

A smiling child wearing a red winter hat with a large fur pom-pom and a red and black winter coat with a white fur collar. The child is holding a red and white striped mitten. The background is a snowy, wintry scene.

TODAY'S family

Dec 2025/ Jan 2026

Cuyahoga

**Atlas Cinemas
gift cards are
the perfect gift**
See page 17 for info!

Providence House

Help make holiday
wishes come true
for children in crisis

Santa's North Pole

How St. Nicholas
ended up in a
wintry place

Great Gift Ideas

For kids and
grownups

Digital Boundaries

Making the internet
safer for individuals with
developmental disabilities

Living Well

New Today's Family advice column
for parents and caregivers

PLUS

Humor
Book Club
Fun Events
Mommy Chronicles



When Santa Wrote Back

By Nathan Christopher

Come along for some fun in this hilarious holiday adventure starring Jake, a precocious young boy who writes a letter to Santa full of outrageous requests and gets more than he bargained for... when Santa writes back!

Jake is excited for the most epic Christmas ever — a Christmas in which he gets every present he can dream of! In order to make this happen, Jake writes a letter to Santa containing his countless gift requests, speedy shipping suggestions, and a friendly reminder that he awaits Santa's reply.

Santa usually saves his ink for the naughty and nice list, but it might just take a letter or two from the big guy himself, along with a bit of holiday magic, in order to help Jake understand the true meaning of Christmas.



Don't Draw in this Book!

By Bill Cotter

A new interactive board book from Bill Cotter! Trace the shapes in Larry's magic sketchbook and turn the page for a surprise!

Larry the monster has a new sketchbook—a magic one, where you "draw" using your finger to trace shapes. Tracing each shape makes something new happen on the next

page! So you can draw a wavy line, turn the page, and see Larry surfing a tidal wave and shouting COWABUNGA!

You never know what's going to happen next, though, because that fish shape you draw might turn out to be a huge whale—and now Larry's surfing right on top of it! Quick, draw something else! This touch-and-trace interactive story is a fun way for kids to practice fine motor skills or just send Larry on a wild adventure, all in the silly, exuberant style that's Bill Cotter's trademark.



Mommy Is Here! After a Long Day at the Hospital

By Nathalie P. Suarez Moscoso & Edison J. Cano Cevallos

Mommy Is Here! After a Long Day at the Hospital is a heart-warming bedtime story that captures the magical reunion between a mom and her baby after a long day apart. This

touching paperback honors the resilience and special bond between parents working in the medical field and their children. It offers a comforting space for love, laughter, and connection, reminding little ones that even when Mommy's away, her love never takes a break.



Kam and Santa's Global Adventure

By Charissa Bates

Join Kam and Santa on a whirlwind trip around the world in this festive, heart-warming story. *Kam and Santa's Global Adventure* introduces children to different cultures and holiday traditions, all while celebrating kindness, generosity, and the spirit of giving — a must-read for the season.

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Extend the day and join us for Youth Open Gym!

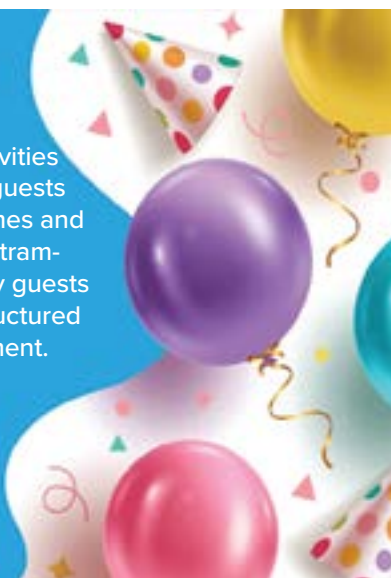
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Help make holiday wishes come true for children in crisis

You can make the holiday season special for the babies and children at Providence House!

Providence House keeps kids safe and families together to prevent foster care placements by embracing them with support during times of crisis to help enhance stability. We've served more than 20,000 children and families across northeast Ohio since 1981 – and in the last five years, 99% of our families have stayed together!

As a local nonprofit, we are nearly 80% privately funded and rely on the generous support of our community to fulfill our mission at no cost to our families.

We have a holiday wish list full of toys and items needed to provide loving care for the children staying in our crisis nurseries and helpful holiday donation resources available at provhouse.org/holiday.

Here are a few ideas to get you started!

- **Shop our holiday wish list at Amazon, Target & Walmart:** We have registries at Target, Amazon, and Walmart to make it easy to find gifts and essential items for our children that can be sent directly to Providence House! You can find them all online at provhouse.org/wishlist.
- **Organize a giving tree or gift**

drive: Your family, company, or organization can host a holiday giving tree or gift drive to benefit the babies and children of Providence House. We have all the resources you need at provhouse.org/holiday

- **Host a holiday party:** Ask your guests to bring a donation for Providence House instead of a host gift. You can find our Wish List at provhouse.org/wishlist.

• **Give a gift in honor of family, friends, or colleagues:** For donations of \$20 or more, we'll send a special holiday card featuring our children's artwork to let them know you are supporting the children and families of Providence House in their honor. Find details and get started online at provhouse.org/holiday.

- **Make a stock or an IRA gift:** Maximize your potential tax benefits while making a significant impact on our mission with a stock or IRA charitable rollover donation! You can find details at provhouse.org/stock or provhouse.org/IRA.

Visit provhouse.org/holiday for more details and contact us at info@provhouse.org with questions!

On behalf of everyone at Providence House, we wish you and your loved ones a joyous holiday season and happy new year!

