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So many of our favorite gifts are ones that are made from our families and our friends. They don’t come from a manufacturing plant on the opposite side of the globe, and they don’t come in neatly packaged boxes. Instead they come from the hearts and minds of those who love us most. And all the more impressive they are crafted by the hands of beloved Tulare County artisans.

From the cleansing and blissful aroma of two brother’s homemade soaps, to a Three Rivers man and wife who craft pottery as a passion, nearly all the items in Holiday magazine are created by those who are carpenters for their customers. The gifts featured in this magazine are not meant to be ripped from under the Christmas tree and thrashed open to see what lies under the thinly veiled wrapping paper. No. Instead they are meant to be handled with the care from which they came, and cherished with the love in which they were forged. Because these are not the types of gifts that lend data to a corporate quarter, they are the gifts that bring art to the forefront. Whether it be the remnants of thought beautifully contrived on a canvas or the wittled work of a woodsman bringing function to form from what was once a lonely piece of the earth.

In all, these gifts are not widgets, units, or any other type of measured product meant to be moved before the close of the holiday season. Because the makers of these soaps, paintings, clothes, carvings, and pottery that shoppers will find in the coming pages, was done with the purpose of personal fulfillment in mind. And that is not something that can be as infused on an assembly line. Because what is abundantly clear in the stories that lie ahead are that gifts featured here are the physical manifestations of passions realized through work. And here in Tulare County we are all lucky to be the beneficiaries to the thoughts, emotions and skills of the craftsmen that make the holidays more than a commercial time of year.
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Shower With Gifts
Clean up your holiday shopping list with soaps by Tulare County’s smallest, small business owners.

Into The Woods
Chris Huddleston doesn’t cut any corners in making his handmade products from Maiden Woods.

Angels & Divas
Earth Angel offers heavenly dresses and divine shoes for fashionistas of every size.

Trendy Toddlers
Find the latest fashions for those special elves in your life at Littles Modern.

Bringing Christmas To Bear On God
Polar bears take children on a journey to find God in the book “God Gave Us Christmas.”

Hand Crafted Christmas Pottery
Couple molds high quality pottery along the banks of the South Fork at their River Water studio.

These Stuffers Are In Stock
Select stocking stuffers for under $10.00 at retailers right around the corner.

Home Is Where The Art Is
Exeter Courthouse Gallery supports the arts by selling artwork from Tulare County artists.

Hot Pursuit of Toys
Toys R Us releases its list of the hottest toys on your child or grandchild’s Christmas wish list.

What’s Fresh for the Holidays?
Taste the fruit of the gods, nature’s candy and weather-predicting persimmons this Christmas.

Market Mix
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**Ingredients:**
- 2 medium heads of broccoli, chopped
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup cheddar cheese grated
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- salt and pepper to taste

**Instructions:**
Cook broccoli in boiling, salted water. Drain, reserving liquid. Mash or puree in blender, and set aside.

In large saucepan, melt butter. Add onions and cook until soft. Blend in flour, add broth and cook, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a boil.

Stir in one cup liquid drained from broccoli, milk and mashed broccoli. Add salt and pepper to taste. Heat to boiling, stir in cheese. Cook until cheese is well blended.

- Submitted by Mary Benton of Visalia for the 1989 Visalia Farmers Market Harvest Cookbook.
Shoppers this holiday season are being asked to visit small businesses for all their Christmas needs and it doesn’t get any smaller than 12 and 13 year old brothers making soaps in their home. Creating all types of hand soaps, body rubs, face rubs, and bath salts, these brothers have built their company, Soaptacular, on the premise that cleanliness should be all natural.

Jacob Ross, 13 years old and Jared Ross, 12 years old sell their products at such places like The Looking Glass in Visalia on Caldwell, and Boyd’s Pharmacy in the Visalia Medical Clinic lobby. But quite a bit of their profit comes from their sales at stores and taking their products on tour. But it is hard for them to determine exactly which product brings in the most dough.

“They all do pretty well. In one store we have our lavender selling a lot and in another store it’s another soap we’re selling out of,” said Jacob. But not only do these soaps have an enticing lavender, citrus, and even watermelon scent, they are great for decorations as well. Soaptacular sells their stocking stuffers of seasonal soaps wrapped in wash clothes and tied together with velvet covered wire that serve as antlers. And these sibling entrepreneurs have certainly marketed themselves to a T, beginning with their name.

“We were experimenting with names and at first we came up with Golden Harvest Soaps, but then we looked that up and there were a lot of businesses with Golden Harvest in their name,” said Jared. “That’s when I thought of Spectacular Soaps, and then it was just Soaptacular.”

And who has helped them most is their mother, who they originally started making the soaps for in the first place. Ronna Ross, a self made graphic designer, helped the boys launch their own business by getting their business license, branding and mission statement. Their older brother, Mackenzie Mitchell, actually helped as well by designed the
Soaptacular logo.

“I helped them price their products, because I learned from business in graphics and marketing how important it is to appropriately price your product,” Ronna said about the success of her sons marketing strategy. But to Ronna it is not only a product, it is a life save…well at least a skin saver.

The birth of Soaptacular actually came from Ronna’s allergic reactions to general soap products. Jacob and Jared both found that the products in popular soap products made their mom breakout and so originally their father started making soaps – both as a way to help his wife but also to save on some money.

“My dad…he likes to experiment a lot and he wanted to learn how to make soap and it was fairly good. But it didn’t look good, I think we called them moose droppings at home,” Jacob joked about his dad’s early soap making days.

