In this issue:

- Build your perfect holiday playlist
- Son discovers war hero dad
- Friendly faces give back year after year
- Step back in time at historic ranch
- Give a gift that will inspire music, last a lifetime
- Spend a night in a quaint inn
- Holiday with a Hero’s magical morning
- Time to make sugar cookies

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CONTENTS

Salvation Army Bell Ringers ........................................... 4
Susanville Symphony Christmas Concert ......................... 8
The Gilded Drifter / Drifter's Table .................................. 10
Recipe - Sugar Cookies ................................................. 13
White Sulphur Springs Ranch Restoration ......................... 18
Plumas County Museum Director retires ............................ 22
Quincy man's father is a surprise WWII Hero ...................... 24
Holiday with a Hero Annual Event .................................. 30
Lassen County Historic Courthouse Renovation ................ 33
Highway to the Gaming Zone ........................................ 37
Music to brighten your holidays ..................................... 38
Two dreams and a hardware store ................................... 42
Cannabis dispensary opens .......................................... 47
The “Queen Of Arts” retires .......................................... 51
Lassen County Arts Council Holiday Show & Sale ............. 54
Have a Merry, Musical Christmas ................................ 56
Recipe - Spiced Yogurt Muffins ....................................... 59
A Horse or Burro for Christmas? .................................... 60
Make a durable Gingerbread House ............................... 62

CONTENTS
When it comes to talking about himself, even for this interview, Bob Ellis shares the good he sees in others and the importance of the Salvation Army in the community.

“This is Lassen County. That’s one of the things I’ve seen in the 43 years we’ve lived here. There are some things that have changed, but the good stuff I see with most of Lassen County doesn’t really change. They’re good people.”

—Bob Ellis

By Makenzie Davis
mdavis@lassennews.com
You often hear it before you see it: That festive, steady ringing.

For more than a month throughout November and December, volunteers dedicate parts of their days to ringing a bell and collecting donations from residents through the Salvation Army Red Kettle Campaign. They stand by the entrances of grocery stores and local businesses, ushering in holiday warmth during the season of giving. You’ll see competitions between organizations in a friendly battle of who can raise the most, you’ll see local youth, families, and year after year, you’ll see some of the same faces – faces like that of Bob Ellis, who make a point of serving the community.

About eight years ago, an accident left Bob with limited arm mobility.

Unable to do much, and feeling a bit restless, the local resident pondered how he could fill his days and also give back to the community he loves dearly.

“I got hurt on the job. I’d had surgery and I was in a sling, and all I had was my left hand and I was looking for something to do,” recounted Bob.

“Somebody told me about ringing the bell, and I thought, ‘gosh, that’s a great idea. I can ring the bell with my left hand.’ And that’s what I did.”

Now, he’s become a fixture: A dependable face of cheer and giving. In the past, he and his wife have even rung the bell at the same time at different locations.

“I like doing it. It’s not about me. It’s about the living God whom I have the privilege of serving, that’s first of all. And second of all, it’s about having that ability to give back. With all my medical problems and issues I’ve had over the past nine years. I can sit around and think about all the things I can’t do anymore, and that’s just a waste of time. This is something I can do,” said Bob. “This is an opportunity for me to serve and give back.”

Bob and his wife Loretta moved to Lassen County in January 1977, just about three years after their wedding on Jan. 26, 1974.

Bob’s job with the then Soil Conservation Service transferred the Chico native couple to Susanville. Prior to that, he was coming off just shy of four years serving in the Air Force at Vandenberg Air Force Base — he served from 1971 to 1975, the last four years of the Vietnam War, and he was fortunate not to serve overseas, he said, instead fighting for his military peers at home.

Since their arrival in this rural area of Northern California, Bob’s work ethic always made sure he had a job, and although there were times early on when Loretta got creative with dinners and there were some summers he wished he spent more time with his family, his dedication to ensuring his loved ones were safe, loved and provided for was evident.

“That’s how it was in those days. You did what you had to do — you worked,” added Loretta.

Following his on-the-job injury in May 2011, which spurred his retirement, Bob has been giving back.

He serves on the board at the Standish Bible Church, and, for the past eight years, as today, you can find him bell in hand, Red Kettle by his side, posted in front of a local business.

“He is just a ball to work with. He rings once a week, the same day every week. It is awesome. He takes whatever store I need him at, he gives me the time and day that he can do it, and he always shows up,” said Susanville Red Kettle Coordinator Tina Hemphill.

Bob has no technique, per se, when it comes to bell ringing. Some days the bitter chill from the biting winter air encourages rapid movement, and some years boast warmer temperatures, but no matter the weather, Bob will be at his post on his determined day and location.

With the intent to pay tribute to Salvation Army’s Red Kettles and their bell ringers for High Country Life, the magazine reached out to Tina for ideas on whom to feature. The coordinator, who has been in the role for about four years, recommended Bob — someone she knows she can rely on, and whose cheery disposition only adds to his service to the organization.

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard or seen him in a bad mood. He’s always cheery,” Tina shared.

When it comes to talking about himself, even for this interview, Bob shares the good he sees in others and the importance of Salvation Army in the community.

He loves ringing the bell and seeing the generosity from the local people, from those who open their wallets and give what they have to seeing children learn the importance of giving, even though they may be tempted by a nearby gumball machine. He loves this community.

“This is Lassen County. That’s one of the things I’ve seen in the 43 years we’ve lived here. There are some things that have changed, but the good stuff I see with most of Lassen County doesn’t really change. They’re good people,” Bob said.

When Bob and Loretta moved to Susanville they lived on Chestnut Street. Then, shortly after, they moved to a home in Janesville; which at first, barren of greenery, was a bit of a shock. Decades later, a sequoia planted by their daughter, shrubs and plants surround the home that welcomes friends and family with open arms.

“God has always provided.”

When the Ellis’ learned they would not have children naturally, they knew they wanted to adopt.

The couple made an appointment with an agency in Chico, and the first meeting hosted prospective parents with the intent of discouraging them — weeding out those who were not serious about the endeavor in which they intended to partake.

But Bob and Loretta were serious. They soon got a call and met with a social worker to plan

Loretta and Bob Ellis are strong believers in hard work, family and giving back to the community. Photos by Makenzie Davis
the next steps. Adopting from the states may take up to 10 years, they were told, and the couple simply wanted a child — they didn’t care who or where their little one came from. They just wanted a child to love. Korea, their social worker explained to them, had the shortest wait time.

But the Ellis’ were told the list for adopting a child out of Korea was already full for the year, and their names would not be included yet. Then, while they were planning their future at the social worker’s office, a call came in.

“Pretty soon the phone rings and this lady’s eyes were the size of saucers. I’d never seen anything like it. She goes, ‘you’re kidding. That’s impossible. There is no way. That’s impossible.’ Keep in mind, all they’ve got is our name and phone number up to that point. God had already put us on the list for a child. It was the most amazing miracle. The only one who could’ve signed our name to that list was God,” said Bob.

“Our miracle Ruth,” Loretta smiled. They picked up their 8-month-old baby Ruth at the Los Angeles International Airport on Sept. 4, 1981 — her Gotcha Day.

However, the Ellises were told Ruth might not have even been on the plane that late summer day, since scalding water from a teapot burned her leg, prompting care before the departure. But Ruth was on that flight, despite the odds, once again.

Bob and Loretta also were foster parents throughout the years, giving some children a home and doing respite care. They shared their love, although it was difficult at times.

Their foster son, Aaron Murray, is still in close contact with the Janesville couple, despite falling out of touch for a while.

A recent Ellis family trip to the beach included Aaron and his wife, daughter Ruth, her husband Alex McElrath and their young son Callan — Bob and Loretta’s first grandson.

“He is just our pride and joy,” shared the new grandparents.

With Red Kettles now posted in front of businesses, Bob is like many who devote their fall and winter hours to the organization, he said.

“To me, it’s really not about me. I’m no different. You think about how many people ring the bell, and everybody I’ve ever met who rings the bell, they all have the same attitude. It’s not about them; it’s about what they can give back. They all enjoy it,” he said during an afternoon interview one week before his first bell ringing of the 2020 season.

There are some people Bob comes across who say they don’t support the organization, or who don’t celebrate Christmas, but Bob says they are rarely “grumpy” about it. He sees the organization as one that supports the community.

Bob is full of laughs, he jokes with those around him, he loves his family and his dog, and he loves this community — that’s clear to see. Whether he is spending time with his grandson in the backyard play cabin, sharing Wednesday morning breakfast with his daughter, Ruth, or ringing a bell, the Janesville
resident wants to dedicate his time to serving those he loves.

Ringing the bell is not about him, he stressed multiple times during the interview.

“I’m just a representative of what you see in everybody, I think. Some are a little sillier than others, some are a little more serious. But, you know, we all are out there for the same reason, I think,” he related.

The Salvation Army’s first Red Kettle fundraiser started in 1891 in San Francisco, according to the organization’s website. Now, the iconic Red Kettles have made their way to other countries.

Annually, the Susanville Salvation Army raises about $23,000, and proceeds stay local, supporting students, feeding families and spreading Christmas cheer.

This year, Bob is set to ring the Red Kettle bell Friday afternoons in front of Tractor Supply, and he’s excited to see some familiar faces and see the generosity from the community.

“You go out there, you be yourself and you enjoy the people. And that’s what it’s about,” he smiled.

Want to VOLUNTEER?

For more information, or to sign up to be a bell ringer, call Tina at 249-0954.

For more information about the Salvation Army or its programs, stop by the office at 1560 Main Street, Susanville, or call 257-0314.
Ben Wade, the Susanville Symphony Orchestra’s director and the Susanville Symphony Society’s artistic director, jokes with orchestra members and the audience during a previous Christmas concert. File photos

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the Susanville Symphony Society to cancel several concerts this year, but the good news is the symphony’s Christmas concert — one of the most popular and joyous of the year — will highlight our holiday season after all.

Ben Wade, the symphony’s maestro and the society’s artistic director said, “Come start the holiday season in traditional style with the Susanville Symphony.”

Ben’s confident the holiday concert is a go no matter what.

“We’re doing a Christmas concert at the Elks Lodge, 100 percent,” Ben said. “Since it is not on county, city or state property, we have a green light without the possibility of the rug being pulled out from underneath us … All necessary precautions for the health and welfare of or patrons will be accommodated — correct spacing, limited number of tickets, etc.”

This year’s production features only two performances — 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 19 and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 20.
The Salvation Army of Susanville extends Heartfelt Thanks to the volunteers, advisory board members and the following donors for a very successful Red Kettle Kick-off Dinner and Online Auction:

- Anytime Fitness
- AutoZone
- Axia Home Loans
- Beauty Bar
- Beck Shoes
- Diamond Mountain Casino
- Courthouse Café
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- Every Bloomin’ Thing
- Forest Office Supply
- Gold Run Cabinet & Door
- Haircuts by Brenda
- Jackson’s Service Center
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- Les Schwab
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- Mazatlan Grill
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- New Image
- NST Engineering
- O’Reilly Auto Parts
- Papa Murphy’s Pizza Factory
- Port of Subs
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- Rita Luallen
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- Susanville Ford
- Susanville Supemarket IGA
- Susanville Towing
- T&A Lounge
- Tractor Supply
- Trish from Serendipity
- Walmart
- Mountain Yoga Studio
- Zaengles Floor & Home

Avoid disappointment, and get your tickets early. Presale tickets are on sale now at Margie’s Book Nook, 722 Main St., and Axia Home Loans, 2940 Riverside Drive. All tickets are first come, first served and no tickets will be available at the door.

According to Ben, performers and material in the program include the Susanville Symphony Orchestra (with “our beautiful string musicians”), Uptown Brass, Christmas Carols (and soloists).

The Elks Lodge will sell eggnog, coffee and apple cider. “These are trying times” Ben said. “Despite the numerous setbacks for Lassen County and the rest of the world, we felt committed, honored and adamant about pushing forward with this concert. I mean, how can we have Christmas in Lassen County without a musical performance from our very own symphony orchestra?”

For more information, visit the Susanville Symphony Society’s website at susanvillesymphony.com, email susanvillesymphony@gmail.com or call (530) 310-8111.
From the front porch of the Gilded Drifter Inn in Loyalton, a guest can’t help being in awe of the wide-open landscape of Sierra Valley. It’s breathtaking with a unique tranquility.

That view and serenity are what prompted inn proprietor Chelsea Johnson to purchase the 121-year-old building — when she was just looking for a place to live (Johnson lives in a separate apartment upstairs in the inn). She fell in love with the valley and the inn and slowly restored each room. The inn had been vacant for five years before she purchased it and reopened in June 2017.

Formerly a bookstore owner and social worker from Roseville, Johnson named each room after a favorite turn of the century author, (mostly American but there is an Oscar Wilde room). The book collections featured in all the bedrooms and common rooms are from her own collection and she hopes that visitors take out a book and read.

There are no televisions in the inn — Johnson means the inn to be a place where the visitor can “slow down and have a quiet experience.”

She’s had visitors from as far away as England — a woman who stayed at the inn on her way to Burning Man, hated Burning Man, but decided to come back to the Gilded Drifter annually each fall. She has many repeat visitors from nearby as well and says Loyalton locals have really been a major part of the inn’s success.

While COVID has certainly changed some aspects of the business — she used to get a good deal of visitors heading to the hot springs which are currently closed — people are still coming for hiking and snow shoeing and other outdoor activities. People sometimes stay for a week and just work on wifi from their rooms.

There’s now a COVID breakfast basket special since visitors can no longer use the communal kitchen. So visitors are greeted to a basket with a carafe of coffee in the morning along with bakery treats.