See all of the ways you can make holiday wishes come true for children in crisis at

provhouse.org/holiday



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Using technology to stay safer online

Cuyahoga DD partners with Floreo to create virtual reality simulations for individuals with developmental disabilities

Lynn B. Johnson, MFA, APR
Cuyahoga DD

Did you know that people with autism are twice as likely to be victims of cyberbullying? And that they are less likely than their peers to block people or websites, leaving them more exposed to harmful content and individuals.

Floreo, the pioneering developer of virtual reality (VR)-based therapy for neurodivergent youth and adults, recently released a series of simulations developed in partnership with the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Called "Digital Boundaries," this series teaches people how to:

1. Identify safe versus unsafe interactions
2. Recognize "tricky people" in online gaming
3. Build the critical judgment skills needed to evaluate trust in digital spaces.

"By codeveloping this simulation with Cuyahoga DD, we're empowering youth and adults to practice and strengthen digital safety skills through safe, immersive, and repeatable scenarios," said Vijay Ravindran, CEO and founder of Floreo.

Using a VR headset, learners engage in realistic scenarios that highlight unsafe interactions, such as conversations with a neighbor, an online gaming friend, or a "sweetheart."

These scenarios focus on risks like excessive attention, secrecy, and inappropriate requests for personal images or information.

Learners then practice safe responses by choosing to say no, end the interaction, or seek help from a trusted adult.

"Safe online interaction is a topic long overlooked for youth and adults with autism and developmental disabilities," said Dr. Amber C. Gibbs, superintendent & CEO of Cuyahoga DD.

"By creating a safe and realistic way to practice digital safety, we are helping ensure that people with disabilities can not only feel more confident navigating online but also thrive in our increasingly digital world," Dr. Gibbs said.

Cuyahoga DD serves more than 15,000 people annually in Cuyahoga County, supporting people with developmental disabilities across home, school, and community settings.

The "Digital Boundaries" module, intended for middle school-age youth and older, was piloted with people served by Cuyahoga DD. It will be rolled out this fall through Cuyahoga DD's assistive technology team, which works alongside families, case managers, and intervention specialists.

For more information about services for people with developmental disabilities, please visit CuyahogaDD.org or call 216-241-8230.



Images from the learner's view of the Floreo "Digital Boundaries" simulations. Images courtesy of Floreo.

CuyahogaDD.org

Grow and Explore with us

If you or a loved one has Down syndrome, autism or any developmental disability, Cuyahoga DD is here for you.



C U Y A H O G A C O U N T Y
Board of Developmental Disabilities

Call 216-736-2673
for Eligibility



Do you know someone who deserves the SPOTLIGHT?

We're always looking to share inspiring, heartwarming stories — whether it's a young entrepreneur chasing a dream, a child who's overcome challenges, a teacher making a lasting impact, or someone quietly spreading kindness in their community.

If you know someone whose story would inspire or uplift Today's Family readers, send us an email and tell us about them! Please include a few details about who they are and what makes their story special. If your idea is a good fit, one of our writers will reach out to learn more and craft an article.

As a thank you for helping us find great stories, we'll send you four tickets to Atlas Cinemas plus \$20 in concession vouchers!

Please note: if more than one person suggests the same idea, the tickets will go to whoever sent it in first.)

SCAN TO EMAIL US!



Wild Winter Lights at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo is once again transforming into a dazzling winter wonderland for the seventh straight year with the return of Wild Winter Lights. Now through December 30, guests of all ages can celebrate the magic of the holiday season with over 1.5 million lights and the return of holiday favorites.

Wild Winter Lights offers visitors a chance to explore an immersive trail of dazzling holiday-themed areas including Colorful Forest, Magical Storybook, Glittering Galaxy, Swan Lake, Frosty Lane, the Conservation Trail, and of course, Santa's North Pole Lodge where families can meet Santa and capture the perfect holiday photo.

Guests can choose to experience Wild Winter Lights on foot or from the warmth of their vehicle on select nights during the Wild Winter Lights Drive-Through.

Highlights of this year's festivities include:

- A mesmerizing musical light show featuring a towering 50-foot holiday tree



- Free carousel rides
- Festive costumed characters and model train displays
- Delicious seasonal treats like Jack Frost Donuts, Kernels by Chrissie, and classic hot chocolate
- New this year, the Zoo will host its first-ever Ugly Sweater 5K on Saturday, December 7 at 8:30 a.m. Participants are encouraged to wear their most festive holiday attire as they race through the Zoo grounds. Wild Winter Lights runs from 5–9 p.m. on select evenings now through Tuesday, December 30.

Visit FutureForWildlife.org/lights to purchase tickets. Advance non-member tickets: \$27, or a 4-pack for \$80; Drive-through tickets: \$59 per vehicle (nonmembers).



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LIVING WELL

with Rebecca Fellenbaum

Heartfelt advice to help you enjoy this time in your life.

Scan the QR code to learn more or write to Rebecca!



Parenting a self-critical tween

Dear Rebecca: My tween suffers from self-criticism and anxiety. She berates herself if she does poorly on a test, forgets to turn in an assignment, and outside of school if she loses something or something goes wrong with a friend. I feel like I'm walking on eggshells trying to get her to toughen up and feel better without further alienating her. She's a great kid, but she's holding herself back, and I can tell she's really suffering. How can I help?

~Stacy, Mayfield Heights

Dear Stacy: Thank you for sharing. You sound like an observant and sensitive mom. Let's dig in.

When did you first notice her anxiety and self-criticism? Has she always been like this, or can you attribute this behavior to a specific event or time in her life? You could gently explore this with her. Start by saying, "I notice you get really upset when things don't go the way you want. Can you tell me what is going on inside you when that happens?" You can even ask her how old she feels when she feels this way or when she first remembers it happening.