From there the brothers started to make their own soaps, and with the help of their mom started to make them look a little better than previous attempts. Before long Jacob and Jared were running out of product as family and friends on Facebook were taking one and then coming back for more. And now, they are sold online at www.soaptactular.com, and at their frequently attended California Home and Craft Fairs, CVWN’s Holiday Marketplace, and they’ve even gone as far as Santa Ana to be a part of The Patchwork Show.

Despite the demanding company they continue to build, both Jared and Jacob are honor students at Willow Glen K-8 and Green Acres Middle School. They both maintain high academic achievement and were winners in the 2014-2015 Regional Science Olympiads at the elementary and middle school levels. On top of that both brothers seem to be musically inclined as Jacob plays the piano and the cello while Jared plays the string bass and electric bass.

Between academics, extracurricular, and the demand of selling their product, Ronna’s sons are not ready to slow down. Currently they are expanding their product line to include shampoo and body bars, pet soap, and they have recently introduced shaving and laundry soap. And now that the holiday’s have arrived they are looking forward to seeing a bump in their sales.

“We are happy with where we are but we want to keep growing at the same time,” said Jacob. “We hope to sell more for the holidays but we aren’t pinning everything on that.”
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OF ALL OF THE building blocks of society, man has always had a special connection to wood. Ancient humans quickly realized that the same trees providing them shelter and nourishment could also provide them with the means to build better shelters and grow their own food. Through the ages, man has perfected the art of manipulating wood, yet processed it beyond the point where it resembles something natural. But the scuffed, grainy, weathered wood of past generations is now making a comeback. More homes have hard wood floors. Unrefined furniture made of wood is trending and handmade wooden items are returning to countertops and shelves in our homes.

Craftsmen like Visalia’s Chris Huddleston are working to bring wooden handmade products back to the American palette. He takes great pride in taking a stump of olivewood and carving out a cutting board, transforming cedar planks into table tops and turning maple blocks into book holders as part of his woodworking business Maiden Woods. Like the craftsman who create the items, Huddleston said no two pieces of wood are the same.

“Every piece of wood is completely unique from the grain, to imperfections in the wood and the color once you get below the surface,” Huddleston said.

It’s one of his favorite selling points as he travels to craft shows up and down the Central Valley. He points out hidden discolorations, natural cracks and odd grain patterns to illustrate the uniqueness of each product. Customers look on in wonder that someone could make something so familiar yet so unique out of wood, a wizard of wood working if you will.

And it was wizardry that brought the 23-year-old to the craft. While attending Van Guard University in Costa Mesa, Calif., Huddleston, a J.K. Rowling fan, decided to make a Harry Potter wand. As the requests for wands increased, Huddleston decided to buy a mini lathe, a wood turning tool used to create cylindrical shapes and straight grooves.

“I think I broke almost as many as I made so it wasn’t a great business model,” he said.

When he was engaged to wife Danielle, Huddleston’s artistic hands were not satisfied pulling out money for the typical gifts. Instead of buying his groomsmen mass produced flasks or beer mugs, he decided to make wooden tie clips by finely sanding down small, wooden rectangles by hand. The small, slender size makes it one of the more difficult items to make, but Huddleston enjoys the craftsmanship and uniqueness of the wood grain and natural colors that he draws out in each piece. He especially enjoys using the more unique types of wood from black walnut and spalted black maple to African rosewood and purple heart. Normally an expensive item, Huddleston offers his handmade tie clips for about $25 so that people his age can afford them.

“We had a tradition where we would dress in suit and ties one night each week,” he said, and a wood-grain tie clip seemed like a way to keep that connection to rural life even when wearing a suit for a night in the city.

By far his favorite product is one of the most practical - bottle openers. Huddleston has perfected the process of making bottle openers and can do it in less than 10 minutes but he doesn’t rush the process. When he isn’t demonstrating the process at record pace for a photo opp, Huddleston says the handles of his bottle openers are the most unique and varied product he makes.

“I never do the same thing twice and the wood really tells me where to go with it,” he said. “The same block of wood just 1 millimeter apart can have completely different characteristics. Sometimes I leave
something thicker or thinner if there is a soft spot, leave in termite holes or find an odd color beneath the surface. You never know where the wood will take you.”

After graduating with a bachelor’s in history/political science last year, Huddleston returned home and moved into his grandfather’s old house on the family farm just north of Visalia. He recalls being an artistic child who loved to draw and paint but also didn’t spend much of his time indoors. He said he remembers riding on the tailgate of his grandfather’s truck as he drove slowly through the orchard. He and his brother would jump off the slow moving truck, collect hardpan, and then have to run and catch up to the truck. There were also the typical country kid games of stick fights, tin can shooting and tag throughout the orange groves. He watched as his family members made by hand the tools and clothes they could not afford. Huddleston carries on that tradition in his garage-based workshop where he made his own wood jigs, custom lathe chisels and uses wood scraps to build shelving for his products.

“Why buy something when you can make for a lot less,” he said.

His ultimate goal remains to become a middle school or high school history teacher, but Huddleston doesn’t have any plans on giving up woodworking even after firmly etching his name on a school district roster. He said the biggest challenge in modern woodworking is getting people to see the product. Without a storefront it is difficult to get noticed in the online forest woodworking that has more than a billion trees trying to branch into the same computer screens.

“We are so disconnected from the way things are made that we question the value of handmade things when we can buy something processed for a fraction of the cost,” he said. “There is a lot of education that has to be done to explain to people that this single piece took me three hours and no one will ever make that same item in the same way again. That’s why it’s more expensive but also more valuable.”