Johnson loves hospitality and meeting new people. It’s a perfect fit for her.

“I met Jeanne and John, and Jeanne made us dinner and that was it,” said Johnson. She wanted them to open a restaurant in the space next door and they signed a lease to make it happen.

“I can talk in a second. I just need to take the cheesecake out of the oven,” said Jeanne Whited of the new Drifter’s Table restaurant. Whited has worked in restaurants for nearly 30 years — everything from hostessing to cooking in the kitchen. But the Drifter’s Table is the culmination of Whited’s lifelong dream to own her own restaurant.

Getting the restaurant fixed up to open was a labor of love and the couple did all the work themselves on both the interior and the exterior of the building. They decorated the inside with Habitat for Humanity reclaimed fixtures.

“About 90 percent of the restaurant is repurposed or reused materials,” Jeanne Whited said. A friend with a restaurant with two kitchens offered some equipment from the kitchen not being used. Locals in the area started donating tables and chairs that were still being used in their own homes.

The Gilded Drifter Inn greets visitors coming off of highways 49 and 70 in Loyalton. Each room at the inn is named after an author popular at the turn of the century and each room features a bookcase full of titles for the visitor to check out.

Steelhead trout over black rice at The Drifter’s Table.

The Gilded Drifter and The Drifter’s Table have become go-to Loyalton destinations.
sitting in their garages and attics not being used.

Originally the Whiteds were thinking of a high-end destination restaurant where patrons would sit down to a five-course meal. But they didn’t want to make it unaffordable in the local area.

COVID-19 lockdown meant that they didn’t initially open the way they hoped to in May. Instead, the Whiteds offered homemade pies and bottles of wine so that neighbors could get to know them better. They sold 130 pies that month.

They built a comfortable outdoor space around the inn and are seating inside at 50 percent capacity.

They’ve had customers coming from Reno, Tahoe, Incline Village and Gardnerville where they have friends and have seen new customers from Sierra, Plumas and Lassen counties too.

Jeanne Whited’s restaurant experience means she knows what it takes to survive. She’s settled on a small menu of reasonably priced items that has something for the meat eater, the fish eater, and the vegetarian each week. The lamb burger is a local favorite. The Drifter’s Table features a few dishes always on the menu, but she changes it up each week with new dishes for patrons to try.

“We have a small kitchen and everything is homemade, so we’re keeping the menu small,” Whited said.

She wants to stay consistent with times they will be open and aims to be open through December 31 of this year before re-opening again May of 2021.

The collaboration of inn and restaurant means Sierra Valley has a destination vacation spot for both ‘near-cation’ locals and far away travelers.

Now that winter is here, The Drifter’s Table is doing indoor seating only. To follow COVID-19 protocol, it’s best to make a reservation as seating is limited.

The Drifter’s Table and The Gilded Drifter are located at 820 Main Street in Loyalton adjacent to the inn and open Fridays through Sundays at 4 p.m. The Drifter’s Table is open from May to December 31. For more information: (530) 993-4312 or www.thedrifterstable.com.

More information about the Gilded Drifter Inn can be found at www.gildeddrifterinn.com or (530) 428-5015.

John and Jeanne Whited (left) partner with Chelsea Johnson (right) to create a destination restaurant and inn in Loyalton. Photo submitted
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Sure, sugar and flour are in there, but the most important ingredient is love

Story and photos by Victoria Metcalf
Special to High Country Life

A CHRISTMAS STAPLE: THE SUGAR COOKIE

My great-grandmother Emma Parcher might not have approved of a dining room table being turned into a cookie board, but she would have approved of a child and two teens learning to bake one-of-a-kind treats for the holidays.

This woman, who once lived near Quincy, was born just before the start of the Civil War, and homesteaded with her parents in Illinois and Iowa, would have also approved that her sound wooden rolling pin was still being put to use, while her great-great-great-grandson helped make sugar cookies.

I think it’s a given that any time food and children are encouraged to bake and create some unplanned incidents are bound to happen.

At one point, Caden Castillo, 6, got caught with a bottle of uncapped blue food coloring in his sticky little hands. Did he try to drink any? Oh no, he claimed, but the blue corner of his mouth and blue teeth and gums said otherwise.

In another near disaster, Bambi Wallis Pope, who turns 15 soon, managed to not only get white royal icing on her sugar cookie, but achieved a major glob of it on the topside of her forearm.

And 13-year-old Mina Wallis Pope proved to be the most artistic of the threesome as she mixed royal icing, colored sprinkles and nonpareils (those round colored BB-shapes that are so pretty but terrible to eat) into some magazine-worthy creations.

The planning process

I went through numerous cookbooks looking for those simple but time-consuming traditional sugar cookies we all seem to look forward to during the holidays.

These are the ones we can spend hours mixing, refrigerating, practicing on for rolling techniques and then finally using those special Christmas-themed cookie cutters to distraction. Now that’s not so difficult to do, the real test comes when it’s time to decorate them.

I’m not short of ideas when it comes to decorating themes. And I’ve watched enough bakers on TV to almost cry at how simple they make even the most detailed designs look. But with that said, I’m no artist — not on paper, not on coloring pages, and most certainly not when it comes to creating memorable, good-enough-looking-to-eat sugar cookie treasures.

But this year’s somehow going to be different (I think I’ve told myself that before.) Just weeks away from turning the big 65 and awaiting Medicare to kick in, I’ve told myself that I’m old enough to learn how to both create and teach others all about making and baking sugar cookies.

This decision came in September. Our tree was absolutely loaded with smallish, but wonderfully sweet peaches. I’d turned to a peach pie recipe I’d seen on a page of a baking book that a good friend, Marcia Detrick gave me before she moved to Wisconsin.

This peach pie was stunning. The baker had cut out individual leaves that were used to decoratively cover the top of the pie. I tried it with an existing cookie cutter and while it was cute, it didn’t match the beautiful full-color photo that food photographers and designers created.

Well, the cookie cutter I’d used was all wrong for the task, I decided. So, I got online and ordered two sets and a stray Christmas stocking cutter. When they arrived, one of my first pies was covered with pumpkin shapes. Others were decorated with leaves, and finally the whimsical part of me used a dinosaur shape or two to tempt my 6-year-old grandson who is a dinosaur enthusiast.

But did I think far enough ahead to create a peach pie with a Christmas cutout theme? Of course not.

One disappointment I had with the cookie cutters I ordered is their size. They’re all small. The ones my grandmother had were larger, the size of a small hand larger.
But I have the size that I have and it’s time to move on.

**Recipe No. 1**

4½ cups all-purpose flour  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
½ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg  
1½ cups shortening  
2 cups sugar  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
½ teaspoon lemon extract  
1 cup buttermilk or sour milk*

Stir together flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and nutmeg. Old-time bakers would have used a sifter to make sure these ingredients are well incorporated so that somewhere in the baking and eating process someone doesn’t come away with a big bite of something that should have been mixed thoroughly inside.

In a large bowl beat shortening for 30 seconds. Add sugar and beat until the mixture is fluffy. Add the eggs, vanilla and the lemon extract and beat well. Electric mixers are the best for this kind of a recipe but doing it by hand will work if the baker has enough arm muscle and determination to do a thorough job of mixing everything in this step.

Begin to add the flour and add some of the buttermilk or sour milk* and then the shortening mixture alternately. Beat until this is well mixed. Divide this mixture in half. Cover each portion and chill at least 3 hours or until easy to handle.

Be sure to flour the counter or board surface well to keep the cookie dough from sticking. This requires a little bit of skill in that the baker doesn’t want so much flour on the surface that it becomes incorporated into the dough and changes its consistency. Too little flour will see the dough sticking.

I watched a video done with two professional bakers. One baker had the sprinkling or actually casting of surface flour down to an art. He took up a generous pinch with his fingers and then flicked it sideways across the surface he wanted to use. This step seemed important enough that the second baker tried the technique as well. It’s a step I also plan to try.

Once the dough balls are well chilled, roll out some of the dough until it’s a ½ inch thick for large 3-inch cookie cutters. For small cookies (like I’m going to make) roll out the dough until it’s 3/8th of an inch thick.

Once the dough is rolled into the correct depth, begin the next step in the adventure. Using a glass or a cookie cutter begin pressing it into the dough. One shape can be used right across the dough, or the baker can alternate different shapes. Note: Cookie cutters come in metal or plastic so remember that some bakers want to prevent the cutter from sticking to the dough. Those bakers have a small bowl of flour set aside where the cutters can be dusted before each imprint.

Once the section of dough is cut, begin to either lift off each cookie and place it on an ungreased cookie sheet, or run a spatula or thin blade carefully under each cookie to ensure it doesn’t stick. Some bakers prefer to lift the dough off of the imprints and then pick up the cookies and place on the cookie sheet. Here again, the baker might want to carefully run a thin blade under each cookie to prevent sticking.

Cookies should be placed on the baking sheet. You can place them close together because they do not spread out as much as other cookies. Bake at 375°F for 8 to 10 minutes or until the edges are lightly browned. Remove to a wire rack to cool completely.
Sprinkle with sugar or colored sugar if the cookie isn't going to receive further decoration. Bake in a 375-degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes or until done. Remove each cookie from the pan and set aside to cool. The recipe makes 24 large or 48 small cookies.

If the cookies are going to be decorated, place them in the freezer for 15 minutes or so once they've cooled. This allows for a firmer surface for icing and decorating. We had several mishaps with cookies breaking when the freezer time wasn't enough. Fortunately, only one decorated cookie was ruined and quickly eaten.

I used orange extract, surprised that we even had that in the spice cupboard. I did find lemon extract later and would recommend that over the orange. But it's just a matter of personal taste.

This cookie isn't overly sweet. I've eaten lots of sugar cookies in my life that were much sweeter and with the added icing and decorations became just too much.

When I did remove the refrigerated dough, I knew immediately it was too moist to roll. So, I began adding sprinkles of flour until eventually I had the right consistency that wouldn't stick. I estimate that I used at least another ½ cup flour.

To make sour milk, combine 1 tablespoon lemon juice or vinegar and enough milk to make 1 cup. Let it stand for 5 minutes before using.

The above recipe is from Better Homes and Gardens Cookies for Christmas 1985.

Dainty Sugar Cookies
Recipe No. 2

1 cup butter
1½ cups granulated sugar
2 beaten eggs
5 tablespoons milk
3 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder

In a bowl cream together the butter and the sugar. Then add and blend in the eggs and milk. Then sift together the remaining two ingredients and mix it into the egg, butter, sugar and milk mixture to form a dough.

Roll out the dough to ½-inch thick on a floured board, pastry cloth or the clean kitchen countertop. Use the desired cookie cutter to make designs in the prepared and rolled dough.

Each cookie can be brushed with a mixture of 1 egg, a pinch of salt and 2 tablespoons of milk, or with milk alone. Each cookie can be garnished with a sprinkle of sugar.

Place the cookies on an ungreased cookie sheet in a 375-degree oven and bake 6 to 8 minutes. This recipe makes 10 to 12 dozen cookies.

This recipe was taken from Cookie Cookery by John and Hazel Zenker. Copyright 1969.

recipes continue on next page
Decorated Christmas cutout cookies  
Recipe No. 3

¾ cup butter, softened  
1 cup sugar  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2¼ cups all-purpose flour  
¼ teaspoon salt  
Tinted frostings, colored sugars, edible glitter and nonpareils.

In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt; gradually add to creamed mixture and mix well. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until firm.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to ¼-inch thickness. Cut with the Christmas cookie cutters of your choice. Using a floured spatula, transfer the cookies to greased baking sheets.

Bake at 375 degrees for 8-10 minutes or until lightly browned. Cool completely on wire racks.

Decorate cookies with frosting, sugars and candies.

Gluten-free frosted sugar cookies  
Recipe No. 4

When two of the people in our household of seven discovered they feel much better when they don’t eat products that contain traditional flour with gluten, we’ve made some adjustments to fit their concerns and comforts. At times we all eat the gluten-free foods, at others I make two batches — one with regular flour and one with gluten-free flour.

The author of The Big Book of Gluten-Free Baking: A sweet and savory cookbook, highly recommends using a set of digital scales to weigh the gluten-free products, rather than using measuring cups. This author claims that all-purpose flours (including wheat and other similar grains) measure differently from regular flours. She suggests that when investing in a scale just for cooking, to get one that will subtract the weight of the bowl or container used in preparation.

312 grams all-purpose flour blend*, plus more for dusting  
½ teaspoon xanthan gum*  
½ teaspoon baking powder  
¼ teaspoon salt  

For the icing

102 grams shortening  
150 grams cane sugar or granulated sugar  
1 large egg

2 teaspoons vanilla extract  
¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon cold water  
240 grams powdered sugar  
¼ cup whole milk or coconut milk beverage*

To make the cookies

In a small bowl, whisk the flour, xanthan gum, baking powder, and salt to combine.

In a large bowl, using a handheld electric mixer on medium speed, cream together the shortening and sugar. Add the egg, vanilla, and orange extract and mix to combine. Slowly add the flour mixture and cold water. Stir until coarse crumbs form. Continue to form the dough by hand. The warmth of your hands will help the dough come together.

Divide the dough into 4 equal portions, wrap each in plastic wrap, and chill for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Any longer and your dough will be too hard to work with and you will need to let it sit on the counter for 5 to 10 minutes, so it is easier to work with.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats.

Place two sheets of parchment paper on a work surface and dust them with flour. Place one dough portion between the two sheets of parchment and roll it to ¼-inch thickness.