In The Adult Chair® model I teach and practice, we define anxiety as the physical manifestation of unfelt emotions. Feeling our emotions helps us get to the other side of anxiety. We can start by naming them and creating a safe space to feel them. Emotions that we allow to metabolize without attaching a story to them can be processed in 90 seconds.

Modeling real-life situations is also

important. Let her see you handle mistakes with compassion. That can look like saying, "Oops, I took the wrong turn. I can fix that," or "I forgot to get milk, no big deal." This can help her see that mistakes don't mean she is bad, but that they're simply part of life.

You mentioned feeling like you have to walk on eggshells. Can you get curious about what you're feeling? It's not your job to toughen her up or make her feel better. Unfortunately, we cannot make anyone feel anything (even our kids). Instead, you can show her and yourself love and acceptance, and walk beside her no matter how she feels.

Good luck, mama. I'm cheering both of you on.

Overwhelmed mom of two

Dear Rebecca: I have two kids under five, and while I'm happy, I struggle with the reality of constant overwhelm, no time to myself, and swings between joy and stress. For example, when I hear my kids pitter-pattering on a Saturday morning way earlier than I'd like, I feel trapped and overwhelmed. How can I enjoy this time more?

~Janelle, Willoughby Hills

Dear Janelle: I've been there, and I'm not just going to tell you to savor the moments and that it gets easier. You deserve tools and help right now.

Let's start with mindset. What are your default thoughts? If we keep thinking the same thoughts, nothing will change. Try this simple shift: when you hear those early-morning footsteps, place a hand on your heart

and name two things you're grateful for, even if it's coffee and warm slippers. This interrupts your default thought loop.

Our thoughts stem from our beliefs. What beliefs do you have about yourself as a mom? Are you listening to your inner wisdom, or are you trying to keep up with everyone else? Releasing unrealistic expectations is an act of self-love.

Next, set up small systems that support you, like a gift to yourself. You could try prepping food the night before, swapping childcare with a friend, or keeping a basket of books and toys near your bed so mornings go smoother. When my kids were little, my neighbor and I had early morning pancake break-

fasts. The kids played, and we could have coffee or take turns getting ready. Those little things add up.

Parenting young kids often swings between total love and absolute fear, and the full range of emotions in between. You don't have to choose one or the other. Allow yourself to feel them all. When you accept the full spectrum of your experience, you stop fighting reality, and you can start to find ease.

You're not failing. You're learning to hold joy and exhaustion in the same hand and you're doing great.

Rebecca Fellenbaum is a certified life coach, writer, and Cleveland area mom who helps parents enjoy this time in their lives. You can find her at rebeccafellenbaum.com.



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New Year's traditions

From ancient rituals to modern celebrations

Every year, millions of people ring in the new year with countdowns, resolutions, champagne, and fireworks. But how did these traditions begin? Their stories stretch back thousands of years and across many cultures.

The countdown

The famous "10... 9... 8..." originated from early 20th-century time ball drops, including the one at the U.S. Naval Observatory. The idea was to synchronize clocks — and eventually, celebrations. When the Times Square ball first dropped in 1907, people began counting aloud as it descended, creating the tradition we know today.

Midnight kisses

This custom traces back to European folklore, which held that the first person you encountered in the new year could influence your luck. A kiss at midnight symbolized good fortune — and

choosing who you'd like that luck to come from.

Resolutions

The concept is surprisingly ancient. The Babylonians made promises to their gods during Akitu, a festival marking the new year. Romans later adopted the practice, offering vows to Janus (the two-faced god of beginnings). Today, resolutions are more personal but follow the same spirit: reflection and fresh starts.

Champagne toasts

Champagne's association with luxury began in the 17th century when it was reserved for royalty and special occasions. By the 1800s, improvements in production made it more accessible, and it quickly became the drink of choice for toasting major milestones — including midnight on New Year's Eve.

The ball drop

Times Square's ball has been redesigned seven times. The original weighed 700 pounds and used 100 light bulbs. Today's version is a 12-foot crystal sphere illuminated by LED lights — a glowing symbol of renewal seen around the world.

Fireworks

Ancient Chinese celebrations used loud sounds and fire to scare away evil spirits. As gunpowder spread, fireworks became a global symbol of celebration and protection. Their bright bursts also represent hope for the coming year.

From ancient rituals to modern celebrations, New Year's traditions all share the same theme: welcoming hope, leaving behind the old, and stepping into the future with light, sound, and connection.

~Article by Dan Miller

~Photo: Shutterstock



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New year success depends on perspective

What Alfred Nobel — and a daughter's innocent question — can teach us about fresh starts

As one year ends and another begins, many of us make lists of goals we hope will bring us a sense of accomplishment. But sometimes what we think of as “success” can shift dramatically with just a little outside perspective.

For years, every Christmas I spent hours deep-cleaning the house in preparation for extended family visits. In my mind, a successful holiday required spotless countertops and dust-free baseboards. Every December I wound up scrubbing until my fingers were raw, promising myself that next year I'd start earlier.

One year, starting early actually made my annual list of goals. I was knee-deep in cleaning when one of my daughters wandered in and asked—eyes wide with excitement—“Who's coming to visit?” For a split second, I assumed she meant: “We must live in our own filth the rest of the year.” But what she really wanted to know was whether her cousins were coming. In her mind,

my obsessive cleaning signaled fun family time ahead. Her perspective made me realize that my definition of a “successful” holiday—a pristine house—was far less important than the relationships we were preparing for. Sometimes, an outside perspective opens your eyes in the best way.

