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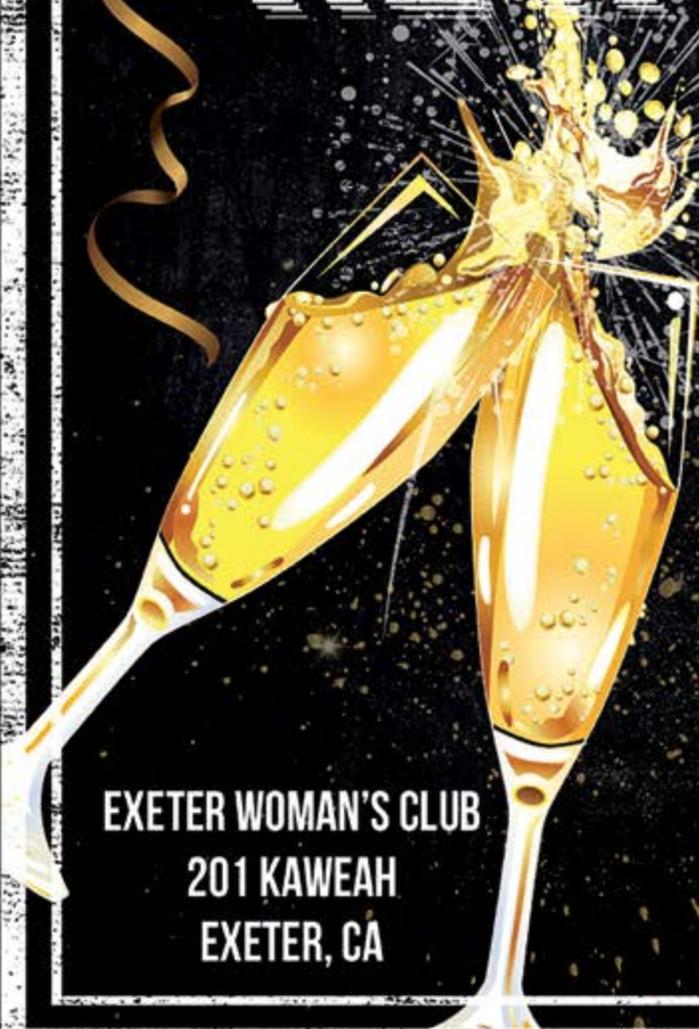
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HOLIDAY MAGAZINE

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Publisher/CEO Reggie Ellis

EDITORIAL

Editor Paul Myers
Writer Kaitlin Washburn
Contributing Writer Patty Phillips
Contributing Writer Neil Fernbough
Contributing Writer Edward Rami

PRODUCTION

Art Director Robert Perry

ADVERTISING

Marketing Manager Edward Rami

OFFICE

Office Manager Katie Bryant
Office Assistant Jasmin Cisneros
Distribution Aaron Fuentes



For issues of The Sun-Gazette's publications, call 559-592-3171 or visit www.thesungazette.com or email editor@thesungazette.com

Mailing address:
P. O. Box 7, Exeter, CA 93221



PHOTO: EDWARD RAMI

Deck the Howls

Cozy Clip Grooming in Exeter passes on its customers' kindness by coordinating Christmas care packages for local senior citizens.

Story by EDWARD RAMI

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT bringing everyone in the family together, and that includes your four-legged family members. So if you are thinking about wearing a new outfit or getting your hair cut for the holiday season, don't forget about getting some grooming done for your pet as well.

There are a lot of options for locally owned pet groomers in Tulare County, but only one of them cozies up with the holiday spirit through a Christmas tradition that inspires generations of local people. Throughout the year, owner Michelle Thomas saves every penny of every tip from customers at Cozy Clip Grooming. She then uses the extra money to buy supplies to make homemade cookies and jellies, buy popcorn, towels and Christian bookmarks. In December, Michelle takes the homemade goodies and other items and takes them to her church where congregation members begin assembling care packages for local senior citizens. In the two weeks leading up to Christmas, she gathers up her grandkids and children, mostly ages 5-8 years old, from the church to dress up in elf costumes and deliver them to seniors, many of

whom do not have family in the area, are on a fixed income, and may not have the means to leave their home without help.