Using cookie cutters cut the dough into desired shapes and transfer them to the prepared baking sheets. Gather the scraps and repeat the steps with the remaining 3 dough portions.

Bake for 11 to 13 minutes. The cookies will be soft but very lightly browned around the edges.

Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for 10 minutes, then use a spatula to gently transfer them to a wire rack to cool completely.

Frostings for cookies

Royal icing

1 package powdered sugar or 4 ½ cups  
1/3 cup warm water (105 degrees F to 115 degrees F for bakers who want exactness).  
3 tablespoons meringue powder*  
1 teaspoon vanilla or almond extract  
½ teaspoon cream of tartar

In a large bowl, beat all ingredients except the food coloring with an electric mixer on low speed until mixed. Then beat on high speed for 7 to 10 minutes or until very stiff.
Add different food coloring as desired. To do this, spoon a portion of the icing into small cups or bowls and then add drops of the coloring until it’s the desired color/shade. Once this is done, the colored icing can be put into small pastry bags or less expensive Ziplock baggies in order to closely design each cookie.

**Creamy vanilla glaze**

1 cup powdered sugar  
½ teaspoon vanilla  
1 tablespoon water or 1 to 2 tablespoons of milk

In a small bowl, mix all ingredients with a spoon until smooth and spreadable. If the icing is too thin add more powdered sugar or if the icing is too thick try adding and mixing drops of water to the mixture. If the icing is too runny it won’t remain in place. If it’s too thick it will be hard to spread or to use in the baggie applicator.

**Shiny decorator’s glaze**

2 cups powdered sugar  
2 tablespoons water  
2 tablespoons light corn syrup  
½ teaspoon almond extract

In a small bowl, beat all ingredients with an electric mixer until smooth.

Icing recipes are found in the Betty Crocker Christmas Cookbook 2006. This recipe goes with the gluten-free sugar cookie recipe.

240 grams powdered sugar  
¼-cup whole milk or coconut milk beverage  
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

In a medium bowl, stir together the powdered sugar, milk and vanilla until smooth.

Dip each cookie top into the icing, then transfer to a wire rack. Allow the icing to set for about an hour.

Keep the cookies in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 4 days. They can be frozen without icing for up to 1 month in a freezer bag. Separating the cookies with parchment paper before freezing helps keep them fresh.

The Big Book of Gluten-Free Baking by Paola Anna Miget was copyrighted in 2020.
Christmas and restoration efforts at historic White Sulphur Springs Ranch

By Debra Moore
dmoore@plumasnews.com

“I’m going to let you know there’s a surprise in here,” my tour guide said as we approached an upstairs room. Despite the warning, I still jumped when I rounded the doorway and saw a woman dressed in vintage clothing staring out the window, just as she or others before would have since the 1800s.

Photo submitted
Her view would have been the same as it is today — the picturesque meadow and surrounding mountains of the Mohawk Valley — near the towns of Clio and Graeagle in eastern Plumas County. And it would probably have been just as chilly in the 162-year-old ranch house then as it was on this wintry afternoon.

Mava Machomich, who managed the ranch for years, still presides over White Sulphur Springs Ranch, at least in spirit. As her mannequin stands watch in a second-story bedroom, local residents are gathered in the downstairs kitchen to talk about their vision for restoring the home and grounds.

It's not easy or inexpensive, and the work isn't always visible. For instance a current project involves replacing the septic system, which required the purchase of an adjacent lot to accommodate the leach field. While they talk, work is also underway on barn repair and trail building.

“It's a project of love,” Judy Lullo says during the tour. Judy and her husband, John, have been instrumental in the restoration effort and Judy wants to share enthusiasm for the project by conducting tours for all who are interested.

A little history
The ranch originated in 1852 when three men, with connections to the Jamison Mine, purchased 400 acres at one end of the Mohawk Valley and dubbed it Sulphur Springs Ranch because of the numerous hot springs. The property changed hands six years later and a hotel was built making it an ideal stagecoach stop during the Gold Rush Days.

George McLear purchased the ranch in 1867 and envisioned turning it into a mountain resort. When renovations were complete in 1871, it featured a bathhouse and swimming pool filled with water from the hot springs. McLear also crafted furniture for the house and ventured into farming, selling produce and dairy products to the mines.

When he died in 1890, the ranch, which came to be known as the McClear House, passed to his four children: George, Jr., Isabell (Bel), Maude and Edith. Bel and Maude managed the hotel and Bel eventually became the owner. When she became ill, her neighbor and friend, Mava Machomich, cared for her and managed the inn.

When Bell died in 1954, she left the ranch to Mava, and when she in turn died in 1974, the ranch went to her nephew and his wife, Harry and Lea McKenzie. The couple completely restored the house, removing some walls in the process, and filling it with antiques and memorabilia. They sifted through the attic, which proved to be a treasure chest of furniture, costumes, medals, trunks, chamber pots and a host of eclectic items. They returned many of the original pieces to the rooms,
including the furniture crafted by George McClear.

Harry died in an ultralight plane accident in 1983, and his wife and their children, Don Miller and Linda Vanella, operated it as a bed and breakfast in 1985. A brochure read: “The Olympic-sized swimming pool located on the property is fed by several warm, white sulphur springs. An expansive view of Mohawk Valley and the surrounding mountain peaks can be enjoyed while relaxing around the pool or sipping a complimentary wine on the balcony in the evening.”

After Lea died in 1993, her children continued to operate it as a bed & breakfast for the next decade. It was a popular destination spot for tourists and locals, with many a wedding and other celebratory events held there. The pool was a mecca for end-of-the-year parties for students.

The siblings decided to close the B&B, and in 2003 the antiques and memorabilia were sold in an estate sale, and the property was sold to Stephen Luczo of Scotts Valley, California. He began dismantling the old buildings, including the two-story bunkhouse. Dismayed neighbors began a campaign to save the ranch.

The Mohawk Valley Stewardship Council

The stewardship council formed in 2009 with the primary goal of restoring the ranch for the public’s enjoyment. It purchased the ranch in 2010 thanks to grant funding as well as a sizeable donation from the property owner himself. While the original ranch was 400 acres, the council bought a 42-acre portion that contains the house, barns, warm springs and swimming pool.

Since assuming ownership, the council has addressed critical infrastructure needs as well as begun work to restore the property’s interior spaces. It’s a big task and a dedicated core group of volunteers organizes fundraisers, oversees projects and tackles many of the tasks themselves. The council depends on public and private donations from the community to help fund the effort.

While that usually involves monetary donations, it also has come in the form of furniture and heirloom contributions. During the tour, Judy Lullo points out vintage sofas, chairs, tables and dressers donated from community members. Some individuals have even donated items original to White Sulphur Springs that were sold during the 2003 auction and have now been returned home. Other pieces came from the Johnsville Hotel.

There are many rooms to furnish. Downstairs boasts large living and dining rooms, a kitchen that spans the back width of the home, and bath and dressing areas. Upstairs are five bedrooms and two additional baths. Some of the upstairs rooms are themed — such as the sewing room or the nursery — each filled not only with furnishings, but objects from the time period.

Outside each room is a placard that lists the items’ origins. “Everything has been done in the last year,” Judy Lullo said of the décor that is in place. But the council has plans to do much more.

When it comes to the grounds, the council plans to restore the pool, add hiking and biking trails, plant gardens and build an amphitheatre.

But all of that takes money and the public can help in a couple of ways. Historically the major fundraiser has been Summerfest, but COVID nixed that event this year. Instead, individuals can give monetary donations in the form of memberships or by buying a brick that will be used to build pathways and borders in the garden areas. Lullo suggests that either or both would make wonderful Christmas gifts this year.

More information on both opportunities can be found at www.whitesulphurspringsranch.com or by calling 836-2495. Tours can also be arranged by calling that number … just be on the lookout for Mava when you head upstairs. HCL
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It was October 1968. The Stella Faye Miller Museum had just opened its doors to the public. And one of the first visitors was sixth-grader Scott Lawson. It’s an experience he will always remember. And if he didn’t realize it as he and fellow classmates stood at the Mezzanine railing and peered down at students and artifacts, it was a day that shaped his life. This December, Lawson is saying goodbye to his job as the Plumas County Museum’s curator and director. He isn’t however saying goodbye to his dedication to preserving the county’s rich history and what it not only means to him but others — present and future.

From the beginning

It was late September as Lawson shared his long connection with not only the museum, but also his dedication to preserving Plumas County’s rich past.

Lawson remembers that he always had some job or project to do as he found time outside of school in the 1970s. In the museum’s early days, Bob Moon, had a lot to do with the operation and gave Lawson an opportunity to be a docent for the museum.

By late 1978 or 1979, Quincy resident Linda Brennan, was taken on as Moon’s assistant, but Lawson continued his involvement with the past.
until adulthood and logging demanded his time.

Lawson said he was a logger for 10 years, but he was tired of the trade that worked him for 10 to 14 hours a day, “and paid us for 10.”

In January 1989, Lawson was hired full time at the museum. He remembers he was paid $6.11 an hour in those days. When Brennan retired in 1995, Lawson slid into the vacancy.

As well as answering to the Plumas County Board of Supervisors, the facility is assisted by the Plumas County Museum Association that formed in 1971.

As the director

One of the things that’s always appealed to Lawson is the variety in the job. He likes the research that’s involved, both for the facility and working with people as they come in wanting their own answers about people and places in the past.

And with the research and the museum’s filing system, Lawson said that the facility has become one of the most respected in California.

There have been a number of changes at the museum since Lawson became director. He and his governing board have worked to build a carriage house. It’s now largely filled with records and memorabilia concerning Plumas County’s past and its people.

The museum is now home to the county of Plumas records and hardbound copies of court proceedings up to 1950.

Speaking of the courts, Lawson was also instrumental in renovating the law office building next door to the museum. It is now the new law library for the county.

One might say that the only thing at odds with the past inside is the modern computer put there to assist those doing research. “We’re a lot more than just a place with three-dimensional artifacts,” Lawson explained.

“Gabe (Gabriel Hydrick, county administrator) is really concerned,” about the museum. For now, he’s added its responsibilities to his growing list of duties.

“They’re going to find they really need someone who’s in charge full time,” Lawson added about the importance of finding county funding to hire another director for the facility.

“We’ve had no real help for 10 years,” he said, adding that docents pick up a lot of the work.

Paul Russell has assisted Lawson and is paid through grants procured by the museum’s governing board.

“If you’re going to be a museum you have to have one full time employee,” Lawson said.

In pulling together museum facts to present to members of the Board of Supervisors, Lawson shared his list:

- 11,858 three-dimensional artifacts
- 1,240 donors of artifacts
- 760 reference books
- Archaeological and historical reports in the Archival Research Library
- 400 historic artifact books
- 1,902 historic photographs
- 3,485 black and white negative (35 mm and 4X5 formats)
- 1,744 archival collections that include diaries, journals, ledgers, manuscripts, letters and more.
- There are: 7,184 superior, district, probate and county court cases on file
- 1,936 articles of incorporation
- 1,744 archival collections that include diaries, journals, ledgers, manuscripts, letters and more.
- There are: 772 maps that include historic property, mines, railroads, ranches and power projects among others.
- There are: 1,278 naturalization records of citizenship applications and declaration
- 2,394 various records from the Plumas County clerk’s office
- 207 tax and assessment records from 1854 (the year Plumas County was formed) through 1950
- These include some Sierra County volumes, Lawson said.

To help complete the inventory, the museum has 120 years of local newspapers. For the most part these are full-year collections.

Lawson has also written seven books on various aspects of Plumas County history, including “A Record of a ‘49er” and “Saga of Mountain Meadows: History of Bucks Lake.” He is currently writing a book on Sierra County.

Personal history

Born in Greenville, Lawson has become familiar with so many areas involving the county’s rich history. As a teen and then an adult, he has tramped the county’s mountains and back woods, learning the trails, former routes and seeing the remains of once prosperous mining towns.

He shook his head and revealed that some of the remains of mining communities existed until this summer’s Claremont Fire burned through the area.

“I still care for the place,” Lawson said. “And I don’t only want it to survive, I want it to thrive.”

In his retirement, Lawson intends to continue raising donkeys and possibly the large burros used for riding and packing. He also plans to visit more of the country’s national parks.
Quincy man discovers his father's WWII heroism, hidden for 70 years, thanks to unique bond of friendship

“I heard Jan talk about the 101st and how famous they are, but no, my dad never said a word.”
—Chico Labrador

Chico Labrador has a great deal to be proud of, thanks to the persistent research his friend Jan Klement carried out over the last few years to determine that Chico’s father was a decorated WWII hero. The news came as a surprise to Chico. Photo by Roni Java

Christmas was only six freezing days away in December 1944 when a decisive World War II conflict in Bastogne of the Belgian Ardennes, in the province of Luxembourg, erupted into what Winston Churchill would come to call “the greatest American battle of the war.” More than a million Allied troops, including 500,000 Americans, fought in the historic Battle of the Bulge from Dec. 19 to Jan. 17, 1945. Records from the era indicate

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Photo by Roni Java
approximately 19,000 Allied soldiers were killed in action and another 47,500 were wounded. An additional 23,000 soldiers were listed as missing and it is estimated 100,000 German soldiers died or were wounded or captured.

With 8 inches of snow on the ground and biting, icy temperatures surrounding them day and night, the soldiers were trapped in a fight for their lives and control of a critical communications and transportation hub that the German forces were determined to capture.

U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) Private First Class (Pfc.) Genaro B. Labrador of Texas, 21, was there with his glider combat unit, the 74th Troop Carrier Squadron of the 434th Troop Carrier Group. They were assigned to the famed “Screaming Eagles” of the USAAF’s 101st Airborne Division.