A much bigger perspective shift happened to Alfred Nobel when he unexpectedly read his own obituary. Before that moment, the Swedish engineer likely saw his life as a great success—he had amassed a fortune through inventions, most notably dynamite. But when a French newspaper mistakenly published Alfred's obituary instead of his brother Ludvig's, they condemned him as “The Merchant of Death,” blaming him for the destructive uses of his inventions. According to the Nobel Foundation, the shock of reading how the world might remember him deeply affected Alfred. He rewrote his will, leaving most of his fortune to establish the Nobel Prizes—including the Prize



for Peace—for which he is now honored.

Most of us will never read our own obituary, and many are much better with domestic arts than I am. But as you build your list of goals for the new year, it may be worth seeking

an outside perspective. Sometimes a small shift in viewpoint can change everything about what “success” really means.

~Article by Stacy Turner

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Chip & Dale (GUND)**
(Ages: 1+)

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Luna StoryTime Projector
LunaStoryTime.com
(Ages 3+)

Inspire a love of reading with this magical storyteller that transforms storytime into an immersive screen-free adventure! With vivid projections, expressive narration and sing-along songs, Luna sparks imagination and encourages early literacy—no Wi-Fi, downloads or apps needed.

Luna is a portable 3-in-1 device: Story Projector, Audio & Music Player, and Night Light. Each Content Character plugs in with 30-70 minutes of edutainment.

The Starter Set includes the Luna StoryTime Projector with carry handle, Owl Content Character (5 classic stories + 5 songs), "Nest" stand, and USB-C cable. Also takes 4AA batteries (not included). Additional Content Characters available for purchase.



**Oh So Fun!
Pop-Up Firefly Tent**
www.MindWare.com
(Ages 3+)

Let your imagination run wild under a canopy of twilight skies and glow-in-the-dark fireflies. Three simple steps has this indoor tent set up in just a few seconds, ready to transport children to a twilight meadow scene aglow with the soft luminescence of fireflies against a backdrop of pink and purple skies. At three feet tall with a base of nearly four feet x four feet, this tent comfortably seats several young explorers. Expose the tent to light for at least 15 minutes, then go lights out and watch the glow-in-the-dark paint light up your space!



**Oh So Fun! Take-Along
Toddler Piano Toy**
www.MindWare.com
(Ages 1–3)

This pint-sized piano features color-coded keys to simplify the learning process. Simply turn the piano on to listen to all songs or choose a specific melody to play its shortened version. Equipped with six easy-to-play tunes including classics like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," this keyboard also features a sweet "meow mode" that turns each note into delightful cat sounds, encouraging amusement and listening pleasure for all. Its compact size, complete with a built-in handle, allows your little musician to play, learn and explore music whether at home or on the move.



**Bloomsapes Blossom
Bouquet Wooden Building Kit**
www.MindWare.com
(Ages 8+)

Set the glue aside; this intricate wooden flower bouquet building kit lets you create stunning floral displays without messy adhesive! Use precision laser-cut pieces for a smooth assembly process as you piece together a bouquet of colorful wooden flowers—including a lilac, pink rose and red carnations—accessorized with eucalyptus stems and a puzzle vase. An everlasting gift for someone special or a delightful addition to your home décor. Complete with step-by-step illustrated instructions and over 450 wooden building pieces, this wooden flower building kit offers a challenging and rewarding crafting experience.



Qwirkle Flex
www.MindWare.com
(Ages 8+)

Get ready to FLEX your strategy with Qwirkle Flex—a bold new twist on the award-winning tile game.

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Dinosaur Picture Blocks
www.eeboo.com
(Ages 2+)

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Purryfuls
www.purryfuls.com

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Wise Blocks Race Car
(Ages 8+)

First You Build, Then Play! This STEAM accredited toy is good for development and learning!

With fun, challenging sets filled with durable pieces, Wise Blocks Small Blocks are the perfect toy for an aspiring engineer, a hobbyist, or anyone up for creative open-ended play!

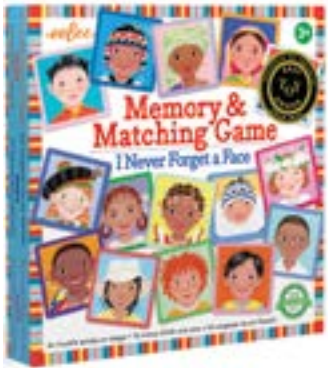
- Great value with 414 bricks!
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Holiday GIFT GUIDE — FOR KIDS —



**eeBoo
Slips & Ladders Dragon
Shaped Game**
www.eeboo.com
(Ages 5+)

Artists Kevin Hawkes and Linda Bleck reimagine this classic game with whimsical dragons. Holographic foil adds shine to the cover, board and playing pieces. Land on a slide and slip to a lower square; land on a ladder and climb toward the finish line!



**eeBoo
Memory & Matching Game**
www.eeboo.com
(Ages 3+)

While developing patience and memory skills, children are introduced to the inspiring diversity of 24 warm and accessible children from cultures around the world, opening doors to empathy and discovery. The back cover identifies each child's home country. An eeBoo favorite!

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 - Set includes 414 bricks, electric motor, instruction booklet, and hand-held remote control
 - 5 AAA Batteries required, not included
- Experience the thrill of building and playing with your own RC Race Car!
- Available at Walmart.

**Jellycat
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For a quarter of a century, they have shared the joy of Jellycat toys with people of all ages, across the globe. Over this time, their unmistakable characters have gained the affection of millions — and center stage in many



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The Amuseables Ukulele is the life and soul of every event, bringing smiles and joy from beach parties to birthdays.



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Super Wings 3-in-1
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**Super Wings 2"
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(Ages 3+)

Brand new for this year, the Super Wings series introduces the 2-inch Transform-A-Bots 8-Pack, featuring characters such as Jett, Dizzy, Golden Boy, Marty, Tino, Sally, and Traver. Each figure transforms from robot to plane mode in three steps, allowing fans to recreate scenes from the show.