"Most people are busy giving back to kids, but everyone forgets about the elderly," Michelle said. "I have a soft spot for seniors so that's why I give back to them."

It was that kind of generosity that helped Michelle begin her business in the first place. Michelle started as a groomer while working for a friend of a friend in 1991. After eight months on the job and building a reputation as a quality groomer, a family member urged Michelle to open her own business. She didn't have enough money to buy an office, or a home for that matter, but a local landlord named Roger Pocock offered to sell her a small home on the edge of downtown Exeter at 422 Rocky Hill Dr. Michelle admitted she was not able to make the down payment, but the property owner made the deal anyway allowing her to make payments on the deposit. Today, the building serves as both home and office for the Cozy Clip owner and she has never forgotten

what that kindness meant to her.

"I have been blessed by God," she said.

After finding a place to call home, Michelle said she continues to count her blessings for the customers she has met along the way. She remembers spending every weekend passing out flyers in front Save Mart and introducing herself to people. The welcome she received from people coming in and out of the grocery store was a far cry from the blank stares and rushed pace often found in other communities.

"My customers are the ones who make the boxes for elders possible," she said. "Without their support, I wouldn't have my business and I wouldn't be able to give back to those who might be forgotten."

Seniors aren't the only ones who can be forgotten during the holidays. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) reminds pet owners to steer pets clear of the following unhealthy treats, toxic plants and dangerous decorations.

Oh, Christmas Tree: Securely anchor your Christmas tree so it doesn't tip and fall, causing possible injury to your pet. This will also prevent the tree water—which may contain fertilizers that can cause upset stomach—from spilling. Stagnant tree water is a breeding ground for bacteria, and your pet could end up with nausea or diarrhea should he imbibe.

Avoid Mistletoe & Holly: Holly, when ingested,

can cause pets to suffer nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Mistletoe can cause gastrointestinal upset and cardiovascular problems. And many varieties of lilies can cause kidney failure in cats if ingested. Opt for just-as-jolly artificial plants made from silk or plastic, or choose a pet-safe bouquet.

Tinsel-less Town: Kitties love this sparkly, light-catching "toy" that's easy to bat around and carry in their mouths. But a nibble can lead to a swallow, which can lead to an obstructed digestive tract, severe vomiting, dehydration and possible surgery. It's best to brighten your boughs with something other than tinsel.

That Holiday Glow: Don't leave lighted candles unattended. Pets may burn themselves or cause a fire if they knock candles over. Be sure to use appropriate candle holders, placed on a stable surface. And if you leave the room, put the candle out!

Wired Up: Keep wires, batteries and glass or plastic ornaments out of paws' reach. A wire can deliver a potentially lethal electrical shock and a punctured battery can cause burns to the mouth and esophagus, while shards of breakable ornaments can damage your pet's mouth and digestive tract.

Keeping your pet's fur clean in the winter is also a good idea. To schedule an appointment for your pet, call Cozy Clip Grooming at 559.592.1280.



PHOTO: EDWARD RAMI

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Chocolate Plum Cake

Deep dark chocolate and lush ripe plums make a sweet match in this decadent dessert that's seasonal and satisfying.

Ingredients:

- ¾ cup unsalted butter
- 1 lbs. ripe plums, chopped
- 6 oz. bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 5 large eggs, room temp.
- 1½ cups sugar
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 1½ cups cold heavy cream
- Unsweetened cocoa powder (for dusting)

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Butter bottom and sides of springform pan and line bottom with parchment.

Purée plums in a blender until very smooth (you need 1½ cups; reserve any additional purée for another use). If plums are not ripe

enough to form a very smooth purée, strain through a fine-mesh sieve.

Combine chocolate and ¾ cup butter in a large heatproof bowl. Set bowl over a medium saucepan of barely simmering water (do not let bowl touch water). Stir until chocolate is melted and smooth. Remove bowl from saucepan. Stir plum purée into chocolate mixture until well combined.