Books have been written and movies have been made about that epic battle and the heroic troops who were cut off and completely surrounded by eight German divisions. They fought valiantly with ammunition running dangerously low, no appropriate winter clothing and raw feet freezing in their leather boots. The desperate, month-long conflict tested the bravery of every soldier and earned the 101st Airborne a designation as “the battered bastards of Bastogne.”

Pfc. Labrador also earned distinction in other WWII theaters for the United States before his service ended Oct. 31, 1945, nearly two months after the surrender of Japan.

But more than 70 years later, Quincy resident Rosario “Chico” Labrador, 64, had no idea that his father Genaro had survived that bloody battle and served with courage and honor before Chico was ever born.

All quiet on the subject of war

Chico is a San Francisco native, one of nine brothers, six of whom died in infancy or before they were born. His father was born in Mexico and earned his U.S. citizenship while he was in the Army Air Force. Genaro died in 1975 when Chico was only 19 and the his mother passed away soon after. Labrador has been on his own for a long time, working in the logging and lumber industry from Central California to Arcata.

“I don’t know how the hell your father survived the Battle of the Bulge.”
– Jan Klement

He’d never heard of Plumas County 24 years ago when he drove up to visit a friend in Quincy. Once here, Chico was persuaded to apply at the mill, Sierra Pacific Industries. He was hired as a skilled sawyer before he could complete his vacation and has been here ever since.

The years have been good, he says. Chico raised his only child, daughter Esther Labrador, in Plumas County and she graduated from Quincy High in 2007. Esther went on to California State University, San Francisco for her bachelor’s degree and fulfilled a big dream by earning her juris doctorate from Harvard School of Law. Recounting the accomplishment brings a grin and a chuckle from her dad, who shakes his head just slightly in amazement at her hard work. He is similarly astounded about his father’s service record.

“I didn’t ever realize all this stuff, that my dad was in World War II,” says the younger Labrador, an easygoing fellow with a ready smile whose friends have called him Chico most of his life. “My dad, he never said anything. I had no idea.”

Today, he wonders if the events his father experienced in Europe, the intense and indescribable things he saw and lived through as a soldier in wartime, might have affected him so deeply he didn’t talk about them because he didn’t want to be reminded?

“T’ll never know,” Labrador said. “I wish I’d asked questions, but I didn’t know that I didn’t know, and now my parents are gone, my aunt is gone. Even my brothers don’t have any information.”

But a few years ago, Chico met someone who wanted to know for him, someone with an inquisitive nature and a talent for deep, sustained research. Someone who wanted Labrador to know he could be very proud of his father’s heroism.

Chance friendship opened up a family history treasure trove

Meeting for a masked-up, socially distanced talk with a reporter on a breezy day in Quincy’s Dame Shirley Park, Chico seemed bemused at the change this new and remarkable family-
history discovery about his father’s time in the U.S. military has brought to him.

“I like to walk Pilar over by Spanish Creek,” he said quietly, leaning down to pet the scruffy neck of his white, 12-year-old Great Pyrenees. He rescued her when she was 1 year old and they’ve been inseparable ever since.

Jan Klement, a Quincy attorney, finds the creek side path west of town a peaceful favorite for the same reason, frequently walking his 9-year-old Schutzhund German shepherd Kheops du Mont d’Osiris there, too. Klement obtained Kheops from the Nadelhaus German shepherds kennel in Corning, and he used to walk his beloved Schutzhund Karzan there, as well, before losing that “gentle giant” not long ago.

The men share a devotion to their pets and since they kept running into one another, formed a friendship that extends back a few years. While their canine companions roamed about Spanish Creek, Chico and Jan talked about life, families and the usual stuff. But an informal mention about a possible paratrooper connection caught Klement’s ear one day.

“I told him about my father’s military service,” Jan explained, “and he told me (he thought) his father was a paratrooper in WWII. That statement got my attention, since I served as a paratrooper with the 101st Airborne.”

A native of Holland, Klement had served as a specialist in B Company with the 326th Airborne Engineer Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division.

By then, the friends were meeting almost daily for their walks, but Chico confided he didn’t really know much, if anything, about his dad’s life as a young man, plus he’d lost his parents at such an early age.

“I heard Jan talk about the 101st and how famous they are, but no, my dad never said a word,” Chico recalled. “I didn’t even know he was in it and then I was thinking yeah, I remember somebody in my family once saying something about paratrooping. But I really didn’t know anything about it.”

An expert researcher, Klement wanted to find out more for Chico and he kept searching for clues as their friendship grew.

“One day, he told me that his aunt had a wide photograph on her wall (in San Francisco) of an airplane with troops pictured in it and an arrow pointing to his father,” Klement said.

Chico said he’d never really noticed the old photo until he was visiting in 2018. He told Jan that the portrait had a lot of military men in the group. A caption read “434th Troop Carrier Group, 74th Troop Carrier Squadron, England 1944.”

That date and location coincided with documented training exercises and preparation to support the Normandy invasion in June 1944 and Bastogne in December of that year. Pfc. Genaro Labrado is clearly visible in the large group of soldiers, all wearing their dress uniforms.

This meant Chico’s father was there, readying with his “band of brothers” for the fights to come.

USAFF Pfc. Genaro B. Labrador, back row, fourth from the left, served with honor and distinction during WWII and at the famed Battle of the Bulge in late 1944 in Belgium. He is shown here in England with his fellow paratroopers and glider combat soldiers of the U.S. Army Air Force’s 74th Troop Carrier Squadron in the 434th Troop Group. Photo excerpt courtesy of the Labrador family.

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“If I hadn’t been in the 101st Airborne Division, I might not have thought about it,” Klement said, “My curiosity got the best of me. I decided to do some research.”

Thus began an extensive search through military records, collected writings, articles and much more. Klement helped Chico request his father’s records and corresponded with military history experts, magazine editors and others.

Uncovering a treasure of military accomplishments any family would be proud of

The Battle of the Bulge took place in the Ardennes region of Belgium and was Adolf Hitler’s last major offensive in World War II against the Western Front, according to History.com.

Klement found out Pfc. Labrador enlisted with the U.S. Army Air Force, not yet a standalone branch of America’s military, on March 10, 1943 and volunteered for airborne duty. He was assigned to serve as a telephone switchboard operator, military specialty 650.

That job description includes all of the following duties: install, operate and perform maintenance on several kinds of magneto and battery operated switchboards; install lines from switchboards to various new or existing circuits; and maintain field wires and be able to read traffic and circuit diagrams.

“Obviously, the operator is well trained before entering a combat support station,” Klement explained, adding that under combat conditions, communications are of the foremost importance because the commanders of the units involved must be in direct contact with their respective commanders.

“For example,” the attorney said, “the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment was one of the units that were an integral part of the 101st Airborne Division, which consisted primarily of paratroopers. After hitting the beaches in Normandy and battling inwards, the 327th was ordered to install communications, such as placing telephone wires in the town of Heidelberg and others.”

Klement’s research turned up further interesting details about his friend’s father and his service in WWII.

Though Pfc. Labrador was designated for a communications-related career, he became a glider combat soldier.

“Since the Army had planned an invasion and needed glider troops,” Jan said, “Genaro became a glider trooper in the 101st Airborne Division. Usually, after enlistment, the Army does what it wants.”

Honored for courage in battle

Was Pfc. Labrador active in combat? Chico doesn’t know firsthand, but his friend Jan says
“It appears that he served in combat areas, but not directly in battles,” Klement said, citing his extensive research and adding one indication is that the Army’s Separation Report states that Genaro “received no wounds in action,” so it is assumed that he served in a combat support capacity. However, a lot of times, soldiers serve in support capacities,” Klement said, reminding Chico that in his father’s case, the support provided was communication.

“Even after an invasion,” Klement added, “land lines were laid by soldiers whose Military Occupation Specialty (MOS’s) were support for the combat troops.” He further clarified that support needs included medical services, transportation, supply, maintenance and many other services not directly in combat. But the soldiers were in combat areas as is reflected in their Report of Separation (on discharge papers).

So were the support troops in danger, Klement asked rhetorically? “Yes, combat areas are what they are called, that is, combat zones,” he said definitively. “And being a Glider Trooper was not for the faint hearted! The 327th suffered over 500 casualties on the first day of the D-Day invasion. It was more risky to be a Glider trooper than a paratrooper. There were a lot of broken arms and legs upon landing the gliders.”

“Chico, your dad is a war hero!” Klement told his friend and research proved it true. “The paratroopers got extra ‘jump pay,’ but the glider guys didn’t receive that. They didn’t get any ‘shot-down pay’ and I don’t know how the hell your father survived the Battle of the Bulge.”

Private First Class Genaro Labrador’s record shows he served in five major campaigns during WWII:

• Normandy (June 6 – July 4, 1944)
• Northern France (July 25 – Sept. 14, 1944)
• Rhineland (Sept. 15, 1944 – March 21, 1945)
• Ardennes-Alsace (Dec. 16 – Jan. 25, 1945)
• Central Europe (March 22 – May 11, 1945)

His Enlisted Record and Report of Separation show Genaro earned several ribbons and citations.

The European-African-Middle Eastern Service Ribbon — an award for having served in one of the areas. All soldiers who left the United States to provide their service received the ribbon and General Eisenhower received the first one issued, Klement reported.

Good Conduct Medal — one of the most important medals because it recognizes that a soldier has performed in an outstanding military manner.

The 434th Troop Carrier Group (74th Troop Carrier Squadron) Distinguished Unit

undoubtedly yes.
Walks with his Great Pyrenees dog Pilar led Chico Labrador to a friendship with Quincy attorney Jan Klement and the discovery that Chico's father was a decorated WWII war hero. Photo by Roni Java

Other than a shoulder patch, the younger Labrador never found any medals or military ribbons with his father's things. He said his brothers weren't aware of them, either, whether they had been lost or just never collected.

Now, he and his family have shining memories to last a lifetime and a father for whom their pride will only grow.

Chico's advice to others is, “because I never knew when I was growing up, the thought about World War II and my dad being in it, that never even crossed my mind. Now I think, ask some questions. If anybody's got people like that, and they can find something out before it's too late, I say, do it.”

Badge — an honor Labrador earned because the 327th Glider Infantry became a unit under command of the USAAF, the 74th Troop Carrier Squadron.

Airborne Troop Carrier Insignia Patch — Genaro and his comrades would all have proudly worn this shoulder patch on their uniforms. It was a true badge of honor.

American Theater Ribbon — a military award first created on Nov. 6, 1942, by Executive Order and issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to recognize those service members who had performed in the American Theater of Operations during WWII. The American Theater of Operations included all continental U.S. territory and 200 miles into the ocean.

Glider Troop Wings — Klement said he believes Pfc. Labrador would have been entitled to this medal, though he didn't find it listed in the Army Air Force documentation, but Glider Wings were issued by the Air Force.

"I wonder what it would have been like to actually be there, if I could have done it or not?" Chico asked himself as the day's interview was winding down. "But I guess you didn't have a choice. Once you're there, I'm sure you're gonna survive, so you're going to do whatever you have to do. Maybe they didn't start out courageous, you know, to be such brave, tough guys. You do what the situation requires. But man, that would be rough."
It’s just the feeling that’s there.”

It’s seeing the kids’ faces when the first responders are coming. It’s hearing the silent excitement, and then seeing the parade of flashing lights.

Terra Avilla, Susanville police officer and Holiday with a Hero board treasurer, doesn’t have a favorite memory. Every year she’s participated in the annual Holiday with a Hero event, she looks forward to one moment: The beginning and the eager anticipation of the morning that’s about to unfold.

“You can just feel the electricity in the air. They are just so excited. The 2-year-olds to the 17-year-olds are silent and they are so happy and their eyes light up when the parade comes. And then they see Santa and they’re singing carols. It’s just the feeling that’s there,” she said.

Holiday with a Hero began in 2014 initially as Susanville Police Department’s Shop with a Cop. Terra, new to the department at the time, was coming from working in Reno where their Shop with a Cop event sponsored entire schools and youth paired up with an officer to shop for their families. However, in Lassen County, she saw several needs a Shop with a Cop program could
help with bringing Christmas to local youth who could use it, and helping bridge connections between first responders and vulnerable kids who may not have had the best interactions with those in first responder positions.

That first year in 2014, the local department sponsored 28 children, pairing up each child with an officer with $50 to spend at the local Walmart, and while the love of this program was instant, several lessons were learned.

They realized the hero partner would have to ensure the child was spending the money on themselves as they often wanted to buy gifts for their family, and they also learned a child would simply not be able to pick out things for themselves if their sibling was left out.

The second year, Shop with a Cop branched out to include the California Highway Patrol and the Sheriff’s Office. The year after that, officers from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and Fish and Wildlife joined in.

“Year four is when we really ballooned,” Terra remembered.

With the addition of fire fighting agencies, medical personnel and other local heroes, Shop with a Cop was officially Holiday with a Hero in 2017.

Last year, Holiday with a Hero sponsored 172 children, and each was given $100 to spend as they please. Whether they wanted jackets and boots, or the latest Hatchimal, the children, paired with their hero and a volunteer, browsed the aisles during a very early December morning checking off the wishes on their lists.

Sometimes, though, the heroes go a little further.

Terra said she’ll get texts from participating heroes asking if she has updates on the child with which they were paired. Sometimes, they’ll even open their own wallets.

She recalled a year when two correctional officers gave more.

In 2015, two siblings had a plan. Never having had a Christmas tree before, one sibling planned to get the tree, the other the ornaments.