**Rocket Launcher
from Smartivity**
(Ages 6+)

Have you ever wondered how rockets travel to space? With this kit, your child will build their own Rocket Launcher. Your child will first create a realistic Rocket. They will then load the Rocket on a durable Launcher and press the Launch button. Now, watch the Launcher thrust the Rocket safely into the air! The kit comes with easy-to-follow instructions, explanations of STEM concepts, and experiments which your child can perform independently.



**Smart Steps Balance Buddy
Learning Monkey**
(Ages 18 months+)

Discover a unique and interactive way to learn counting and balancing. It comes with two play modes. In COUNTING MODE, your little one can learn to count from 1 to 5 as they follow voice instructions to add rings. BALANCE MODE promotes their sense of directionality, helping them understand right and left as they keep the leaning monkey balanced. For more challenges, the monkey rotates 360 degrees, encouraging your kids to reach new levels of accuracy and motion coordination. This innovative STEM toy offers a variety of exercises that enhance cognitive development, spatial awareness, and finger strength. Let's count, balance, and simply have fun with the Smart Steps Balance Buddy Learning Monkey!



**Fisher-Price® Little People®
Caring Fun Animal Farm**
(Ages 1+)

This interactive playset features a two-story barn packed with hands-on activities all around, plus a drop-through silo and multiple stalls to house and care for the animals.

As kids play out fun days on the farm, Smart Stages technology introduces opposites, colors, counting and more with 50+ sing-along songs, sounds and phrases.



**Coco Fun Charm Kids
Insulated Water Bottle**
www.cocosmilecups.com

These holiday-themed thermoses are designed to make hydration enjoyable for children and convenient for parents. Crafted from BPA-free materials, these thermoses feature adjustable lanyards and leak-resistant caps, combining practicality with festive designs. The sleeve features molded holes for attaching various charms.



**MEGA BLOKS®
Big Building Bag**
(Ages 1+)

- This set includes 80 big and vibrant building blocks.
- Easy to grip, stack, and pull apart, these building blocks are the perfect fit for your toddler's little hands.
- When playtime is over, blocks can be stored in the bag for easy cleanup.



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Thursday, January 29, 2026 | 8:30 a.m.

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A season that shines

The bright history of holiday lights

When the days grow short and the evenings arrive before dinner, something magical happens across neighborhoods everywhere: the lights come out. String lights, candles, glowing wreaths, inflatable snowmen illuminated from within — the whole season seems to sparkle. But why?

A tradition older than Christmas

Long before Edison, LEDs, or Clark Griswold's famous roof display, people used light to celebrate the winter solstice — the darkest time of the year. In many ancient cultures, lighting fires, candles, and lanterns in December symbolized hope, protection, and the promise that longer days would return.

Candles on the tree

By the 1600s in Germany, families began decorating evergreen trees with candles to symbolize warmth and life in winter. It was beautiful... and extremely dangerous. Buckets of sand or water would sit nearby in case the tree caught fire — which it often did!

Enter electricity

In 1882, Edward H. Johnson, an associate of Thomas Edison, hand-wired 80 red, white, and blue bulbs and hung them on his Christmas tree. Curious crowds gathered outside his New York home to stare

through the windows. Slowly, electric tree lights spread — though early versions were expensive and required hiring an electrician to install.

From bubble lights to LEDs

The 20th century brought a parade of styles: C7 and C9 bulbs, bubble lights (which still have a cult following), icicle lights, and today's long-lasting, energy-efficient LEDs. Modern lights are safer, cooler to the touch, and available in every shape from snowflakes to synchronized musical displays.

Why we still do it

Holiday lights create a sense of warmth when the world feels cold. They brighten neighborhoods, lift moods, and remind us of childhood excitement. Psychologists even say lights can improve mental well-being during the darkest months by triggering feelings of nostalgia and comfort.

In a season that often feels busy and commercial, lights give us a simple, shared joy. Whether you prefer classic white strands, whimsical rainbow patterns, or the neighbor's house that goes full Clark Griswold every year, those glowing decorations connect us — to history, to tradition, and to each other.

~Article by Dan Miller





Enjoy free daily admission and holiday events at the Cleveland Museum of Art

Make your season bright this year with a trip to the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA). From the CMA's largest-ever fashion exhibition and world-class art to holiday music, family activities, holiday-themed nightlife and traditions tours, there's something for everyone. With free daily admission, it's the ideal place for people of all ages and groups of all sizes.

Youth and family programming

Open Studio

Sundays, December 7 and 21
10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Open Studio days provide free, drop-in art-making sessions designed for the whole family, encouraging creativity and bonding through hands-on activities.

Play Days

Sunday, December 14
10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Play Days at the CMA are free opportunities for families to be creative and curious and connect through art together. Events include

music, storybook readings, games, and art making for the whole family. Each event has a theme that relates to an exhibition, artist, or artworks in the CMA's collection.

Join them as they embark on a captivating journey exploring the revealing beauty of light. Don't miss a glowing display where light reveals the secrets of the past along with expert-led demonstrations of how art restoration brings forgotten masterpieces back to life with the CMA's conservation team and the Education Art Collection!

Holiday Pop Up! Open Studio Saturday and Sunday, December 27 and 28 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Reflect on the year and dream of the future. Design a vessel for your memories and explore creative ways to document time.

Join them in the Ames Family Atrium for this special winter-break studio!

For a list of all the CMA's holiday programming please visit www.clevelandart.org.