Using an electric mixer on medium speed, beat eggs and sugar in another large bowl until pale and tripled in volume, 10–12 minutes. Using a rubber spatula, fold about ⅓ of the egg mixture into chocolate mixture to lighten, then fold chocolate mixture into remaining egg mixture until combined.

Combine flour, baking powder, and salt in a medium bowl, then

fold dry ingredients into chocolate mixture until combined.

Pour batter into prepared pan and smooth surface. Bake cake until center is set and sides are beginning to brown, 45–55 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cake cool completely in pan (cake will sink a little in the center as it cools).

Meanwhile, using an electric mixer on medium-low speed, beat cream in a large bowl until soft peaks form. Unmold cake (run a knife around the edge to help release, if needed) and transfer to a platter. Mound whipped cream in center of cake, then dust with cocoa powder.

Yield: 1, 9-inch cake

Active Time: 30 minutes

Total Time: 75 minutes

– *Recipe courtesy of Epicurious*

The Festive Plum

Story by REGGIE ELLIS

ONE OF THE MOST memorable lines from the classic poem “Twas the Night Before Christmas is about children dreaming of the candies and gifts to come. “The children were nestled all snug in their beds, While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.”

Sugar plums were not plums at all, but a type of confectionery made of hardened sugar surrounding a nut, similar to an M&M or jelly bean, that probably resembled the size of a small plum and likely colored red or blue. Some food historians believe them to be the world’s first sugar candies, known as comfits, and they were a luxury item often served at aristocratic receptions.

But author Clement Clarke Moore’s use of the word plum in the name tells us the desirable nature of the alluring fruit. In part due to its association with the sugar shell candy, plums became synonymous with desirable things at the time of Moore’s writing. In England “plum” was slang for 100 pounds, or as we might say now, a pile of money. Those who gained well-paying employment were said to have landed a “plum job.” The British and Americans weren’t the only ones to associate plums with something desirable. They weren’t even the first to do so.

Plums are believed to be one of the first fruits domesticated by humans. Plums were domesticated in China more than 2,000 years ago and have figured in written documents since 479 B.C. In Chinese culture, the plum represents the most desirable trait in a

man – his grace under pressure. The plum tree was a common subject in traditional ink and wash paintings of ancient China as one of the Four Gentlemen, also known as the Four Noble Ones, of beautiful flowering plants that epitomize the inner beauty of the culture. The plum tree is renowned for its ability to blossom in the dead of winter, imbuing it an otherworldly elegance compared to other plants, a metaphor for being humble in adverse conditions.

Confucian scholar Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty wrote of the plum’s heavenly virtues: great potential in the bud, prosperity in the flower, harmony in the fruit and rightness in its maturity. The four virtues embody the characteristics of heaven (qian). Chinese also see the five-petaled flower as symbolizing five blessings: longevity, prosperity, health, virtue, and good living.

We feel the need for plums in our heart and in our bones. Plums are relatively low in calories but contain fiber and a variety of vitamins and minerals. They are rich in antioxidants that promote bone development and joint health. The combination of fiber, potassium and antioxidants may have a protective effect on heart health.

To this day, agriculture officials still associate the term “sugar plums” with plums. University of California, Davis refers to California fresh market plums as “sugar plums” for their sweetness. California is certainly sweet on plums as it produces 95% of the domestic market for the United States, with most of that coming from Tulare and Fresno counties. Plums are a vision realized.

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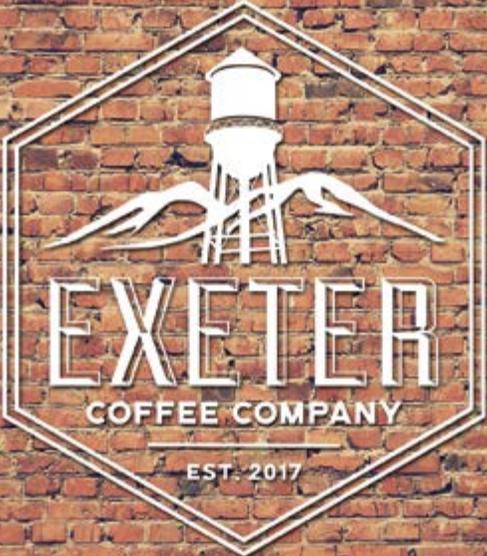
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Read in Peace

Local author pens chapter for "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Christmas Magic" edition of the popular franchise.