The correctional officers said no, and bought the tree and decorations themselves, so the siblings could pick out some gifts to put under their first Christmas tree. Even more, they loaded the festive goodies in their car and drove it to the family’s home.

“Every year, it just makes me so incredibly thankful we live where we live,” Terra said.

Holiday with a Hero officially became a non-profit last year, and it’s board, led by president Leon Myers, is jam packed with people from the community who eagerly anticipate the annual December event.

Board members include Leon, Terra, Secretary Elizabeth Darley, Jayson Vial, Karen McDaniel, Matt Williams, Nick McBride, Maryann Kiar, Rebecca Sanchez, Juanita Williams, Carla Dollar, Shannon Cook, Anthony Lane, Christi Myers, Dan Weaver, James Crandall, Elizabeth Ainsworth and Johnelle Wright — a mix of those from a host of different county agencies, groups, public health and community members.

However, it’s not only through the dedication of those working to put on the event that makes it so magical, it’s also the ongoing community support.

In the early years of the event, the Policemen’s Ball was the main source of funding. Held in either September or October, the tickets and raffle entries helped fund Holiday with a Hero.

When the Policemen’s Ball was unable to happen one year, though, local agencies stepped up to make sure the event was funded.

In 2018, posed with the possibility of a year without Holiday with a Hero, firefighters stood on the street corners with empty boots asking for community donations.

In one day, the community donated about $15,000.

Jessica Goni, with the Lassen County Sheriff’s Office reads the names of various toys to Holiday with a Hero participant Jasmine during the 2018 Holiday with a Hero event.

Photo by Makenzie Davis
In another instance of generosity, one day while grocery shopping, Terra was filling up her cart when a woman stopped her. After inquiring if Terra was the Holiday with a Hero lady, she reached into her purse to pull out $20 to donate to the program.

A few years prior, she told Terra, her kids were able to participate during a year they had nothing. Now, in a better position, she wanted to pay it forward.

Even participants from early years are coming back to serve as volunteers, and then there are the efforts of groups like the Lassen High School Associated Student Body that puts together age appropriate stockings with so much thought and care.

This year’s Holiday with a Hero will be different, as everything seems to be with COVID-19. The board has been working with public health and the plan is for the event to still go on, with the intention to sponsor 150 local children. This year, the first responders will be doing the shopping for the participants, and smaller groups of agencies will be doing light parades as they drive past the children’s houses to deliver the goodies. Another change this year is the issuing of Golden Tickets.

During past years the Holiday with a Hero team sifted through hundreds of nominations, trying to determine which local children could either use it financially, or to improve their connection with first responders. Now, local agencies and social services team have Golden Tickets on them to hand out to any family in need, and there is no waiting to see if they’re approved.

From that very first event in December 2014, Shop with a Cop has grown at what seems like an exponential rate, and Terra herself can hardly believe it.

What started as a single department idea has blossomed into a county and multi-agency wide event intended to serve underprivileged youth and those who might only have interacted with emergency personal when something bad happens; when there’s a fire, when a loved one is injured or an arrest is made. This event, though, provides an opportunity for children in the community to positively interact with local first responders in a positive environment. And many go above and beyond, forming connections, opening up their wallets and spreading love.

“Every year I just have these stories about how good our humans are,” Terra shared.

In a year of uncertainty, cancellations and postponed celebrations, Holiday with a Hero hopes to provide that moment of childhood joy – that unfiltered, silent expression of glee even in 2020.
step inside is all it takes to appreciate the grandeur. With its marble stairs, ornate and intricate designs around windows and doors and high ceilings lined with crown molding, the Lassen County Historic Courthouse, even mid-renovation, demands respect. More than 100 years ago, Lassen County residents voted in favor of a $100,000 bond: $20,000 of which would be set aside for the construction of a new hospital, and $80,000...
During the renovation of the South Lassen Street Historic Courthouse, crews are ensuring the safety and preservation of all historical aspects of the building.

Ornate detailing in the main entrance adds to the building’s uniqueness and grandeur. Photos by Makenzie Davis

for a new courthouse — a two story structure made of stone, terra cotta and marble.

By 1917, the commanding structure was finished and Lassen County courts, departments, weddings and trials worked, celebrated and dealt justice in the halls until the new Lassen Superior Court was constructed in 2012.

While the courts moved, county departments stayed, braving temperamental heating systems and aging infrastructure. The goal now is to modernize the building, ensure its safety and move the Lassen County Board of Supervisors board room and remaining departments to the Courthouse Square — a plan that’s currently on time — and on budget.

However, without the acquisition of nearly $8.4 million from legislative specified funding through the California Natural Resources Agency in 2018, the renovation of the courthouse square might not have been possible. The funding — which was encouraged along by former Lassen County Supervisor, then State Assemblyman, now District 1 State Senator Brian Dahle — ensures the seismic and ADA requirements needed to modernize and safeguard the historic building can be implemented.

Former longtime supervisor Jim Chapman appreciates Senator Brian Dahle for his hand in helping the county achieve this project.

“This has been a 40-year aspiration,” Jim said. “I think the funding Senator Dahle was able to obtain for us when he was in the assembly basically brings to reality that long held aspiration.”

When the county received the funding in 2018, they started working on a multi-step plan. First, they moved the departments to the annex behind the courthouse and then crews worked on the demolition phase, taking precautions to preserve all the historical aspects of the building. Now, the county is entering a formal and competitive bidding process for constructing seismic upgrades, Americans with Disabilities Act upgrades and life-safety improvements for the iconic Lassen County building.

When touring the Historic Courthouse with County Administrative Officer Richard Egan and Deputy Administrative Officer Tony Shaw in October, Brian surveyed the ongoing renovation, and remarked on the building’s qualities.

“I love this building, it’s a cool building. There is so much history here,” he said as he surveyed the partial third floor of the empty, mid-renovation stone courthouse.

Accessible by an aged staircase, the third floor of the building boasts the original windows and screens. Visible ductwork nestled amongst the framework even shows the date stamp of May 1915.

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The third floor of the building, called the

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attic, originally housed the jury chambers and a lounge room and eventually a law library, and while unrecognizable now, during the removal of important documents and historic artifacts, county officials unearthed the original law books used by the first Lassen County District Attorney, E. V. Spencer, who was chosen as the first district attorney in May 1864.

A surprise that came out of the recent demolition work, Richard noted during the October walk-through, was the discovery of the high ceilings in the hallways and department rooms — ceilings that had been lowered during previous renovations to cover duct work.

The county is also paying keen attention to preserving original fixtures, Tony said, including the pendant lights hanging in the main entrance and courtroom, along with the bulb lights near the judge’s bench. Even the whole marble slabs from the bathrooms were saved with the intention of being repurposed.

While the historic structure boasts intricate, breathtaking work, the building is not without its faults.

As teams took core samples from the more than a century old building, it became clear the Historic Courthouse on South Lassen Street needed work.

Essentially, the interior walls are metal lath and plaster, and during demolition when crews were tearing down the plaster walls to prepare for their reinforcement, brick interior walls that were labeled on the original blueprints were simply not there.

Current plans include the creation of concrete inner walls to stabilize the walls, according to Tony.

Prior to the Historic Courthouse’s construction, according to the California Supreme Court Historical Society website, the Masonic Lodge and the Magnolia Saloon served as courthouses until a two-story wooden building was constructed in 1867. Residents then approved the bond measure for the current...
building in 1915, with the building reaching completion in 1917.

According to Jim, the county has made efforts throughout the past several decades to upgrade the Courthouse Square, but “there was never adequate funding.”

Seismic studies were drawn up in the 1970s and ADA renovations were made to the entrance in the 1980s.

“We just did what we could to keep things together,” he said.

Now, the county is working to modernize and safeguard the structure, while making it efficient — but the historical qualities will not be lost.

Richard noted the new offices will be energy efficient and well lit. The temperature troubles — when it was “100 degrees in the summer and 100 degrees in the winter” — will be a thing of the past. Historic coil heaters, though, will be positioned for aesthetic purposes.

“This is our biggest public works project we’ve done in a long time,” Richard remarked.

A goal of the project is to not only make the offices better for county departments, but to bring the board of supervisors back on location.

The supervisors used to meet in the northeast corner of the second floor, Jim said, but moved to the annex behind the courthouse in the early 1960s. Then, they left Courthouse Square around 1987 along with various departments to the current 707 Nevada Street location.

Hopefully, through this project and the implementation of an elevator providing access to the second floor, the goal is to make the historic courtroom a hub for meetings, while retaining the character of the room.

This project allows the county to embrace its heritage and positions us for the future, Jim continued.

“As future generations come and go, paying their taxes, registering to vote, searching for property records, getting married, divorces, births — those are core activities,” Jim said. “It’s basically the capital for the county. Like the Capital Building is for the state, or the U.S. Capital building is for the nation in Washington, D.C.: A courthouse in a county seat is, in essence, the capital of the county. It’s where the core service of the county is maintained and performed. It’s our identity.”

The renovation is ongoing, and it was a longtime coming, but officials and community residents are eager for its completion. “I just can’t wait to see it done,” Jim said. [101]
INTRODUCING SUSANVILLE’S NEW HIGHWAY TO THE GAMING ZONE

By Glenda Svendsen
Special to High Country Life

Highway to the Gaming Zone, located at 1430 Main St., has opened up with gaming and entertainment options for everyone.

This gamers’ paradise offers 5,000 square feet of all types of media, old and new. From old school Atari consoles, 8-track and cassette tapes, vinyl and comics to every edition of Xbox, PlayStation and Game Boy, plus all the related action figures, characters and collectibles you love, there is literally something for everyone!

Kids and kids at heart can play classic arcade games including Marvel’s Superheroes, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Pac Man for free. There are also several tables situated throughout the store for groups to play board games, cards and Friday night Magic.

Or you might want to enjoy a game of pinball during your perusal of comic book and movie related poster art and memorabilia.

Gift certificates for the Highway to the Gaming Zone are appropriate for literally everyone on your gift list. Owner Thomas Herrera (who also serves as a Susanville City Councilmember) has a discerning eye for trending games, music, books, movies, Disneyana, new and vintage toys and high-end collectibles for the serious fan — because he’s a serious fan, too.

Having stumbled across his first comic book at the age of 8, he discovered more than adventure between the pages. A character’s symbolism, loyalty and decisions to use one’s power and strength for good versus evil spoke to him at a core level. Thomas embodies those character traits, which he grew to admire. His passion for gaming and public service are inseparable, and he believes the choices and rewards of studying the champions of his youth can effect change for good in all of us.

Thomas’ example of perseverance is certainly inspiring. He originally opened up shop in 2018 and drawing near to the first anniversary of his dream store, it flooded three times in succession resulting in about $60,000 in lost inventory. Not one to be dissuaded, he obtained a new building and bravely reopened last July during a pandemic. Lucky us.

Another service offered at Highway to the Gaming Zone is on-site repair of most gaming consoles and electronics — the perfect solution for the gamer or techie in your life.

To check out the thousands of games they have in stock or for an enjoyable shopping experience, head over to Highway to the Gaming Zone were everything really is fun and games — and more! HCL

Owner Thomas Herrera offers 5,000 square feet of all types of media, old and new.
Photo by Glenda Svendsen
Music to brighten your holiday festivities this Christmas

By Sam Williams
swilliams@lassennews.com

K. OK. OK, already. Guilty as charged!

Yes, I was born in the 1950s, so when I think of recommending Christmas music to anyone, I freely admit I tend to slide back into the happy and warm holiday seasons of my youth — a comfort zone of sorts for me.

Is that bad? Well, I guess that depends upon your perspective. For those youngsters who stubbornly believe the world began when they became self aware, please allow me to linger in my past preferences a little while longer before I spotlight some newer stuff you may enjoy, too.

‘The Beatles Christmas Album’

by The Beatles

Most of us who were alive and at least semi-conscious in February 1964 will vividly remember the explosion that occurred when the Beatles hit the stage at the Ed Sullivan Theatre in New York — the exact moment in time when youth culture launched its rebellion against the older generation and these long haired, Cuban-heeled, yeah, yeah, yeah musicians showed us how much fun we could all have if we just followed their example.

While it wasn’t the band’s American television debut (that honor belongs to NBC News and a Huntley-Brinkley Report contemplating the hysteria created by the Fab Four among English teenage girls that aired on Nov. 18, 1963), that first Ed Sullivan Show appearance proved to be perhaps the biggest step in the band’s rise to worldwide fame and fortune, and their Christmas Album launches my list of Christmas music for you to consider this holiday season. Yes, for better or ill, these four lads from Liverpool profoundly changed America and the world the evening of Feb. 9, 1964.

Let me be clear — this is not a collection of time-honored Christmas carols performed ala Scouse by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, it is a collection of Christmas messages delivered to fan club members every year between 1963 and 1969, including a number of skits and fragments of mostly original songs delivered in their manic style, although a listener can’t help but notice how the weight of Beatlemania crushed their cheeky exuberance as the years passed. Now available on both vinyl and CD, if you have a hard-core Beatles collector in the house, a box set of seven, 7-inch vinyl 45s can be had for like $140. Yikes — that’s $20 bucks each!

I make everybody in my house crazy because this is one I just have to listen to every year. My favorites are “Yesterday” (performed as “Christmas Day” and “Everywhere It’s Christmas!”

‘White Christmas’

by Bing Crosby

Irving Berlin’s “White Christmas” was recorded in 1942 before I was born, but it is believed to be the best-selling single record of all time. Crosby’s “White Christmas” album was released as a set of 10 songs on five 78-RPM records in 1945 and has remained in print ever since, although with different track listings. The current version includes “Silent Night,” “God
Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen,” “Jingle Bells,” “It’s Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas” and more.