Frost: An Ice-Capped Garden Experience open through January 4

Each season, Frost transforms the Cleveland Botanical Garden 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 glass-house 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

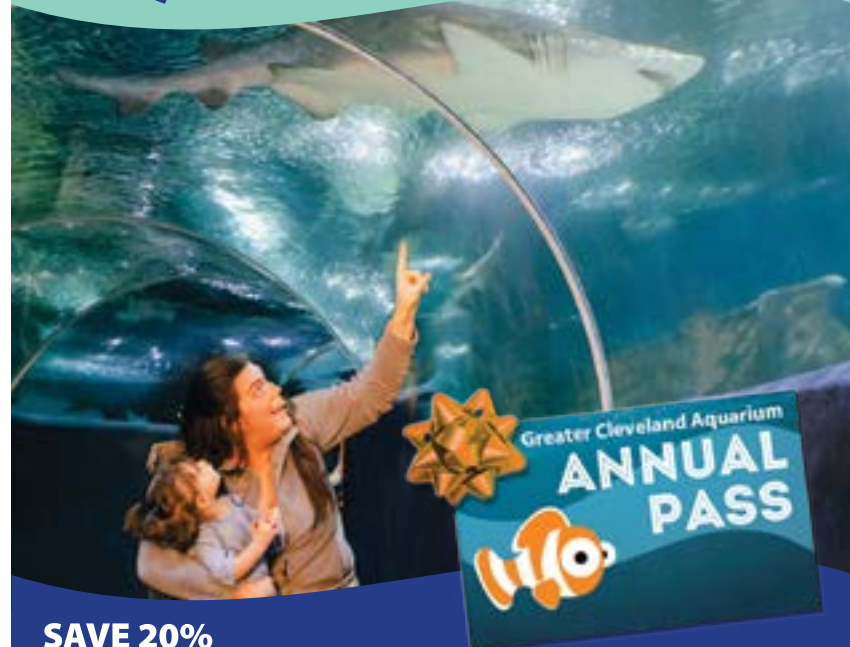


tunnel and a disco-lit Hershey Children's Garden. Indoors, the Japanese Overlook will evoke the magic of a grand winter hall—an enchanting new setting for educational activities.

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 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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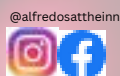
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The real story behind Santa's North Pole

We all know Santa Claus lives at the North Pole — a snowy workshop filled with elves, reindeer, and endless toys. But the idea of his Arctic home is surprisingly new in the long history of St. Nicholas.

Saint Nicholas wasn't northern at all

The real St. Nicholas was a 4th-century bishop from modern-day Turkey. Known for his generosity, he inspired early gift-giving traditions — but his world was warm, not wintry.

So how did Santa become a cold-weather celebrity?

As Christmas traditions spread across Europe and eventually to America, wintertime celebrations became closely tied to the season itself. Snow, evergreens, and long nights created a backdrop that felt naturally magical. Storytellers leaned into this wintry setting, gradually shifting Santa from a Mediterranean bishop to a figure who fit the colder climates where Christmas customs flourished. By the 19th century, imagining Santa in a place of endless snow simply felt right — even if it wasn't historically accurate.

Enter Clement Clarke Moore

In 1823, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" ("Twas the Night Before Christmas") introduced many features of the modern Santa: flying reindeer,



chimneys, and a jolly personality. But the poem didn't mention the North Pole.

Thomas Nast makes it official

In the 1860s, political cartoonist Thomas Nast created illustrations for Harper's Weekly that firmly planted Santa at the North Pole. Nast chose the location partly because it was remote and magical — and partly because it symbolized neutrality during the Civil War. His drawings of Santa's snowy workshop and list-checking desk shaped the popular image we still use today.

Arctic explorers add to the myth

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, polar exploration captivated the public. Newspapers printed imaginary stories about Santa discovering new lands or sharing the ice with explorers. Some children even received replies to letters addressed simply to "Santa Claus, North Pole."

A marketing boost

By the 20th century, advertisers ran with the imagery. Department stores, toy companies, and greeting card makers embraced Santa's wintry headquarters. Coca-Cola's iconic 1930s Santa — cheerful, warm, and wrapped in red — cemented the North Pole as his home forever.

Why it stuck

The North Pole also offered something else: a place untouched by the complications of the real world. It wasn't tied to any country, culture, or conflict — just pure imagination. For children, it became the ultimate fantasy workshop where anything could be built, wrapped, and whisked around the globe overnight. And for adults, it provided a comforting bit of wonder to hold onto. The myth endures because it gives everyone permission to believe in something delightfully impossible.

Today, children still write to the North Pole, track Santa on NORAD radar each Christmas Eve, and imagine that swirling snow globe of elves, reindeer, and toys. And in a way, the North Pole lives wherever families create holiday magic — whether that's a snowy yard in Ohio or a living room filled with twinkling lights.

Article by Dan Miller

Photo credit: Adobe Stock / By vectorfusionart

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Christmas 1975 vs. 2025

A holiday time-travel through traditions, toys & tinsel



If you've ever found yourself humming along to Bing Crosby while your kids blast a Bluetooth speaker loaded with "Trap Remix: Jingle Bells," congratulations—you've officially celebrated Christmas in more than one century. Holiday traditions evolve, of course, but few things shine brighter than comparing the warm, simpler memories of 1975 with the fast-paced, app-powered whirlwind of 2025. So grab your mug of cocoa (instant packet or oat-milk micro-lot fair-trade brew, either is fine) and let's hop in the sleigh.

Decorating

1975: The season kicked off the day after Thanksgiving when Dad hauled a cardboard box marked "X-MAS LIGHTS (WORK?)" down from the attic. Inside: one giant knotted ball of multicolored bulbs—those big C9s that got hot enough to warm a small room. Untangling them required patience, teamwork, and one adult muttering under their breath. The aluminum tree was still hanging on in some households, along with the color-wheel that spun slowly and hypnotically, turning the living room pink, then blue, then vaguely festive green.