Huddleston offers a variety of products on Etsy.com including coffee scoops, earrings, cutting boards, candleblocks and book buddies, the last one being a wooden grip that allows you to hold a book open with one hand. His items come in a variety of wood styles ranging from the familiar cedar, olivewood and back walnut to the more exotic African purple heart and African rose wood. Maiden Woods products can also be found at 115 N. West St. in Visalia.
It is the most wonderful time of the year and it is filled with sequins, feathers, lace, rhinestones and a whole lot of glam. Between Christmas parties, Christmas Balls, cocktail parties and New Year’s, Earth Angel is the one-stop shop for all fashionistas.

Walking into the boutique, an intoxicating fragrance fills the air. Chandeliers glisten the high ceilings of the old vintage building, while the merchandise glitters in the light. Colors of whites and blacks, blues and baby pinks, dance amongst the store. A peaceful ambiance decorates the boutique. Greeted by friendly smiles from owners, Victoria Stark and her daughter Claire Stark, a shining shopping experience begins to unfold.

For 41 years, Victoria Stark has offered Porterville and the surrounding cities a personal shopping experience unlike any other. With two storefronts next to each other, a fantasy for any fashion lover begins to become a reality. From wedding dresses and formal gowns to jewelry and shoes, Earth Angel gives customers the ability to create a stunning outfit from head to toe without ever leaving the store.

Starting with $500 in November 1975, Stark was on a mission to pursue a career while raising children. As fashion was her ultimate passion, she drove down Porterville’s Main Street in hopes to find a store front that was affordable enough for her to open her first store, Scarlett’s Web. Renting the old hospital building for $125.00 a month, she gathered 44 consignors to fill her store with folk art fashion. In the era of crocheted, macramé and everything flower child, in 30 days she had sold $10,000 worth of merchandise. As she had bigger goals, she took her money and drove to Los Angeles in January of 1976, with a vision to turn her consignment store into a one-stop, high quality fashion boutique. As fashion and business progressed, she sold her store in Porterville and began to branch out to Visalia and later Santa Cruz, re-opening her new boutiques as Earth Angel.

“The Lord has allowed me to have a vision; a vision in fashion. Fashion is everything. It recycles and everything comes back around,” Stark says with a smile.

In 1989, Santa Cruz’s Pacific Avenue was hit by the devastating earth quake, Loma Prieta which forced businesses down Pacific Avenue to close. As Earth Angel was one of the businesses affected by the devastation of the quake, in 1991 the boutique found a new location, relocating to 207 N. Main Street in Porterville. With the success of the business and introduction to a taste of L.A. fashion and merchandise, the need to expand again came in 2005, when they purchased the building next door. With the additional space, the vacant building began to fill with high end gown designers like Jessica McClintock, Sherri Hill and Roberta, now offering customers an additional shopping experience.

Now, with their two boutiques next to each other, a dress gallery at one location and a casual boutique...
Divas next door, they are able to offer a variety of products and whole new shopping experience. During the holiday season, Earth Angel decorates at least 250-300 high school girls from all over Tulare County for their Christmas formals. As Claire and Victoria take pride in being personal shoppers, they help girls and brides find the perfect gown, accessorize with high glamour jewels and help complete their look with high impact heels. They help the customer save time and money as they offer everything in one location at affordable prices. From designers like Paparazzi and Alyce Paris, gown prices range from $80 - $800 with sizes for everyone from 00-4XL. Although Earth Angel isn’t a bridal shop, they carry a variety of gowns ranging in colors, styles and designs. And of those gowns, at least eight brides a month purchase a gown for their big day and experience the refreshing and uplifting shopping experience.

The casual boutique sells a variety of natural fabrics, basic colors and a mix of dresses, blouses, shoes and statement jewelry. And the exhilarating smell that fills the boutique, is Sandra Bullock’s favorite candle, by the brand Illume that the store also sells. Sophia’s Closet, unique baby clothes handmade by Claire using high end vintage fabric, also has an appearance in the casual boutique. Custom baby blankets, diaper bags and clothing are available for customers as well. Hand rhinestoning and embellishing on gowns and clothing is also offered for any clothing purchased in the stores.

Victoria and Claire take a different approach to business and advertising. They have never paid for any advertisement and have always relied on word of mouth and returning customers. Now with social media, they have been able to reach girls in Delano and Bakersfield. They take pride in the shopping experience they provide and know it is unlike any other location.

“Our main focus is to make customers happy. We want women to feel amazing, beautiful and worthy. We love helping women evolve while encouraging inner and outer self-beauty,” Stark expresses. “We not only clothe women, we help promote the development of self-expression through fashion.”

Regardless if you are looking for a gift for someone special or the perfect outfit to rock the holiday festivities, Victoria and Claire are ready to help take you on a magical holiday shopping and dressing journey that you have never experienced before.
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corduroy and velvet. Plaids and holiday patterns. Behind their sewing machines, mixes of reds, greens and blacks, begin to luster in festive cheer. While their babies drift to sleep dreaming of candy canes, Christmas lights and lullaby stories, their mothers’ hands begin to craft holiday delights. Bloomers, leggings and headbands begin to glisten children in holiday celebrations as Littles Modern holiday collection brightens the smiles of excited little ones.

What started as a joke for two mothers and friends of 10 years, turned into a love affair in creating unique clothing for babies. After attending a mutual friend’s sewing party for baby bibs, Kristine Robertson and Bethany Archibald jokingly conversed about someday creating their own clothing line for little ones. They both enjoyed sewing and both were familiar with the struggles of not being able to find unique and quality children’s clothes and accessories in the Tulare County.

They agreed there was a gap in the market for baby clothing in the local area so they pursued their parody. With their clothing on the horizon, a connection to combine their friendship, motherhood and love for children began to cultivate. While Robertson was a full-time mother of two and Archibald, a full-time dental hygienist and mother of one, the women were confident that their antic would sprout in their free time.