‘The Christmas Song’
by Nat King Cole
Nat King Cole has to be one of the smoothest crooners of all time, and his renditions of Christmas favorites must be among the best every recorded. “Chestnuts roasting on an open fire,” probably lights our holiday fire like no other song can. Cole’s trio first recorded the song in 1946, and he revisited it several times.

‘The Christmas Album’
by Elvis Presley
How could I possibly compile a list of Christmas albums and not include this 1957 smash from the King himself — considered to be the biggest selling Christmas album of all time. Here you can find “Blue Christmas,” “Silent Night” and “I’ll Be Home For Christmas.” If there are any Elvis heads in the house, you could also look for “Elvis Sings The Wonderful World Of Christmas.”

‘The Christmas Album’
by Neil Diamond
Here’s another one for boomers like me from Neil Diamond, a musician who kicked off his career in the 1960s. The 1992 album includes “jingle Bell Rock,” “O Holy Night” and John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s “Happy Xmas (War Is Over).”

Some readers also may enjoy the folksy arrangements on Diamond’s “Acoustic Christmas” from 2016. With 10 Number 1 singles and more than 11 million records sold, Diamond

‘Elvis’ Christmas Album’
by Elvis Presley
How could I possibly compile a list of Christmas albums and not include this 1957 smash from the King himself — considered to be the biggest selling Christmas album of all time. Here you can find “Blue Christmas,” “Silent Night” and “I’ll Be Home For Christmas.” If there are any Elvis heads in the house, you could also look for “Elvis Sings The Wonderful World Of Christmas.”

‘Christmas Interpretations’
by Boyz II Men
Hey, don’t you dare forget Motown as you gather your holiday music this year! While the Boyz take on some holiday favorites like “Silent Night” and “Let It Snow” in their own rhythm and blues style, they wrote much of the album.

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Beach Boys’ Christmas Album
by the Beach Boys
Ah, the boys from Hawthorne in Southern California rode the waves of the Beach Boys’ Christmas Album — recorded in 1964 — with all the harmony their five voices could create.

The album includes a mixture of self-penned holiday numbers ("Little Saint Nick" and "The Man With All The Toys") as well as classics such as "We Three Kings Of Orient Are," "Auld Lang Syne" and "Frosty The Snowman."

A Christmas Gift For You
From Phil Spector
by Phil Spector
Although he’s probably best known these days for his run in with the law (he’s a convicted murderer), Phil Spector’s contribution to popular music and music production (his famous “Wall Of Sound”) will stand forever. This album, originally from 1963, features many of Spector’s acts (The Ronettes, The Crystals and Darlene Love) taking on popular songs such as “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer,” “Winter Wonderland and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus."

Some industry insiders believe there would not be a Christmas album market today if Spector had not released this gem nearly 60 years ago.

‘Pentatonix Christmas’ by Pentatonix
Pentatonix, a five-piece a cappella band, quite simply must be heard to be believed. Not only does the band deliver outstanding vocal harmonies from the bassiest bottom to the highest soprano, one member is actually an excellent beatboxer, imitating the percussive sounds of a drum kit with his mouth. If you haven’t heard these singers with your own ears, you’re in for an unforgettable holiday treat.

For the most part, the album mixes classics such as “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” and “O Come All Ye Faithful” with more modern material.

‘Mannheim Steamroller Christmas’ by Mannheim Steamroller
First released 1984, the eclectic synthpop-driven sounds of Mannheim Steamroller have become enduring holiday staples over the years. Material on this CD includes “Deck The Halls,” “we Three Kings” and “Stille Nacht.”

A compilation CD, “Christmas Celebration” is also available.

A final note
This list of holiday offerings is by no means complete. If you’re looking for holiday music, you can’t go too far wrong if you pick up holiday records by artists you already know.

Happy listening and Merry Christmas, too.
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Longtime American Valley Hardware store owners Mary and Gary Vogt of Quincy have sold their business to delighted new proprietors Alida and Alex Westerberg from the Petaluma-Santa Rosa area. Honey, the couple’s 8-year-old German shepherd, keeps them company at the shop.

By Roni Java
Special to High Country Life

It’s here, that most wonderful time of the year, when the air is crisp throughout the Lost Sierra and we bundle up and count our blessings.

So it’s especially rewarding to see two local dreams coming true this season, bringing together the wishes of four people who all wanted essentially the same thing — a chance to slow down a bit, begin a new kind of day-to-day living and enjoy more of everything they care about.

There’s a trendy term for that nowadays; they call it lifestyle design. Some people just call it happiness.

Trading busy Bay Area lives for the peace of pristine Plumas County

Stopping by the iconic American Valley Hardware store in downtown Quincy on a bright day in late autumn, you might be surprised to see a new member of the team laying down on the job.

Honey, an 8-year-old black and tan German shepherd, has her own pillow in the office and she’s a shop dog who lives up to her name in every way. She’s sweet, beautiful and affectionate to all — especially her human folks, Alex and Alida Westerberg, who are the proud new owners of the hardware store.

Until earlier this fall, the Westerbergs were two busy Bay Area professionals building a good life together in the Santa Rosa-Petaluma area. Things were good.

Alida is an accomplished equestrian and registered dietitian with a decade in health care. Alex is a fix-it guy who is also a finance expert and international business consultant with a background in agriculture, high tech and the wine industry.

But these entrepreneurs were dreaming of creating a quieter life with a solid sense of community. Some place where they could stretch out.

Coincidentally, Quincy’s much-loved and longtime American Valley Hardware storeowners, Gary and Mary Vogt, were feeling ready to retire. It was a big decision.

“We’d been thinking about retiring for a while, and then we began to get serious about finding a buyer,” Gary said, taking time out from his to-do list to talk with this writer.

Honey the shop dog settled into her spot and Mary, Alex and Alida gathered at a goodly social distance with facemasks secured.

“We were ready to start spending holidays with our family,” Mary said, chuckling over in her corner.

“With our crazy schedule, that’s been a challenge and I always have to be the one to cook the turkey! Now, we’d like to pass that torch on to a couple of our daughters. Let somebody else cook, I’ll bring the side dishes! And we’ll have more time with our grandchildren.”

You could say things are working out great all the way around and you’d be right. The way it came together is a cheery holiday tale for sure.

Two dreams and one happy deal

Before they ever met the Vogts, when Alex saw the hardware store up for sale, he looked at Alida and had a hunch they’d found what they were looking for.

And by September, Mary and Gary recognized in the young couple a familiar streak of can-do attitudes and community spirit, so they welcomed them up to have a look around.

The Vogts had felt a similar calling back in 1982 when they left their careers with PG&E and opened the Quincy store, leaving the Bay Area to come up and be part of a community they already loved. (Gary is a 1965 Quincy High grad.)

In fact, the Vogts have described raising their daughters in Plumas County as a blessing — Amelia, the eldest, and the twins Sarah and Catherine, all of whom graduated from QHS, too.

The Vogts say small-town living brought them into contact with people making a difference locally, like booster clubs, seniors’ or children’s programs, local schools and others.

Today, those quality-of-life issues are tops on the Westerbergs’ list as well.

“Alex had his eye out,” Alida said with a shy smile. “He was looking at a variety of businesses that were for sale and when this one came across his desk, he told me this looked really good.”

He told her it was a hardware store in Quincy and asked if she had ever heard of the place? As a matter of fact, she had.

Alida is a native Californian, born and raised in Santa Rosa. She earned her B.S. in Clinical Nutrition at U.C. Davis in 2010. She knew just where Quincy was and how beautiful the region is because she grew up riding horses and used to visit a friend of hers at Feather River College during their student days.

No question about it, Alex and Alida had to see the business and headed up to Plumas County. In short order, they struck a deal.

By late September, the Westerbergs moved into a cozy rental in Graeagle and the sale of the American Valley Hardware store closed Oct. 23. Immediately, the proud new owners began training with the best hometown hardware experts around.

Now, the four business people are busier than ever. And they love it.

“This is fun!” Alex said later, between jobs out on the store floor.

Alida adjusted a display of snow shovels and agreed. “There’s so much we loved about this store and why we wanted to be here. It’s not only hardware, it’s a general store for the community with some of everything.”

Kind of a strange story

Still, owning and running a shop in a town of 5,500 is a far piece from the pace of San Francisco and the wine country.

“I have a very strange story,” Alex said during the interview. Mary, Gary, Alida and the reporter all laughed out loud.

Alex was born in San Francisco and raised in a little Oregon farming town called Harrisburg, between Eugene and Corvallis. He grew up surrounded by agriculture, working on his family’s grass-seed farm.

In 2009, he graduated from the University of Oregon (Go Ducks!) with a bachelor’s degree in English literature.

“And then I got into finance after college,” he said. “I founded a tech company but I wasn’t one of those millennials forming dot-coms all the time. It was a mobile tech company. We were the first people in the country to create a mobile wallet, what became, you know, Apple Pay and those kinds of things. We were first to market with that, but unfortunately, it didn’t work out.”

Alex moved down to California in 2011 where he went into the wine industry. Working in both Napa and Sonoma counties, Alex honed his executive skills in vineyard management.

Which is how he met and fell in love with Alida during a romantic date in 2013 at the famous Willi’s Wine Bar in Santa Rosa. The restaurant was lost in the tragic Tubbs Fire of 2017, but has since rebuilt in another spot.

Was it their hope to launch their own vineyard?

“You know, maybe one day,” Alex said thoughtfully. “My parents still have their grass-seed farm back in Oregon. And we’ve always
talked about maybe planting some vines there one day, but it’s right on the river and pretty cold and wet. So we’ll see, maybe one day.”

During those wine country years, Alex also earned his MBA in international consulting at the University of San Francisco. He worked with a startup that was creating sustainable packaging for the wine industry. And that’s how he now finds himself co-owning the hardware store with Alida in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. “Wait, how’s that?

“I got really excited about joining up with the startup,” Alex recalled. “And because I was in that environment, helping to build and establish this business, it really lit the bug in me to get back into business again for myself. You’ve just got to trust, really trust your gut and your intuition.”

Alida shares that vision and said, “You never know where life will take you. And this, it just felt right.”

**Boldness, genius, power and magic**

It’s one thing to dream and another thing entirely to make a plan and take action. The Westerbergs are action-oriented folks and meeting Gary and Mary Vogt changed everything for them.

“Alex and I had gotten really clear that we wanted to move somewhere where we would have some space,” Alida said. “And I wanted to have horses.”
Her husband wanted property with space for a shop and room to build motorcycles, something he loved doing as a young fellow in Oregon.

The couple hopes to find a more permanent home closer to the store in 2021, a spot where they can stretch out and get to know their neighbors, Alex said.

Alida loves to cook and she chose a career as a dietician so she could help people. It’s in her nature. Alex loves fixing things and helping people solve problems.

“This business and all of that stuff put together, when I first looked at it, I thought oh my gosh, this is exactly what I want to be doing,” Alex said, explaining that growing up on a farm meant he was always repairing something.

“My whole early life, I was working on cars and motorcycles and doing construction projects in the summer to earn money when I was in college,” he added. “So I’ve spent a lot of time in hardware stores and always had a fascination for them. So it just felt like an absolute perfect fit for the things that we had decided were important to us in our lives.”

A different pace in a gorgeous place

Just as Gary and Mary were deciding they wanted to travel and take life a little easier, still living in Quincy but having time for new pursuits and family, Alida and Alex were imagining a new life away from traffic jams and the future prospects of tiny properties with gigantic price tags.

He and Alida chose Plumas County for their new life as small business owners because they want to be able to enjoy their lives together and build a legacy in a way that reflects what they want out of life. But there is definitely something more at stake, too.

“The business that Mary and Gary have built here really appealed to us,” Alex said, “but the fact that we could be in a community like Quincy, with the college and access to the mountains…there’s so much space here and living without being in traffic! I mean, just being able to find a parking spot!”

Thanks and appreciation for the team’s commitment and expertise

In all seriousness, though, the Westerbergs said that even with all their prior business experience, this new venture has been surprising and impressive.

“Wow, just the amount of products the store carries and the knowledge that Gary and Mary and the staff have,” Alex commented. “Every day, constantly, when I come in and I ask somebody about something — you know, where can I find this? Or where is this? The staff here, they don’t even have to think about it. They know exactly where it is in the store and how to fix it and how to apply it.”

Alida and Alex are grateful for the degree of business knowledge, experience and expertise they’re inheriting at the store.

Mary explained she and Gary are helping the Westerbergs make the transition to business ownership by being available for a while in person and on the job.

“I think it’s also nice to have us here not just for Alex and Alida and the staff, but for the community to come in and say goodbye or, you know, be able to have a moment where we are both working in the store and can spend some time with them,” Mary said.

10 Days of Christmas Fundraiser Benefit will continue

As the interview came to a close and the storeowners past and present started moving back to their work, the topic of the Vogts’ popular holiday donation program arose.

Would the Westerbergs continue to sponsor the program, which benefits different area nonprofits during the holiday shopping season?

For the last five years, a percentage of the Vogts’ gross sales from Dec. 15 through 24 have been donated to local nonprofits. The holiday campaign raises about $3,000 each season that is split among the organizations — helping schools, scouting troops, veterans’ services, hospice programs, sports teams and local food pantry projects, among many others.

Alida and Alex agreed they would like to sponsor the holiday fundraiser and asked community representatives to come by the store and introduce themselves, explain what their programs do and say hello.