2025: Today's houses start glowing in mid-November, fueled by online inspiration and the national spirit of "I can totally hang 15,000 LEDs myself." Light strands sync to music, activate by voice command, and sometimes go viral on TikTok. Artificial trees arrive pre-lit, pre-fluffed, and cost more than the 1975 station wagon. Clevelanders still add a few hometown touches—like a leg-lamp ornament or a nod to nostalgia with a vintage Mr. Jingeling keepsake tucked somewhere on the tree.

Seeing Santa

1975: Back then, meeting Santa meant a trip to the local mall or if your parents were adventurous they'd trek downtown to Higbee's or May Company. You dressed up, stood in a long line, and hoped the Polaroid came out without anyone blinking. It was pure magic—and a rite of passage for generations of Cleveland kids.



Toys like the Evel Knievel Stunt Cycle were wildly popular in the 1970s and brought countless hours of fun — including for the author of this article. Unfortunately, like many kids, he didn't hang onto his original toy, though he did manage to save his box of Lincoln Logs (now worth about \$5 on eBay). The stunt cycle, however, can fetch \$650 or more. Luckily, new versions are being sold today, giving parents and grandparents the chance to relive a little childhood magic with the kids in their lives.

2025: Santa still holds court—but now you book him like a wedding venue. Online reservations, text alerts, themed sets, digital queues, and email delivery of photos. Lines are shorter, backdrops are fancier, and the Wi-Fi never quite works as well as the marketing materials promise. But the awe on the kids' faces? Exactly the same.

Shopping

1975: Shopping meant bundling up, braving the snow, and heading to the mall. Gift-seeking was an aerobic workout: Sears for Dad, Woolworth for stocking stuffers, and maybe a stop at Orange Julius. Toys were gloriously simple—Lincoln Logs, Tonka trucks made of real metal, Shrinky Dinks,

and the Evel Knievel Stunt Cycle that somehow survived every crash.

2025: Today's gift-givers click "add to cart" from the couch. Packages arrive constantly, creating a porch-pirate version of the Advent calendar. Kids want things that need charging cables, firmware updates, and a warranty. Though retro toys—yes, including a reissued Evel Knievel—are making a comeback for parents craving "battery-free joy."

Entertainment

1975: Holiday entertainment meant circling TV Guide with a red pen. Miss the Christmas special? Too bad—maybe next year. Families gathered for "Frosty," "Rudolph," and "A Charlie Brown Christmas" in real time, popcorn bowl shared, commercials tolerated.

2025: Now kids stream everything instantly, everywhere—bedroom, backseat, grocery store line. But many families still hold one sacred retro tradition: at least one night of watching a classic together, phones down, hot cocoa up.

And for Clevelanders, holiday outings remain beloved: Public Square lights, the "A Christmas Story" house, or a small-town tree lighting where the cocoa is free and someone's uncle plays trombone.

The heart of it: same then, same now

What's most striking about comparing Christmas 1975 and 2025? Despite the upgrades—smart lights, digital Santas, same-day delivery, and cocoa flavors no one asked for—the heart of the holiday hasn't changed much.

Families still gather. Kids still glow brighter than the tree. Traditions still root us, connect us, and remind us that the magic of Christmas doesn't come from gadgets or glitter—but from the moments we share.

A lot has changed in 50 years, but the wonder? That stays wonderfully, reassuringly the same.

~Article by Dan Miller

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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.

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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!



Greater Cleveland Aquarium annual passes discounted through December 31

Dive into holidays with a deal from Greater Cleveland Aquarium! Black Friday (November 29, 2025) through Cyber Monday (December 1, 2025) unlock a 20% savings on any membership level with code SAVE20MEMBERSHIP. The four-day Thanksgiving weekend sale is the deepest membership discount the Aquarium offers.

"We want to make adding a splash of wonder to gift-giving as stress-free as possible," explains Greater Cleveland Aquarium GM Stephanie White. "You can secure these savings digitally by entering the code at our website checkout or make your purchase in person at the ticket counter and pick up a printed notification you can forward on."

Standard annual pass levels range

from \$45–\$130 (\$3–\$117 during the promotion) and include a year's worth of free daily admission and other perks for one (adult/senior individual) or as many as eight (family/grandparent) named passholders. While the holiday membership promotion runs through December 31, the discount drops to 10% on Tuesday, December 2 with code SAVE10MEMBERSHIP.

Gift memberships activate with the recipient's first visit to ensure to guarantee a full year of benefits including free daily admission, free parking and exclusive member events, as well as discounts on programming and birthday parties and other perks.

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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.



Deck The Hall event at Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens

Celebrate the holiday season at Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens' Deck the Hall, a festive tradition for family and friends — November 28–December 30. This magical event turns the estate that was once home to Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company co-founder F.A. Seiberling and his family, into a holiday destination, featuring seasonal décor throughout the Manor House, outdoor light displays and walking paths, and the Dazzle light show. Guests can also visit with Santa in the Carriage House Courtyard from 4–8 p.m. daily through December 23. Afterward, warm up with hot cocoa and gingerbread cookies from Molly's Courtyard Café, shop for gifts and décor at Molly's Shop, or pick out a poinsettia in the Corbin Conservatory.

Deck the Hall operates daily from

3–9 p.m. — last admission is at 8 p.m. Parking for the event is free in the Main Lot and auxiliary lots, with complimentary shuttle service available.

Tickets to Deck the Hall include a self-guided tour through the decorated Manor House and access to the grounds to see the outdoor lights. Manor House tours are not timed — tour anytime 3–8:00 p.m.