As Robertson was already sewing headbands in preparation to decorate her newborn daughter, the mothers knew that incorporating a variety of glittering headbands would be included in their first trial of inventory. In June 2015, the birth of Littles Modern began to transpire in the women’s homes while their children laid down for naps and bedtime. With a tagline of “for the love all things little and modern,” the women began to create unique pieces to dress babies.

“We love babies and people. It’s not just a business but a community full of relationships with other moms and babies,” Kristine stated.

Starting an online store through Etsy, with the help of social media and selling at crafts fairs, their children fashions began to be noticed by moms all over the valley. Shortly following, they started selling their collections in a storefront in Visalia at Embellishment and Restore. Soon enough, babies were seen all over in photos on social media and around Tulare County. Quickly selling out of their small collections, their demand to create more flourished while their customer base increased. Their clothing line began...
to expand from just headbands and leggings to harem pants, teething necklaces and bloomers.

“We’re just two average moms who love baby stuff. The best part is being able to meet people and creating connections with other local moms.”

With a focus on making clothing affordable but not cutting on quality, prices range from $4.00 - $10.00 for headbands and their highest priced item is $20.00 for a pair of leggings. Their most popular item is also the newest item they incorporated into the collection, diaper bloomers which instantly sold out in their fall collection. Bloomers range in colors, fabrics and patterns from mustards, floral, cotton and corduroy and are influenced by the season or collection. Bloomer styles are also available in high and low waists. Leggings come in various styles and patterns for both boys and girls. Delicate teething necklaces made with silicon beads are also handmade to help soothe teething babies. These teething necklaces are convenient and portable for moms to wear around their necks. From newborns to 24 months, many sizes are available.

Littles Modern holiday collection will feature three bloomers, two plaid and one velvet. Holiday headbands with candy cane patterns, Christmas greenery and polka dots will adorn the heads of smiley little girls. The fall collection full of bloomers, leggings, harem pants, joggers and various heads bands, bibdanas and teething necklaces will also be available for purchase through the holiday season.

The women’s favorite part of the business is not only having the freedom to create pieces in the comfort of their home, but being able to watch babies and children grow, run, play and have fun in their clothing and accessories. Littles Modern is open to custom orders and local pickups. They also will work and try to accommodate for last minute photoshoots.

“We get to be a part of people’s lives. It feels like we are more than creating but investing in children’s lives by having the opportunity to clothe them.”

KRISTINE ROBERTSON Littles Modern

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If anybody should be able to find Santa Claus, it's polar bears. Already acclimated to the weather of the North Pole, the great white bears are adept at finding things amidst the blinding blizzards and frozen landscape of the arctic circle. But instead a mother and her cub decide to look for something far more important in the book “God Gave Us Christmas.”

Author Lisa Tawn Bergren uses her furry friends to tell the story of Mamma Bear showing her Little Cub the true meaning of Christmas. The book begins with Little Bear asking the simple question “Is God more important than Santa?” The question gets to the root of children’s confusion over Christmas as a holiday and a holy day that seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum. The jolly old elf conjures materialism, mystery and magic while baby Jesus embodies promise, peace and providence. Mr. Claus is a symbol of excess while Jesus represents perfect piety. Santa drops off packages once per year while Jesus bestows gifts everyday.

When Little Cub asks if he can go search for Santa, Mamma Bear instead promises they will “go find God,” a wonderfully simple phrase used by Christians everywhere to describe how they come to find God in their struggles and strife. The book is an easy read for parents to share with children and touches on tangible examples of God’s awesome glory to which children can easily relate.

The artwork is just as precious and adorable as the lovable polar bears featured in the Coca Cola commercials at Christmas time. Artist David Hohn captured the anthropomorphic essence of the cuddly bruins of the north pole. The bears begin in their cozy house before taking a picturesque journey across snowy hills to behold the wonders of the arctic as illustrations of God’s power and love. Hohn is an award-winning illustrator who graduated with honors from the Maryland Institute college of Art. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

A Christian author who is best known for her young adult dystopian series Remnants, Bergren has tapped into an equally successful series of Children's Books under the “God Gave Us” title. The “God Gave Us” series, which includes titles such as “God Gave Us You,” “God Gave Us the World,” and “God Gave Us Love,” has sold over 1.5 million copies. While born in California, Bergren is no stranger to snow as she and her husband Tim, a worship leader and duck sculptor, and their three children in Colorado Springs, Colo. The former Executive Editor of Fiction at WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing now splits her time between home, writing and working with her husband on their joint business, RMrustic.com.

“God Gave Us Christmas” and other Christian children's books can be found at Majesty Bible, located at 226 E. Caldwell Ave. in Visalia. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and closed on Sunday. For more information on book titles visit majestybible.com or call the Visalia store at 559.623.9240.
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Crafted Christmas Pottery

Text by AMY C. WITT
Photography by PAUL MYERS

The sycamore leaves begin to change colors and sway their way down to the top of a Three Rivers pottery studio. The river begins to trickle louder over rocks as animals make their way to the water. And while the seasons change and the holiday smells fill the crisp mountain air, H.J. and Anne Brown peacefully sculpt unique pieces of high quality function pottery at their River Water Pottery studio that overlooks the banks of South Fork.

It wasn’t until retirement that the couple began taking pottery serious. And although the couples work collaboratively alongside of one another in their studio, H.J admits that his wife is the real artist who’s had her hands filled with clay for nearly 40 years. Attending Mills College in Oakland, Anne was inspired by her professor Tony Prieto, a renowned famous potter who influenced her to dip her hands in pottery. Unfortunately while being inspired by Prieto, he died unexpectedly during the course and Anne was never able to learn the tricks of the trade.