Review by REGGIE ELLIS

CHRISTMAS IS A MAGICAL time for memory making. Many families have long standing traditions where generations get to share a similar holiday experience by passing down the culture of the household. Irene Morse of Visalia was like any other grandmother. She wanted to host a feast for her growing family to gather around a grand dining room table and share a Rockwellian Christmas. But the world was changing and so was her family.

Morse and her husband Gary had a blended family after finding each other later in life. Jobs had taken their children across the state and into other states. Buying presents for so many grandchildren was getting expensive, and few of the families could line up their Christmas calendars to coincide on the same day.

The solution, in her own words, was: "We needed some uninterrupted time and that meant that, most likely, Christmas would have to fall on a different day and traditions would have to be swept away like used gift wrap."

The rest of Morse's story can be read in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Christmas Magic*. Morse's tale is just one of the funny and heartwarming stories captured in the book, which features 101 holiday stories covering everything from finding the perfect Christmas tree, being with family, and seeing the wonder in a child's eyes, to goodwill, love, and the true meaning of Christmas.

This is Morse's second anthology. She also published a story of taking her husband Gary, who is

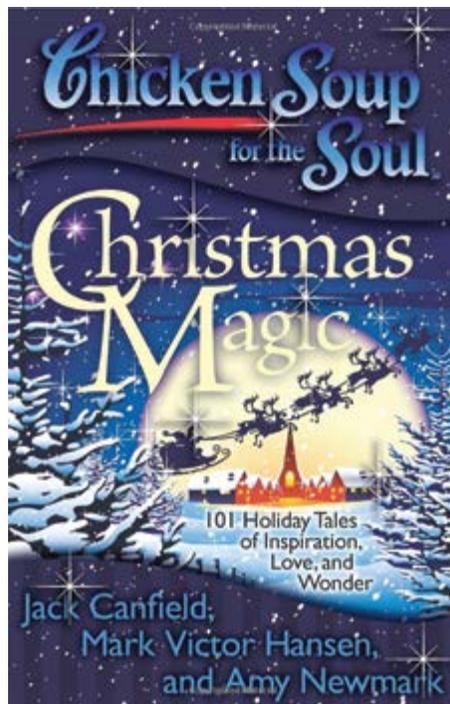
blind, to experience the mountain gorillas in Rwanda as part of the travel series *Be There Now*. Morse self-published her first book, *The Velvet Bridge*, in 2017 after encouragement from the Tulare-Kings Writers group, of which she is still a member. The book is a collection of diary entries she made of visits with her aging mother after she began showing signs of Alzheimer's. Earlier this year she released her newest book *A Traveler's Journal: Greece – Coming Home to a Place I've Never Been*. In between she wrote three children's books for her great-grandchildren featuring young characters with superpowers based on their personalities visiting places Morse herself had told them

stories about.

Since *Chicken Soup for the Soul* wants to keep Christmas magical for everyone, all of the stories are "Santa-safe" for kids! *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Christmas Magic* by Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Amy Newmark was released in 2010.

Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, LLC, publishes all the latest titles in the famous *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series which are distributed through Simon & Schuster, Inc. Since 1993, books in the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series have sold over 112 million copies, with titles translated into over 40 languages. To this day,

"chicken soup for the soul" remains one of the world's best-known phrases and is regularly referenced in pop culture 22 years after it first began its inspiring and uplifting socially conscious story company.



Visalia-opoly

This Visalia version of Monopoly makes a great holiday purchase rich with local landmarks, Christmas custom and fake cash.

Story by REGGIE ELLIS

FAMILIES GATHERED AROUND the table for a feast is an iconic image of the holidays. But there is another dinner table gathering that is rich in Christmas day ritual, and in fake cash!

