a required fire inspection may run \$30-\$100. If the compulsory home study visit reveals the need for making home improvements to meet Ohio mandates, there may be costs associated with those upgrades.

By comparison, voluntary adoption of a newborn at a nonprofit organization in Ohio typically costs \$10,000-\$25,000, according to the Franklin County Law Library website.

I want to adopt a child currently in foster care. What is the next step?

Start with contacting the county agency. Cuyahoga residents may call 216-881-5775 or visit <https://hhs.cuyahogacounty.gov/programs/detail/foster-care-and-adoption>. Those in Lake County may dial 440-350-4218 and those in Geauga County may call 440-285-9141.

According to Torres, prospective adoptive parents are required to attend preservice training to become licensed as a foster or adoptive parent. Once licensed, they will complete an application and undergo a home study, which includes a fire



inspection. Following approval, the county agency will work to match the potential adoptive family with a child or sibling group. After a match is made, an adoption assessor and the child's social worker will present the prospective adoptive parent with the child's social, medical, and educational records, photographs and other pertinent information.

The adult and child will then have preplacement visits in the adoptive home and the child's current home. After the child lives with the potential adoptive family for a trial period, a judge or magistrate can finalize the adoption. Classes, support groups and referrals to community agencies will then be available to the new family.



There's more than one way to become a family.



More than 250 children in Cuyahoga County need a forever family. Teens, sibling groups and special needs children are waiting for you to welcome them into your family. For more information call 216-881-5775 or visit EveryChildNeedsFamily.com



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HUMOR



Eager shoppers camping out all night in the not-so-old days, freezing their tushes off for a chance to get a cheap video game console. Ah, the memories.

Black Friday

How the day after Thanksgiving went from quiet shopping to calendar chaos

There was a time—not that long ago—when the Friday after Thanksgiving didn't have a catchy name. It was simply "the day after," a time when families polished off leftovers and maybe, just maybe, did a little shopping. Then came "Black Friday," a term that sounds like it should describe a stock market crash rather than a day of doorbusters and discounted air fryers.

The phrase actually dates back to the 1960s in Philadelphia. Police officers there used the term "Black Friday" to describe the gridlock and chaos downtown when hordes of post-Thanksgiving shoppers and football fans flooded the city. Stores were thrilled by the sales; the police were not amused. Retailers, understandably, didn't love the negative connotation and briefly tried to rebrand it as "Big Friday." (That didn't stick—thankfully.)

By the 1980s, national chains began embracing "Black Friday" as a marketing term, flipping the meaning from gloom to profit. The idea was that retailers moved from "in the red" to "in the black" once the holiday shopping season began. Ads, TV spots, and circulars spread the word. By the late '90s, "Black Friday" was an unofficial holiday of its own—one that required a thermos of coffee and an alarm clock set for 3 a.m.

Then things got weird. People camped overnight outside stores.

Some lined up in tents. Every news station ran the same footage: shoppers stampeding through automatic doors for \$10 toasters and half-priced TVs. Somewhere, someone decided that freezing in a parking lot was a fair trade for a discount on electronics they didn't need.

Fast forward to today, and the scene looks a lot different. Most people shop from their couches in pajama pants, browsing "Black Friday Week," "Black Friday Month," and—our personal favorite—"Cyber Monday Extended!" Retailers stretch the deals across weeks, and the once-thrilling chaos has mellowed into a digital scrollathon.

Still, the tradition continues, even if it's lost some of its madness. Maybe that's not a bad thing. Families can now spend Thanksgiving night watching movies instead of strategizing their retail battle plans. No one has to run through a parking lot at dawn or risk frostbite for a discounted slow cooker.

The meaning of "Black Friday" has evolved, but the excitement remains. Whether you're hunting bargains online or just savoring another helping of pie, it's nice to remember that this unofficial holiday began with good intentions: getting people out, about, and into the holiday spirit.

Just don't call it "Big Friday." We tried that already.