While H.J. traveled as a freelance photographer for television and film, the couple moved from Seattle to Los Angeles and finally made their home in Santa Monica. When she was nine months pregnant, she found The Pot Farm pottery studio which was two miles from their home and she began to fuel her burning desire and enrolled in a pottery wheel class. Returning to the classroom, Anne focused on her career and quit pottery for eight years.

In 1990, the couple purchased their Three Rivers home and commuted back and forth from southern California to the valley each weekend. And after her eight year hiatus, H.J. built Anne her...
eight year hiatus, H.J. built Anne her studio and the pottery magic began to flow through the Three Rivers mountains. As H.J. was naturally filled with creativity, it wasn’t until retirement that he decided to join Anne in her pottery journeys. Now, with H.J. involved in the trade, the couple needed to expand their studio to accommodate both potters style.

Anne takes pride in throwing clay on the wheel while H.J. uses a slab roller. Throwing clay is the fastest and first step in Anne’s process. She can easily throw 30-50 pots in a day but this isn’t realistic because of trimming and time. She starts by weighing a lump of porcelain clay. After it weighs in at two pounds, she then takes the lump and throws it on her wheel that sits on the balcony overlooking the river. The fascination begins as her hands begin to sculpt, pull and shape the lump of clay into something beautiful using river water and a sponge to assist in shaping. Once she’s finished molding, she uses a piece of wire and runs the wire under the bottom of the sculpted piece, creating a nice clean bottom cut. After the piece is sculpted it must dry.

“The magic for me is in the throwing. It’s the hardest to learn but once you learn, it’s like riding a bicycle, you never forget,” Anne expresses.

Once the piece is dried, approximately 2-4 hours, Anne can begin cleaning the bottom, adding handles, assembling, making holes and ultimately creating the piece. After trimming comes the drying, one of the most vital steps in the process. Drying is the longest part and can take anywhere from two days to a week. After the pieces are dried, they are then added to the kiln in the bisque firing with temperatures exceeding 1800 degrees, then taking two days to sit in the kiln to cool to prevent cracking. The firing time takes anywhere from 7-8 hours before they can be glazed. Glazing is the process of adding the array of dreamy colors. After Anne hand dips them in her desired color palette, they are fired again for the glaze firing with the kiln heating to over 2100 degrees. After 10-11 hours, and after cooling, “Christmas Day” as the couple calls it finally comes, when they can open the kiln and take out their finished pottery presents.

H.J.’s style is a little different. He uses recycled clay oppose to Anne needing fresh clay. He starts with flat pieces and uses a roller to create plates, trays and coasters. He also uses leaves from the surrounding sycamore trees, flowers and plants to imprint into his pieces. H.J.’s favorite part is glazing and watching the colors come to life making an attractive piece. While Anne hand dips her glazes, H.J. uses Japanese brushes to paint his glaze on from his 80+ sampled colored palettes. As his glazing differs from Anne’s, he uses a number system to identify which color collaborations he uses. On the bottom of each piece, a number identifies which color group he used so that customers can have a matching color set or to identify specific color combinations for future creations.

“I let each piece tell me what to do. I let the piece become what it wants to become. You always let the piece become part of the process,” H.J. humbly explains. “You just get into the flow and let everything go.”

Although their processes and styles differ, they come together and take pride in creating functional and high quality pottery. From plates and bread bowls, to apple cobbler pots and cheese trays, each piece is dishwasher, microwave and oven safe while giving the individual the opportunity to cook and eat directly out of the same piece. Each piece comes with a recipe and/or essential accessories for the piece. For instance, if you purchase an apple baker, an apple corer and recipe comes together to make, bake and eat a delicious desert all in the same dish.

Prices range as low as $7.00 for an eye bowl, which is a small dipping dish and as high as $45.00 for bird houses. Of their pieces, bread bowls, apple bakers, leaf bowls and “Mommy, I brought you some flowers” pot are amongst their top sellers.

“We want to make what people want to buy and what works for them and that they’re going to use,” the couple expresses. “We want to give them a little impression of Three Rivers.”

Through their labor of loves, River Water Pottery offers an abundance of dishes, home décor, bird houses, sage burners and various accessories. Currently, their pottery fills 12 stores from Santa Barbara through the Tulare County. Of those stores, Joshua Tree carries a variety of delicate wine corks, cheese platters, mugs, bowls and other beautiful pieces.

While the couple is dedicated to their pottery career, it’s more of a studio shared by two people in love, with a desire to create beautiful things. And while their shelves are filled with various drying pieces, the couple’s goal isn’t to make a living from their pottery, it’s strictly for the mere love for the trade while providing their customers high end functional pieces and sharing living and traveling on their pottery journey.
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The latest and greatest items on the market can certainly be considered pieces of art. Apple’s iPhones, iPads, and iPads are functional sculptures with beautiful displays. And while people may be buying the latest and greatest techno gadgets for their loved ones to snuggle under the branches of the tree, you may want to consider an actual piece of art instead.

Some might believe that art is something for other people around the state to enjoy because there is no shortage of creative paintings, potteries, or sculptures outside of the Central Valley. But that is not necessarily true. In fact local artists here in Tulare County have been producing some visually enticing works for quite some time, and they can not only be viewed, they can be bought at the Exeter Courthouse Gallery Museum.

Lately the Galley has played host to Western pottery and paintings, and while shows may last for up to...
three months, there is quite a bit of variety. Exeter Mayor, and Exeter Courthouse Gallery Museum President Robyn Stearns finds that there is never a shortage of artists willing to display their latest work.

“We always change our shows every few months, and as of right now we are booked all the way through next year,” said Stearns.