“We’re really excited to meet everyone and to become a part of the community and carry the torch that Mary and Gary have established with this wonderful business,” Alida said with a grin. “In fact, we’re keeping their tradition and actually assuming exactly the same schedules.”

Alex chimed in, “Alida will be here in the mornings and I’ll be here from midday until closing. Maybe that’s funny, but you know — why mess with success, right? It’s not broke, so don’t fix it.”

Sounds like a terrific attitude for two new hardware store owners.
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A collaboration from Lassen County and Plumas County Public Health

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Curtis Bortle didn’t always intend to open Lassen County’s first recreational and medical cannabis dispensary, Canna Junction — it was a matter of opportunity, an idea that struck doors that opened.

About three years ago he went to his first Lassen County Board of Supervisors meeting, dressed in slacks and a button up: He noted there’s importance in dressing for the job you want.

“l didn’t know exactly where the county was at with it,” Curtis said of that first time he went to a supervisors meeting. “I knew they had some cultivation laws and things like that, and I had intended to just go to a board of supervisors meeting and pitch dispensaries. Fortunately, that same day they were discussing a referendum on cultivation aspects, so it was kind of like a good opportunity.”

In 2016 California residents passed Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act, which allowed adults 21 years of age or older to legally grow, possess and use cannabis for non-medicinal purposes with certain restrictions. Additionally, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act also made it legal to sell and distribute cannabis through a regulated business as of Jan. 1, 2018.
Statewide, Proposition 64 passed with about 57 percent of the vote. In Lassen County, according to the Secretary of State website, about 45 percent of voters were in favor of Prop 64, 54 percent against. In neighboring Plumas County, about 52 percent of voters were in favor and about 48 percent against.

The road from the passing of Proposition 64 to the opening of Lassen County’s first recreational cannabis dispensary was lengthy; there were calls to take it slow, groups formed against the passing of a measure that would enable the taxing of potential commercial operations and there were numerous public comment opportunities and title amendments.

From the vote to the dispensary

Although locals voted Prop 64 down in 2016, in January 2017, Lassen County officials knew a decision would soon have to be made regarding their position on cannabis business. Lassen County Counsel Bob Burns presented supervisors with the idea of putting a temporary ban on marijuana-related activity, and they formed an ad hoc committee, too, comprised of supervisors Chris Gallagher and David Teeter.

Come September, October and November 2017, a few months before the state could start issuing licenses for recreational cannabis activities, including dispensaries, the county’s theme stayed firm: Elected officials did not want Lassen County to be a guinea pig in the state’s new endeavor, according to a past article in the Lassen County Times.

“I don’t want to rush into this. I want staff to take the work that we’re talking about and provide something for us that gives us the best chance of success,” David said during a November 2017 meeting.

Others agreed. During an October 2017 meeting, Chris Gallagher said, “We would rather get it right, if we can, from the beginning and move forward.”

In November 2018, Lassen County voters approved Measure M, which allowed the county the right to tax commercial cannabis operations, should licenses be allowed.

“I believe the vote shows we can take the next steps towards a dispensary and carefully regulated commercial medical cannabis cultivation,” David, who was for the measure, said after its passage. “At the same time, these new businesses have to show they can be good actors in our community and mitigate the negative effects of their products.”

There was a movement against Measure M, though, during the months leading up to the vote.

The Citizens Against Measure M — which consisted of elected official and community members — held various town hall meetings pushing for residents to vote no on the measure they claimed was a fiscally irresponsible idea. The group alleged the acquisition of cannabis related funds would put local money at risk, since cannabis is still illegal under federal law.

Months later, though, the nods of some Lassen County Board of Supervisors’ heads during a 2019 meeting prompted staff to look into dispensaries within the county.

“Staff has been seeking direction on where to go with cannabis,” Lassen County Planning and Building Director Maury Anderson said during a March 2019 meeting. “I think I heard the majority of this board shows some interest in biting this elephant one bite at a time, and I think the majority of what I heard was maybe a dispensary would be a good start.”

With the majority of answers being nods of approval, and Supervisor Aaron Albaugh giving a clear shake of disagreement, Anderson asked...
the board for direction on “how you want it and how many of the dispensaries you want.”

By mid-August 2019, the board of supervisors approved an amendment to the Title 18 of the county code, in a 3-1 vote, allowing for commercial cannabis dispensaries and testing facilities.

However, during this process, there were some concerns brought up from community members regarding not only potential dispensaries, but the commercial cultivation of cannabis as well, which was nixed from the proposed amendments.

Public comments throughout the years from residents varied from the dangers of cannabis, illegal grows taking water, alleged health risks and the concern of selling of the still federally illegal drug in Lassen County.

During that August meeting, almost 30 speakers voiced their opinions during the public hearing.

Among them was Dr. Steven Braatz, who presented the board with a letter from the Banner Lassen Medical Executive Committee opposing the amendments, according to the Lassen County Times article.

“We, the Medical Executive Committee of Banner Lassen Medical Center, wish to express our strong opposition to your proposed amendments to Title 18 of the Lassen County Code, allowing and fostering promotion of cannabis dispensaries, cannabis testing facilities and commercial cannabis cultivation in Lassen County,” read the letter, which also included statements about studies allegedly linking cannabis with various disorders, and THC related traffic accidents.

There were also comments made on not changing the way of life in Lassen County.

“A lot of people live here ... because they like it the way it is. To come along with an economic development proposal ... that could potentially change the face of the county, just remember a lot of us like it the way it is,” said resident Jack Hansen.

Also during that meeting, Lassen County Sheriff Dean Growdon said he was opposed to the commercialization of cannabis since the beginning in Lassen County, but with the understanding it may soon become legalized, he started working on an enforcement plan, saying he and his deputies, despite stretched resources, would continue to work and serve the community.

However, those in favor of the new business opportunities shared their views, with some mentioning an increased risk of black market activity could be possible if commercial operations were shunned.

Additional concerns brought up focused on whether the intended location, at 702-040 Johnstonville Road, was within the city of Susanville’s sphere of influence.

Ultimately, the amendments made in the board of supervisors boardroom stuck, allowing for the new business in Lassen.

A few months later, when the county amended the ordinance to allow for a dispensary in industrial zones to apply for a land use permit during a December 2019 meeting — since, according to David, the
original requirements were “too stringent” severely limiting where a dispensary could be zoned — there was some more push back.

Gary Bridges, now District 1 Supervisor-elect, spoke, saying he was concerned the changes were just for the “convenience” of getting a dispensary closer to Susanville.

From there, Curtis had to have a use permit approved for the dispensary and then started improvements on the building’s interior and exterior, adding automatically locking doors, and placing a security person at the front door to check identification of those stopping by.

Ultimately, as supervisor during this process, David added his goal was to bring new business to the area.

“I was always just looking for new economic outlets for Lassen County,” he said.

**Why Canna Junction?**

The local cannabis dispensary’s owner, operator and CEO expected some push back.

Curtis grew up in Susanville. His family moved to the area when he was 7 years old, his father in corrections and his mother working at the local hospital, and living in an area of town with many correctional officers, he felt he could never get away with much.

Growing up here and knowing the political climate, Curtis said he was unsure of how successful a cannabis dispensary could or would be in the area, but after working on it for a couple of years, it became less of a concern.

“I really think cannabis is a unique opportunity. I was trying to convince the board of supervisors to not miss the boat on this one. The industry is still going,” Curtis said in an October interview, a few months after Canna Junction’s soft opening.

Canna Junction opened for deliveries to Lassen and Plumas counties in August, and the dispensary opened for in-person visits in September.

Before all the supervisor and planning commission meetings, the county code amendments and public hearings, Curtis’ friend was expressing his desire to quit his job and open up a cannabis store, and he asked Curtis to help research the new laws.

What started as asking Curtis for help figuring out the new laws, turned into Curtis taking the reigns and bringing on his friend as manager.

Having served in the military, and having friends who suffered from PTSD, or who were addicted to opioids, Curtis’ own views on cannabis began to change.

“It’s inherently important to me that people can choose the life they want to live,” he said.

Once the idea of opening up a cannabis dispensary in his hometown formed, Curtis began traveling up from Sacramento, where he served in the California Army National Guard, to attend local meetings.

Once the ball got rolling, it did take some time, and there was some political pressure, but Curtis said the county departments were helpful.

“The county was pretty understanding and pretty willing to work with me ... the planning and building department, specifically, has been pretty easy to work with for the most part. It could have been easier, but this was also the first dispensary,” said Curtis. “There were some things we were kind of learning together at the same time, or kind of figuring out together.”

Not only does the dispensary bring jobs — it currently employs about 12 people including budtenders, security, delivery drivers and office staff — it generates local tax revenue.

Curtis said the store is generating about $6,000 in tax revenue every month, and recently Richard Egan noted cannabis tax revenue, received from both legal and illegal operations, was actually a bright spot in the recently approved county budget.

However, Richard also noted it was too early to really see the benefits from the dispensary.

While Curtis is excited for the new venture, he is also aware there may be those who aren’t in favor of the new storefront in Lassen County. If people have any concerns, Curtis said he hopes people would stop by the dispensary and talk to him.

“That was also my interest in opening this. To provide a well-regulated, efficient, reputable business that’s transparent and forthcoming in the community,” Curtis said.

“It’s really not as scary as everyone makes it out to be. I’m a veteran, I have no criminal background, I grew up here. I’m a normal person, and I’m very accessible ... it’s not like cannabis is this boogeyman, it’s a normal industry.

“It requires a level of transparency and professionalism and normalcy that any other business would require in order to function. That level of legitimacy is on business owners and people in the cannabis industry to conduct themselves as such the entire time.”
Plumas Arts is located at 525 Main St. in Quincy. Photo by Margaret Elysia Garcia

THE QUEEN OF ARTS
Plumas Arts executive director passes the torch after 34 years

By Margaret Elysia Garcia
margaretelysiagarcia@thestudy.us

Plumas Arts gallery is cheery and warm on a fall afternoon in Quincy with beautiful eye-catching work from local artists displayed on the walls. The mood among the women in the room is just as vibrant, welcoming — and transition filled.

Roxanne Valladao, the executive director of Plumas Arts for the past 34 years, has begun her retirement — sort of. She's still around to show new executive director Kara Rockett-Arsenault the ropes.

"How do you fit 34 years into a few paragraphs?" says Valladao when asked to talk about the highlights of her time at the nonprofit organization that has provided support for artists, arts education in schools, and enrichment for the community for 39 years.

The organization, which began in 1981, grew up under her direction, which began in 1986. Valladao's children were still babies when she thought she could do a good job with the art barn and help showcase art better in the county — the beginning of her tenure with the organization.

Back then, the Plumas County Arts Commission was a tiny office in a back office of what was then Epilog bookstore on Main Street. She worked 20 hours a week to grow the organization.

It next moved across the street to a brick office building. It was a tiny space to showcase the artwork created by community artists, and desks took up too much space in the gallery, but it's what the organization could afford.

Fast forward to 2015 and Captain Carl leaving funds to Plumas Arts, which were used to purchase the historic Capital Club building after the bar it housed closed down. During renovations, speculations surrounding the building's original use were put to rest, (brothel won — hairpins in the floorboards).

The Capitol Building becoming the new home of Plumas Arts is an especially sweet
moment for Valladao. She loves how it brought community together to create the gallery space. “I watched 12 local carpenters in teams of three in five hours put in the floor,” said Valladao. “It’s one thing to have a dream; it’s another thing to see it realized and manifested before your eyes.”

“We have passionate, phenomenal supporters and a ton of sweat equity in this building,” Valladao continued.

For Valladao, living a good portion of her life as the director of Plumas Arts provides her with a unique opportunity to reflect. While she didn’t start with a specific professional background in arts administration, she’s grown into the job and appreciated the training and support available from the cohort of other arts organizations around the state. “It’s been an amazing fit for someone with a unique set of skills,” Valladao said.

“Funding for arts organizations is always challenging — arts are often at the bottom of the food chain — I wanted people to care and build community — and they do,” said Valladao. The California Arts Council provides art organizations around the state with training, peer groups, education. Some of her past ideas came from meeting with other arts leaders. She didn’t want Plumas Arts to suffer from Eeyore disease — where all is glum if the financial situation isn’t perfect. There’s always something you can try and do even in the most difficult times.

She points to Plumas Arts as an example of an organization that serves the whole county — an organization that provides arts for everyone across all demographics.

For both women, the highlights are the many musical performances and cultural events Plumas Arts has been able to host over the years. They’ve had Johnny Klegg, Ballet Folklorico, and Taiko Drumming performances to name just a few, with an eclectic mix of sights and sounds.
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Some of local artist Norma DeBaker’s art work on display at the Lassen County Arts Council. Photos submitted

Lassen County Arts Council hosts Holiday Member Show and Sale

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The Lassen County Arts Council hosts a Holiday Member Show and Sale this December at its gallery, located at 807 Cottage St. in Susanville.

The Lassen County Arts Council offers the community a variety of services and programs including concerts, gallery exhibits, art classes and workshops. It also provides opportunities for artists to meet, exchange ideas, perform, sell their artwork and promote their talent. The Lassen County Arts Council also stocks art supplies and offers discounts for members.

The Holiday Members Art Show and Sale is expected to offer works of art in all mediums from its artists — drawing, painting, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, fiber arts and more.

While at deadline it’s too early to tell which arts council members will display their work at the Holiday Member Show and Sale, popular arts council member artist Norma DeBaker will have her art there for sure.

Norma moved to the Susanville area in 1990, and she said she’s enjoyed many advantages since then. She’s expanded her love of art by attending classes in ceramics, stain and fused glass design and working in silver jewelry smithing. She also became locally recognized for her multi-cultured, hand-formed sculptures, masks and ceramic figurines, silver wrapped dichroic glass jewelry and fused glass art.