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Frost: An Ice-Capped Garden Experience opens November 22

Each season, the Cleveland Botanical Garden transforms into a dazzling celebration of nature showcasing the magic of the season, inviting families and friends to return and make new memories together. With sparkling displays, festive activities and the warmth of the season woven throughout, Frost captures the timeless joy of winter in the Garden.

Frost will transform familiar spaces into a dazzling celebration of light, nature, and seasonal wonder. Journey through reimagined indoor and outdoor scenes, following the story of Verglas, the winter spirit, through the changing of the seasons. Verglas will greet you as you enter the Ellipse, along with shimmering displays of plants and lights at every turn.

Raine & Shine, spirits of the wet and dry seasons, return to the glasshouse biomes celebrating winter in other parts of the world. Lights will guide people into the Spiny Desert of Madagascar and through the Costa Rica Cloud Forest, where they will be met with a captivating ring of waterfall lights.

Family favorites abound, with Clark Hall offering extra seating and an expanded kids' play zone, including an oversized slide, back by popular demand.



Outdoors, the gardens sparkle with densely lit displays and plenty of photo opportunities including a light tunnel and a disco-lit Hershey Children's Garden. Indoors, the Japanese Overlook will evoke the magic of a grand winter hall—an enchanting new setting for educational activities.

Rounding out the journey with familiar favorites, the Garden Room delights with creative gingerbread houses, and Woodland Hall once again hosts a stunning display of decorated trees by our affiliate garden clubs.

Frost will open to the public on Saturday, November 22 and will run through Sunday, January 4. Adult tickets are \$24–\$28, child tickets are \$15–\$17. Advance online ticket purchase is required. Prices vary by day of the week and entry time. Tickets are on sale now at holdenfg.org.

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Fun Thanksgiving Facts

Pumpkin pie was not served at the first Thanksgiving meal.

The Pilgrims didn't have ovens for baking and they lacked the butter and flour necessary for pie crust. Culinary historians believe the first Thanksgiving meal consisted largely of seafood, like mussels, lobster, and clams. Diners almost certainly ate venison and likely some assortment of wild fowl—turkey, duck, goose and swan.



An estimated 240 million turkeys will be raised in the U.S. this year.

Of the 240 million turkeys raised this year, 45 million—or 18 percent—will be baked, grilled, and fried this Thanksgiving.

The first Thanksgiving was celebrated in 1621, but it wasn't observed as a national holiday until 1863.

Sarah Josepha Hale, the woman who wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb," wrote letters for 17 years campaigning to make Thanksgiving a national holiday. Finally, President Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday 240 years after the tradition started in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The TV dinner was invented thanks to Thanksgiving.

In 1953, a Swanson employee accidentally ordered too much turkey—260 tons too much! The frozen turkeys were taking up space in 10 refrigerated train cars when a company salesman suggested preparing and packaging the turkey with sides in compartmentalized aluminum trays. Swanson sold 5,000 TV dinners in 1953. The following year, they sold 10 million!

There weren't any balloons at the first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 1924.

The first parade featured Macy's employees, floats, and animals from the Central Park Zoo. Large animal shaped balloons made their first appearance in the parade in 1927.

Cranberries aren't just for eating.

Native Americans used cranberries to treat wounds and dye arrows. You can also find them in many holiday crafts including creative center pieces, wreaths and garlands.



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What happens when Girl Scouts come together for action-packed adventures? They learn all they can do and be while experiencing the great outdoors and the thrill of trying new things.

As a Girl Scout, you'll:

- ✓ Sing silly songs as new friendships blossom
- ✓ Discover new skills, like filming a movie, as your crew cheers you on
- ✓ Plant seeds of kindness by helping out in your community

Adventure is always in season with Girl Scouts.

Join Girl Scouts today!

girl scouts
of north east ohio

Scan the QR code to join today. Questions?
Contact Customer Care at
800-852-4474, customer care@gsneo.org,
or via live chat at gsneo.org