The Gallery is open regularly on the weekends between 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays, and from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. Being open on the weekends allows people looking for the right piece of art to take some time strolling around the gallery between stops at the hustling and bustling malls and big box retail stores. But what Stearns finds to be the most intriguing part of the Gallery’s shows is the patrons appreciation for the local artists.

“I really think that the local people around here really like the local artists and we have a lot of local talent…there are a lot of artists in the area, Three Rivers has a lot and so does Visalia,” said Stearns.

Stearns noted that Jana Botkin’s work was so revered that she was asked to create a Christmas tree ornament for the White House.

“She did a hand painted ornament for the White House and she even did one for us too, so that was something really unique for Exeter,” said Stearns.

And while having artists available to describe some of the inspiration of their art is nice, some local artists move away just to send some of their work back home. At least that is the case for Marty Weekly who served on the Gallery’s board for quite some time before taking up residency in Morro Bay. But according to Stearns his work is regularly put on display at the gallery and it can go for a pretty penny. And Stearns said that his work should, “because he is a tremendous artist.”

Something art lovers will not find on the gallery walls, despite it being the season, is Christmas art. Stearns noted that it is not exactly a huge seller, but something that does benefit the Gallery during the Christmas season is the Christmas Holiday at the Gallery event. This year the event was held at Exeter’s Yokohl House, a piece of art in and of itself. Moved from the corner of Pine and D back when it took horses and quite a bit of man power, the house was relocated to where it sits today because the owners of the Yokohl house and the house next door were sisters. History has it that they wanted to be next door neighbors. Today, Exeter’s famous burger joint Frosty King sits where the house used to be.

Fast forward to today and the house was bought by developers interested in developing Yokohl Valley, a large swath of land just outside of Exeter. When they would come to the area to view property and discuss their regular business, they found themselves spending too much on hotels, so instead they decided to buy the house. However, it was not simply a business decision, instead they wanted to show that they wanted to be a member of the community. And there was no better way to show their dedication to Exeter than to host one of the city’s most well known fundraisers.

Stearns noted how much everyone enjoys being a part of the festivities. Artists donate some of their pieces, there is a silent and live auction, and everyone leaves with a smile.

“We have a lovely evening, there’s always live music, and lots and lots of food,” said the Exeter Courthouse Gallery and Museum President. “Sometimes because it’s a live auction we get into these bidding wars and that can be a lot of fun.”

The backyard and deck of the Yokohl House is where the Exeter Courthouse Art Gallery and Museum hosted their guests before they engaged in some heated bidding wars and silent auctions while enjoying some live music.
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- 1 teaspoon baking soda
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- 2 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 cups flour
- 3/4 cup walnuts, chopped

**Instructions for the Cake:**
Mix ingredients, adding one at a time in the order given, except adding apples last. Batter will be hard to stir when apples are added.

Grease (do not flour) a 8×13 pan. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 55–60 minutes. Cake will have a crusty layer on top when cooled. Frost with cream cheese frosting.

**Ingredients For the Frosting:**
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 8 oz. of soft cream cheese
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**Instructions for the Frosting:**
Mix ingredients with electric mixer until smooth. Spread on cooled apple cake.

- Recipe submitted by Lloyd and Vanabeth Trout of Elbow Creek Farms in Visalia for the 1989 Visalia Farmers Market Harvest Cookbook.
Toys”R”Us® released its 2016 Holiday Hot Toy List, the company’s annual go-to holiday shopping resource for parents and gift-givers – straight from the toy experts.

Comprised of 40 items categorized by age from Baby’s First Christmas to Big Kids, the Toys”R”Us team spent the last year narrowing down thousands of new toy introductions and selecting the items sure to be at the top of all wish lists this holiday season.

Shoppers can see the full list at Toysrus.com/HotToys and follow the conversation on social media using #TRUHotToyList. Click to Tweet: Note to Santa: The @ToysRUs #TRUHotToyList is here! Visit www.Toysrus.com/HotToys to check out the must-have toys of 2016!

“It’s serious business creating a list of must-haves that helps parents and gift-givers stay ahead of their kids’ requests,” said Richard Barry, Executive Vice President, Global Chief Merchandising Officer, Toys”R”Us, Inc. “Our mission is to ensure parents feel confident in their toy buying decisions – whether they choose to check off their kids’ wish lists now or right before Christmas.”

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**2 To 5 Years**

**Think & Learn Code-a-pillar™ from Fisher-Price®**
This coding caterpillar encourages experimentation while developing coding, sequencing and critical thinking skills for kids of all ages. Preschoolers can arrange the easy-to-connect Code-a-pillar segments in endless combinations to send Code-a-pillar on the move, while older ones can configure the segments so Code-a-pillar can reach specific targets they set up throughout the room. 4 “AA” batteries required (not included). Ages 3 to 8 years.

**PAW Patrol™ Zoomer Marshall™ from Spin Master™**
This interactive pup really comes to life - walking, talking, spinning and more, all on his own. With the wave of a hand, Marshall will follow behind, just like a real pup. Little ones can press down on his head for him to say more than 150 real PAW Patrol phrases and sounds. He’ll even perform the Pup Pup Boogie and the PAW Patrol theme song. Zoomer Marshall features more than 80 interactive missions and tricks, plus two spring-loaded water cannon launchers to help save the day. 4 “AA” batteries required (not included). Ages 3 years and up.

**PJ Masks Headquarters Playset from Just Play™**
Based on the hit preschool superhero animated TV show, the PJ Masks Headquarters Playset stands more than two feet tall and has three character-themed levels filled with engaging kid-powered features. The adventure begins with the light and sound PJ Picture Player where kids can choose their mission and recreate the action with the high flying zip line, working elevator, hanging cat rings, trap door and pop-out hatch. The excitement continues as kids launch the included CatBoy figure and Cat-Car down the winding ramp “into the night to save the day” and sing along to the theme song. 3 “AAA” batteries required (not included). Ages 3 years and up.