She’s been an artist most of her life. Norma said she began drawing Disney characters as a young child of 7, and despite her young age went on to win art competitions. Encouraged by her mother in her love of art, she studied commercial, medical and fine arts in Texas. While studying, she also taught art to children and adults with disabilities.

After she moved to California, she received her first career opportunity in the arts by working for General Electric as an illustrator in their Nuclear Energy Division. Then she and her family moved to Alaska during the building of the Alyeska pipeline where she continued to work full-time jobs illustrating for the U.S. Department of Interior in the public affairs and photogrammetry departments. While working full time, Norma also worked as a freelance artist, creating murals, brochures, displays and other technical art, and illustrating children’s books on the Alaska Native culture.

Norma and her family built a home in the Elysian Valley in Janesville where she continues to create the art she loves.

Her past accomplishments include the Westwood Agriculture Display, Lassen Capital Display, Sacramento State Fair Display, Bilingual Brochures for the Department of Health and Human Services and window designs for local businesses.

She also creates one-of-a-kind Memorial jewelry and items for past loved ones and pets. Currently you will find her work at Artisan Coffee and Gallery on Church Street in Janesville. Email her for private showings at debakernorma@yahoo.com or to set up a show in your home.

And don’t forget — Norma is only one of many arts council members whose work will be on display at the Holiday Show and Sale.

The gallery’s regular hours are from 4 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays.

For more information, call the Lassen County Arts Council at (530) 257-5222.

Local artist Norma DeBaker is well known for her beautiful work with jewelry and glass. Photos submitted

Here’s something you don’t see everyday! A Lassen County Arts Council member painted the Grinch on this piece of driftwood she found at Lake Almanor.
Some folks will tell you musicianship seems to run in their families; somehow this magical musical ability just seems to flow seamlessly from one generation to the next. Others will talk about the unexpected rise of a great family musician seemingly out of nowhere.

Actually, these two extremes exist on the outer fringes of reality, and for most of us, it’s really not all that simple. So here’s the truth — regardless of the wealth or poverty of your musical genes or the discovery of a family member’s wonderful unforeseen gift, most accomplished musicians will tell you nothing much happens in the musical realm without a lot of hard work, dedication and love. There’s so much to learn and digest, practice and perfect, that musicianship — like many of the good things in life — is a journey, not a destination.

And for every musician, that satisfying and joyful journey begins with their first instrument — frequently one they receive from a family member at a special occasion such as Christmas. Anybody who knows anything about purchasing an instrument online will share...

Could a musical Christmas be in your family’s future?

By Sam Williams
swilliams@lassennews.com
the perils of making such an online purchase — especially if you don’t know exactly what you’re buying. The best antidote? Visit a local music store that features a variety of musical instruments in all price ranges and an experienced and knowledgeable staff that can advise you and help you make the very best, informed decisions. Luckily for us in Northeastern California, we have such a cure.

Donnell’s Musicland — located just half a block south of Highway 89 in Greenville, a small community in Plumas County — may seem like an unusual place to find the answers to all your musical questions and the birthplace of a family member’s musical ambitions, but it is, in fact, the only music store in Lassen and Plumas counties. In addition to the Greenville store, Musicland is also in partnership with The Toy Store in Quincy and the store offers a display of instruments.

“People who don’t want to drive all the way to Greenville can stop by The Toy Store and find most everything they need there,” Ken said. “It’s a great place. I’m very happy to be associated with them. They’re first-class people.”

Ken’s interest in running a music store and a repair business comes from his simple and deep love of music.

“Fortunately, I’ve been doing this my whole life,” Ken said, “and it’s almost like a hobby business. I could probably run a music store in my sleep. I do it because I just love being out with people and helping people play music. It’s my contribution to the community.”

The Musicland staff shares Ken’s up close and personal love of music, so don’t expect to be waited on by some pimply-faced, teenage, wanna-be-guitar-god-brat, bashing out “Smoke On The Water” in the wrong key, either. Don’t forget, owner Ken Donnell, a singer/songwriter from the Texas songwriting tradition inhabited by Townes Van Zandt, Lucinda Williams, Lyle Lovett and many others, performed his own original songs for many years on a jumbo acoustic guitar he built for himself, and he personally created and tailored his shop to serve the wants and needs of his local community. He said visitors to the store will find items in nearly every price range, although he admits he doesn’t carry expensive, collectable or vintage instruments because they are simply not what his customers are after.

“We’ve got a great inventory of new and used musical instrument gear at reasonable prices — guitars, basses, hand drums, some trap sets, musical accessories, children’s instruments, bow instruments such as cellos, violins and even an upright bass — and we’re ready to serve all the people around here who want to share the gift of music for
Christmas,” Ken said. “Pretty much anything with strings — we’ve got a pretty good selection. And we’ve got a lot of ukuleles, they’re pretty popular right now. Twenty years ago you could hardly give a ukulele away, even a good ukulele, but right now they’re the hottest thing going in stringed instruments.”

Ken readily accepts the limitations of running a music store in a little mountain town.

“We have to focus more on the low to moderate price range,” Ken said. “It’s hard for us on the upper price range because the margins are so small and the internet is so active with people going after those high-end sales.”

Still, Ken is a stickler for both quality and value for the items in his store.

“Everything is inspected and tested by me,” Ken said. “I make sure it’s high quality, represents a good value, and it’s ready to be used.”

And if you buy an instrument at Musicland that no longer fits your needs and desires, the store can help you out.

“We’re happy to take things back, because we only sell good stuff,” Ken said. “So if somebody outgrows it and they want to return it, we’re happy to make that happen. In a small community like this one, your reputation is everything. We don’t want anyone to have a bad experience, if possible.”

And even though Musicland is a store in a tiny mountain town, it offers world-class repairs and service.

You see, Ken also has skills as a luthier — he formerly handled warranty repairs for some of America’s biggest guitar companies including Ovation, Gibson, Martin, Guild and Taylor before launching his own guitar microphone business.

“Competent luthiers are hard to find, and that’s one of the things that draws them in from far and wide, that I can work on virtually any instrument made with strings,” Ken said. “I just love working on stringed musical instruments. I love building them, too.”

And here’s one for you — in his spare time Ken operates the MiniFlex microphone company that sells guitar microphone amplification systems for every level of guitarist.

Musicland’s holiday hours, pandemic permitting, will be from noon to 6 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and by appointment.

For more information or to make an appointment, text Ken’s cell phone at (530) 566-2561.

“I can respond, we’ll set up a time to meet, and they can have their own personal tour of the music store,” Ken said.

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If you’re having issues with your stringed musical instrument and you don’t know where to go to have it serviced or repaired, Ken Donnell, owner of Musicland in Greenville, has been responsible for warranty repairs for some of America’s biggest guitar companies including Ovation, Gibson, Martin, Guild and Taylor. Photo submitted
Christmas morning is an exciting and joyous time for families. Children are anxious to rush downstairs and see what Santa has left under the tree, and parents are eager to see the looks on youngsters’ happy faces.

Having a fast and easy breakfast at the ready on Christmas morning allows families to jump right into the festivities rather than spending too much time in the kitchen.

This recipe for “Spiced Yogurt Muffins,” courtesy of the National Dairy Council, Dannon and McCormick, can be made in advance and then enjoyed while peeking into Christmas stockings or watching holiday parades on television. This big-batch recipe is ideal for feeding a houseful of overnight holiday guests. Or it can be prepared in advance and doled out as needed throughout the week. The muffins also can be made as a treat for holiday office luncheons. Cut the recipe in half for smaller yields.

Spiced Yogurt Muffins
(Yield: 50 servings)

6½ cups plain fat-free Greek yogurt
4 cups water, room temperature
1 box (5 lbs) Gold Medal® Muffin Mix, Whole Grain Variety
3 tablespoons pumpkin pie spice
2 tablespoons Chipotle cinnamon

Combine yogurt and water in mixing bowl. Whisk until blended. Set aside.

Add spices to dry muffin mix in a large bowl. Add yogurt and water mixture to the muffin mixture. Mix until just blended. Don’t overmix.

Using a scoop, portion into greased or lined muffin pans. Bake at 350 F for 24 minutes, or 17 to 20 minutes in a convection oven, until the tops are golden brown.

Wishing You and Yours a Merry Christmas and a Safe and Peaceful New Year
Lassen County residents with room on their property and in their hearts might want to consider celebrating the holidays by adding a new horse or donkey to their family. If so, the Bureau of Land Management is ready to help out with more than 400 animals awaiting adoption at their corrals near Litchfield.

And as an added incentive, the BLM is now paying adopters $1,000 to provide a home for one of these living legends of the West through its Adoption Incentive Program.

“We currently have about 400 mustangs, all under 5 years old, and about 40 burros, as we call donkeys, of all ages,” said Litchfield Corrals Manager Doug Satica. “They are all certified healthy and they are ready to train for pleasure riding, competition and working around the ranch. With folks staying closer to home, there might be just a little extra time on hand to spend on training a new equine addition to the family.”

Anyone interested in adopting can call the Litchfield Corrals at 254-6575 and arrange an appointment to view a selection of animals available.

“We’ll ask people to tell us whether they are interested in a horse or burro, an age range, sex and color and our crew will assemble a pen full of animals for viewing and potential adoption,” Satica said. “There is a really nice selection right now from various public land and national forest ranges including some close to home such as Twin Peaks in Lassen County and Devil’s Garden in Modoc County.”

Those who choose to participate in the Adoption Incentive Program will receive a check for $500 at the time of adoption, and another $500 check when they receive title to the animal a year later.

All horses and burros up for adoption have received de-worming treatments and vaccinations for West Nile virus, rabies and common equine diseases. All have negative Coggins test results. Adopters receive complete health records for their animals so they can begin health care programs with their veterinarians.

To qualify, adopters must be at least 18 years old and have no convictions for inhumane treatment of animals. BLM staff members will interview all prospective adopters to be sure they meet the BLM adoption requirements.

Newly adopted horses and burros must be kept in corrals with at least 400 square feet of space per animal (20 feet by 20 feet), surrounded by a six-foot fence built of pipe or boards. Horses under 18 months old can be kept in corrals with five-foot fences, and four-and-a-half-foot fences are allowed for burros.
Janesville resident Tressa Guess looks over burros as she selects one to adopt.

BLM has plenty waiting for homes.

Adopted animals should be kept in this corral until they can be approached, handled, haltered and led. Adopters must provide a two-sided, roofed shelter to provide protection from extreme weather. Nongentled animals should not be placed in large, open pastures.

On adoption day, adopters must provide a halter and lead rope. BLM wranglers will halter and load adopted animals. Adult horses must be transported in stock trailers with side-swinging gates.

Title to adopted wild horses and burros remains with the federal government for one year. After providing a year of good care, adopters can receive title. The BLM or a representative will check on the condition of the animal during the adoption period.

Wild horses and burros are protected by a federal law, the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The law recognizes the animals as “living symbols of the historic and pioneer spirit of the West,” and requires the BLM to manage wild herd populations. The BLM periodically gathers horses and burros to control herd populations on ranges shared with wildlife and domestic livestock. Herd sizes are controlled to ensure there is sufficient feed and water for all range users and to ensure that natural resources are not over-used.

Janesville resident Tressa Guess watches as the burro she adopted is haltered and readied for transport.

Photo submitted
Gingerbread cookies and houses are two of the many symbols of the holiday season, alongside Christmas trees and twinkling lights. In fact, few confections symbolize the holidays more so than gingerbread.

Many a child (or a child at heart) has spent hours carefully trying to create decorative gingerbread houses. Although gingerbread recipes span various cultures, gingerbread houses originated in 16th century Germany. The fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel” helped solidify the popularity of gingerbread, which became part of Christmas traditions.

Even though gingerbread houses can be fun to make, there’s no denying it can be exacting work — especially for those who strive for perfection. Prepackaged kits attempt to take some of the guesswork out of the equation, but those who are crafting from scratch can employ these tips as they build their gingerbread houses.

• Go for form and not flavor. Few gingerbread houses ever get eaten, so focus on finding a dough that will bake up rock hard as opposed to one that tastes good.

• Get the right icing texture. Pastry artist Catherine Beddall says royal icing is the preferred “glue” to adhere gingerbread pieces. Beddall says icing should be thick like peanut butter and not runny.

• Mind the dough. Do not roll out the gingerbread dough too thin or it may become brittle after being cooked. Always cut out shapes before the gingerbread is baked. Let the baked pieces sit overnight to cool completely before using them to build.

• Patience is key. Allow the icing to dry for at least a couple of hours after adhering each piece and before moving and handling the house, says Beddall. Work in stages so that individual items can be decorated and allowed to dry. Then the walls can be put together, followed by the roof pieces.

• Kids likely will need help. Children may not have the patience or steadiness to handle complete gingerbread construction. They can decorate the separate pieces of the house while the components are laying flat, which is easier for kids. Adults can do the main assembly later on.

• Utilize a template. Free-handing may not be easy. Cut out templates using cardboard or posterboard for various gingerbread pieces. One of the most important tips is to have fun.

Don’t take gingerbread house making too seriously as a novice. Rather, enjoy the experience and the centuries-old tradition.
Visit our website, susanvilleautocenter.com, to download the PDF and start coloring! Then bring it to the dealership and put it on the window for voting. We have bikes for 12 kids!

3 Winners Per Age Group: 3-5 • 6-8 • 9-11 • 12-13

Winner will be drawn December 18, 2020, 12 pm.

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