Deck the Hall will be held on Nov. 28 – 30, Dec. 4 – 7, 11 – 14, 18 – 23, 26 – 30. Standard admission prices are \$28 for adults and \$15 for youth (ages 3 to 17 years). Children 2 and under are admitted for free.

Tickets for Deck the Hall are on sale now. For tickets, or to make reservations, for a Deck the Hall special event offering, visit stanhywet.org or call 330.836.5533.

Candy Land It's Wild in Ohio runs through–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. This event is open 10 a.m.–5 p.m. daily through January 4. The exhib-



it 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.

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.

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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.

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~Today's Family Staff

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eeBoo Fall in Brooklyn (1000-piece puzzle)

Artist Laura El's moody evocation of a charming Brooklyn Street in autumn twilight, full of hints and stories. Completed puzzle: 23" x 23".



eeBoo Seahorses, Shells & Coral (500-piece round puzzle)

Artist Monika Forsberg's colorful, interlocking array of underwater marvels brims with details to discover. Completed puzzle: 23" diameter.



eeBoo Holiday Bakery (1000-piece puzzle)

Artist Victoria Ball peeks inside a charming bakery bringing warmth to the village as part of her English Cottage series. Completed puzzle: 23" x 23".

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Add a cozy new throw to your bed with this chunky knit blanket, perfect for adding an extra touch of comfort and style. Made from 100% high-quality acrylic, this blanket is super soft to the touch and perfect for snuggling up with while you drift off to sleep or settle in for a movie night. Available in several shades, you're sure to find the right fit for your room or sleep space! 47" x 59"



Linens & Hutch Relic Stripe Reversible Quilted Coverlet Set

Give your room a comfy new addition with this super soft reversible microfiber quilt and sham set. It is generously filled with artificial down, and each piece is double brushed to give it that super soft, cozy feel.

The beautiful, subtle quilted stitchings add dimension and a gorgeous touch to any bedroom. Spun from premium yarns, this set is twice as strong as cotton, wrinkle resistant and a perfect option for those with allergies or sensitive skin. The reversibility gives each side its own unique look. Available in a variety of beautiful designer patterns, making it easy to refresh any bedroom. 3-piece set includes 1 quilted coverlet and 2 pillow shams.



Linens & Hutch Seersucker Box Textured Down-Alternative Comforter Set

Transform your bedroom into a serene oasis with this Seersucker Textured Comforter Set. Lightweight, breathable, and timelessly chic. Crafted from ultra-soft seersucker fabric, it delivers a delicate texture and contemporary elegance, paired with plush down-alternative fill for cozy, all-season warmth.

This three-piece set, complete with a comforter and matching shams, effortlessly elevates your space with versatile layering and everyday luxury. Machine washable and built to endure, it blends relaxed refinement with practical ease for lasting comfort and style.



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Hamilton Beach Gourmet 2-Slice Toaster

- Evenly toast both sides of bread with Sure-Toast™ 1 slice technology
- Conveniently toast longer slices in 6.5" slots
- 7 browning levels for every taste and recipe
- Toast thicker breads in extra-wide slots
- Easily retrieve smaller breads with Toast Boost
- Self-centering bread guides for consistent heating and even browning
- Keep your countertop crumb-free with slide-out crumb tray
- Convenient cord wrap



Hamilton Beach FlexBrew® Trio Coffee Maker, Black

FEATURES:

- Three ways to brew: single serving side with your favorite pod or ground coffee, or on carafe side up to 12 cups
- Fast brewing — brews a single cup in about 90 seconds
- Brew multiple cups without refilling the 40 oz. water reservoir
- Wake-up ready coffee with Easy-Touch programming
- Convenient cup rest with storage area

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The Cleveland Orchestra to host free Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Concert

The Cleveland Orchestra will honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with its 46th annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Concert on Sunday, January 11, at 7 p.m. at Severance Music Center.

This beloved annual event is free and open to the public, celebrating Dr. King's enduring message of hope, justice, and unity through the power of music. The concert features acclaimed soprano Latonia Moore alongside the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus, an all-volunteer community ensemble. The evening's program will take audiences on a musical journey reflecting Dr. King's evolution as a visionary leader and tireless advocate for equality.

Although the concert is free, tickets are required and available on a first-come, first-served basis beginning on Saturday, January 3, at 10 a.m., through the Severance Ticket Office in person, by phone at 216-231-1111, or online at clevelandorchestra.com. There is a limit of four tickets per household.

To ensure a smooth ticketing experience, guests are encouraged to download The Cleveland Orchestra app and create an account in advance of the on-sale date.

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The celebration continues on Monday, January 19, with the MLK Community Open House & Day of Music from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Severance Music Center. This free, family-friendly event invites visitors of all ages to explore the building, experience live performances from community ensembles, and take part



The 2025 Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Concert
Photo credit: Roger Mastroianni

in interactive activities in a casual atmosphere.

The day includes appearances by 10K Movement, Cleveland Association of Black Storytellers, Cleveland Classical Guitar Society Student Showcase, The Cleveland Orchestra Learning Ensembles: Bassoon Farm & Music Mentors, The Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra, Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus Chamber Ensemble, Medina High School Encore Entertainment Company, Shaw High School Mighty Marching Cardinals Band, and St. Edward High School Trash Talkers.

Guests can also enjoy free hot chocolate and cookies and take complimentary family portraits in the Grand Foyer. No tickets are required for entry.



Christmas Quotes

I once bought my kids a set of batteries for Christmas with a note on it saying "toys not included."
—Bernard Manning

There's no experience quite like cutting your own live Christmas tree out of your neighbor's yard.
—Dan Florence

I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, but if the white runs out, I'll drink the red.
—Unknown

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