**5 To 7 Years**

**Shopkins™ Tall Mall from Moose Toys™**
Kids can get ready to experience three levels of fun, as this set features different play areas for Shopkins to explore. Level one is the place for home and garden, level two is where the Shopkins hang out to eat and level three is where kids will find all the zappy electronics. The Tall Mall folds down for easy on-the-go transport and features extra storage for kids to keep their collections. This item also includes two Toys”R”Us exclusive Shopkins figures. No batteries required. Ages 5 years and up.

**Power Wheels® Wild Thing™ from Power Wheels®**
This ultimate performance vehicle brings a whole new level of control, excitement and thrills with the ability to shift into a 360 degree spinning action while driving in both forward and reverse. Equipped with large durable tires for multi-terrain driving and three different speed settings up to 5 mph, kids will love cruising and spinning in this impressive ride-on. Maximum weight limit is 100 lbs. 12-volt battery required (included). Ages 5 to 7 years.
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*from Playmates Toys*

With Talk-to-Me Mikey, kids can spend hours conversing with Michelangelo, the most fun-loving and energetic of all the Ninja Turtles. One of the most intelligent Turtle toys to date, Talk-to-Me Mikey recognizes when a child asks any of a list of 10 questions and responds in more than 100 unique ways. This highly interactive Turtle also features motion sensors to react based on how children move Mikey. Known for being the Turtle brother with the most enthusiasm, Mikey even sings songs and plays games with kids. 3 “AAA” batteries required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

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**STAR WARS™ INTERACTECH IMPERIAL STORMTROOPER FIGURE**

*from HASBRO™*

STAR WARS™ fans can experience The Galaxy's most iconic soldier with this 12-inch Interactech Imperial Stormtrooper figure. With more than 65 light and sound effects and precise motion sensors, this trooper can march into battle and lead the charge with its own unique spin. Fans can get up close and personal with hand-to-hand combat sounds. And if the Rebels get the better of him, the Interactech Imperial Stormtrooper yells out in defeat when falling. Each Interactech Imperial Stormtrooper Figure comes complete with a blaster and jetpack that once strapped on, unlocks a library of sounds. 2 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

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**BARBIE® HELLO DREAMHOUSE™**

*from Mattel®*

Kids can go high-tech with the world’s first smart dollhouse. This two-story home has innovative features designed for modern Barbie® lovers with floor sensors that recognize where Barbie and her friends are in the home. Embedded speech recognition allows little ones to control elements of the Dreamhouse™, including the slide and elevator. Kids can endlessly imagine and customize their house play. No batteries required. Ages 5 to 7 years old.

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**DREAMWORKS ANIMATION TROLLS HUG TIME POPPY DOLL**

*from HASBRO™*

DREAMWORKS ANIMATION TROLLS HUG TIME Poppy is a loveable, colorful troll who enjoys “hug time,” no matter where her adventures take her. Poppy stands 14 inches tall and offers the ultimate Trolls play experience, including music, phrases, lights and sounds. For added interactivity, Poppy comes with a matching wearable Hug Time bracelet for kids, and when activated, both bracelets and POPPY’S hair light up. Little Trolls fans can also style her hair with the included comb and place her tiara on top of her new ‘do. 2 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

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**HOT WHEELS® AI STARTER SET**

*from Mattel®*

Featuring signature Hot Wheels® innovation, this starter set delivers the ultimate racing experience with enhanced AI smart cars that can stay on track or drive independently so kids can compete against their friends. The AI Intelligent Race System Starter Kit includes two high-performance RC smart cars with scale speeds up to 180 mph and two smart gaming controllers with gameplay modes for all ages. 3 “AAA” batteries and 3 ‘AA’ batteries required (not included). Ages 5 years and up.
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Hatchimals™ from Spin Master™
Hatchimals™ are interactive magical creatures inside eggs. Who’s inside? It’s a surprise. Kids can care for them and these small creatures will hatch themselves. Little ones can teach them to walk, talk, play games and more as they raise them through multiple stages. 2 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 5 years and up.

NERF N-Strike Modulus Tri-Strike by Hasbro™
Kids can blast away the competition in three ways with the NERF N-Strike Modulus Tri-Strike blaster. Players can customize the performance for each battle with ELITE slam-fire action, MEGA pump-action blasting, or a missile launcher. This blaster includes 10 ELITE darts, MEGA barrel with four MEGA darts and missile launcher stock attachment with one missile. No batteries required. Ages 8 years and up.

SelfieMic™ from Moose Toys™
Combining kids’ love of “selfies” with the popular pastime of singing karaoke, SelfieMic™ allows budding pop stars to create their own music videos right from their personal smartphone. SelfieMic features a selfie stick with a working karaoke microphone and ear piece. The device syncs with music app StarMaker, which allows kids to record their own voice or lip sync to more than three million songs. With voice and video effects to make kids sound and look like stars, kids can also create music videos to share with friends – no camera crew required. No batteries required. Ages 8 years and up.

LEGO® Friends Heartlake Performance School from The LEGO Group
LEGO® Friends can travel to the three-story Heartlake Performance School in an included iconic yellow school bus with opening doors and removable roof, where little builders can create and play with a studio, classroom, editing suite and locker room for their figures to role play and train in the performing arts. Each set includes three mini-doll figures: Andrea, Noah, and Iva the dance teacher. No batteries required. Ages 7 to 11 years.
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Cozmo® from Anki®
Meet Cozmo, he’s a gifted little robot with a big brain, and an even bigger personality. Powered by advanced robotics, artificial intelligence and computer vision, Cozmo has a brain that processes more data per second than all the Mars Rovers combined. But smarts aside, Cozmo’s heart and soul rest within his emotion engine, which evolves the more he hangs out with kids. He’s brought to life with complex facial expressions, a host of emotions, and his own voice. His eyes light up when he sees a familiar face. If he hasn’t played in a while, he’ll nudge to play one of a handful of games. And just like a character plucked from a movie, he has his own dynamic soundtrack, which synchronizes to match his mood and activities. More than a companion, Cozmo’s a collaborator. Cozmo ships with an outlet charger and three interactive Power Cubes. No batteries required. Ages 8 years and up.

Nintendo Entertainment System™: NES Classic Edition from Nintendo
From Goomba Stomp to Final Fantasy, the Nintendo Entertainment System™ is full of nostalgia from game to game. This new miniaturized version comes pre-loaded with 30 of the all-time greatest games, including The Legend of Zelda™, Super Mario Bros.™ 3 and Mega Man 2. The system comes bundled with an HDMI cable, an AC adapter, one NES Classic Controller and all 30 games, installed and ready-to-play. The system is also compatible with the Classic Controller and Classic Controller Pro, but additional NES Classic Controllers will be sold separately. Each NES Classic Controller can be plugged into a Wii Remote™ controller for use with NES Virtual Console games on the Wii U™ system. No batteries required. Ages 10 years and up.

PlayStation®VR from Sony Entertainment Systems®
PlayStation®VR is a virtual reality system that allows players to feel as though they are transported out of the living room and into a virtual game world. This gaming innovation provides an easy-to-use VR experience for the PlayStation®4 (PS4™) system, and includes a headset, cables, stereo headphones and demo disc. PlayStation®Camera required, sold separately. No batteries required. Ages 13 years and up.

Hovertrax™ 2.0 from Razor®
Kids can experience round two of the revolutionary ride with this new and improved Hovertrax™ 2.0., a hands-free, electric ride-on, with exclusive technology that features intelligently-engineered, self-balancing software for an easier mount and smoother ride. With foot-controlled gyro-sensor technology that offers exactly the right amount of responsiveness, fender bumpers for protection and cool-blue LED light bars, the Hovertrax 2.0 makes it easier than ever to enjoy futuristic fun for up to 60 minutes. 36Volt rechargeable lithium ion battery pack required (included). Ages 8 years and up.
Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells
We hope rain is on the way,
But until it pours
And the water level soars.
Be waterwise every day.

Sincere Thanks,
The City of Exeter

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and Holiday Season

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Friday December 9th 4:00 pm to 8:00pm

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As we approach the holy day of the holiday season, there may not be any fruit that personifies the divine flavors of the season more than the persimmon. Its Latin name Diospyros loosely translates into “food of the gods.” In China, the fruit is often given as a thank you note for wedding gifts. In Japan, where it is the national fruit, persimmons are used as ornaments during the New Year’s celebration because they associated with good luck and longevity and also because they used as a hangover remedy.

Nearly every part of the Indian persimmon is used in folk medicine as its root, fruit, bark, stems and leaves are said to cure dysentery and alleviate digestive disorders. While normally made into cookies, puddings and despite being high in fructose, the fruit known as “nature’s candy” contains an endless supply of health benefits, chief among them unique, cancer-fighting antioxidants. In fact, persimmons is one of the few foods associated with killing breast cancer cells without harming normal cells, according to one study.

Its seeds are even said to predict the weather! According to the Old Farmers Almanac, you can predict the snowfall by cutting open a persimmon seed and looking at the shape of the kernel inside. If the kernel is spoon-shaped, lots of heavy, wet snow will fall. If it is fork-shaped, you can expect powdery, light snow and a mild winter. If the kernel is knife-shaped, expect to be “cut” by icy, cutting winds.

The persimmon also teaches us patience, something we could all use a little bit more of during the craziness of holiday shopping. Early settlers thought the fruit inedible until they learned that the Native Americans left them on the tree longer than any other fruit so that the sugar content would overtake the bitterness for candy-like treat. Persimmons must be completely ripened, even allowed to over ripen, before consumption. When ripe, this fruit comprises thick, pulpy jelly encased in a waxy thin-skinned shell.

In 1607, Captain John Smith wrote from Jamestown that: “The fruit is like a medlar; it is first green, then yellow and red when it is ripe: if it is not ripe, it will drive a man’s mouth awrie with much torment, but when it is ripe, it is as delicious as the apricot.”

The seeds of Japan’s national fruit also planted the idea of trade between the Far East and the Western World. U.S. Naval Commodore Matthew Perry brought the first Hachiya persimmon seeds back from Japan after signing the treaty of the Convention of Kanagawa in 1854, which opened ports in the isolationist country to American ships. Today the Asian-born fruit is grown all over the world, including the United States and predominantly in California. So practice patience this holiday season and you will be rewarded by the heavenly healing powers of the persimmon.
Mix

Market

Persimmon Cookies

Ingredients:
1/2 cup oil
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 cup persimmon pulp
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon clove
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
2 cups flour
1 cup nuts, raisins, and dates

Instructions:
Cream the oil, sugar, egg, pulp and baking soda.
Sift in flour and spices. Add the nuts, raisins and dates to the mixture. Drop from the spoon onto a greased cookie sheet.
Cook in the oven at 350 degrees for 18 to 20 minutes.

- Submitted by Rod and Velda Pomp of Visalia in December 2014 for the Visalia Farmers Market Harvest Cookbook.
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