Getting the young and old together for a good old fashioned game of Monopoly is a time-honored tradition in many households. While the game play is fun and fairly easy to follow, Monopoly is lacking in the local character department. Names like B&O Railroad and Marvin Gardens have little meaning to young players who have likely never left their hometown and certainly haven't spent any time in Atlantic City, which is where the names come from.

Luckily for local youth, there is now a version of the game that has cornered the market on locally based board games – Visalia-Opoly.

Visalia-Opoly, a new Monopoly board game that “celebrates the Gateway to the Sequoias,” has hit the shelves at one Walmart in Visalia.

Property names from the original edition of the game, such as Boardwalk and Park Place in Atlantic City, N.J., have been replaced with Brewbaker's Brewing Co. and Kaweah Oaks Preserve. Game pieces include a heart, hand, pretzel, shoe, smile and a dog. Popular places like “Visalia Fox Theatre” and “Adventure Park” are spotlighted in the Visalia-centric game but so are some places lesser known to visitors, such as the “Velouria Records” and “ImagineU Children's Museum.”

Even the “Chance” and “Community Chest” cards, which in this version are called “Big Fun” and “Contingency” cards, give shout-outs to Visalia. Like “You ate too many slices of funky chicken pizza from the Planning Mill! Lose 1 turn to recover.”

The board game was made by an Ohio-based company called “Late for the Sky,” which has made custom city- and college-based Monopoly games since 1984. Its first game was Miami-Opoly, based on Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, more commonly referred to as

Miami of Ohio. Since then, the company has created more than 80 games including Fresno and Modesto. Walmarts in Visalia are selling the game for \$19.98.

Monopoly is the best-selling privately patented board game in the history of the United States, according to the editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. The game has inspired over 1,000 variations including editions from Betty Boop and Batman to the Bible and the Beatles and is sold in 47 languages in 114 countries.

Monopoly is the second oldest American board game, behind “Game of Life.” The game, as we know it today, was popularized by Parker Brothers in 1943 but was originally invented in 1904. The idea for the game was sold by Charles D. Darrow, an unemployed heating engineer, but is based on a homemade version of

the game patented by Lizzie Magie in 1904 called the “Landlord's Game.” A follower of economist and journalist Henry George, Magie developed the game to illustrate George's writings on greedy slumlords ex-

ploiting tenants.

Darrow's version of the game was surprisingly popular during the Great Depression as it extolled the ideals of capitalistic greed at a time when most Americans were struggling to feed their families and had little hope of ever owning property.

History.com explained that because families had little money to spend on entertainment, they would buy reusable board games and stay home to play them. The games could also be shared between families who may have been sharing common areas in labor camps or even sharing living quarters. The trend was repeating during the Great Recession in 2008, when board game sales rose by 6% that Christmas as toy sales declined, because families were finding ways to stay connected while staying in.

So don't pass go on this great game and collect some priceless time with your family.



Visalia Opoly

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Comfits & Joy

While not the sugar plums of 'Twas the Night Before Christmas fame, this comfit confection includes an authentic helping of dried fruit.

Ingredients:

- 6 oz. slivered almonds (or hazelnuts), toasted
- 4 oz. prunes
- 4 oz. dried apricots (or dried cherries)
- 4 oz. dried figs
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- 1 tbsp. anise seeds, toasted plus ¼ teaspoon
- 1 tbsp. fennel seeds, toasted plus ¼ teaspoon
- 1 tbsp. caraway seeds, toasted plus ¼ teaspoon
- 1 tbsp. ground cardamom plus ¼ teaspoon seeds
- 1 pinch kosher salt
- 1 cup crystal sugar

Instructions:

Place almonds, prunes, apricots, and figs into bowl of food processor and pulse 20 to 25 times or until fruit and nuts are chopped into small pieces, but before mixture combines into a ball.

Combine powdered sugar, and one tablespoon each of anise seeds, fennel seeds, caraway seeds and powdered cardamom with salt; blend in blender, Thermomix, food processor, nut grinder or coffee grinder to as fine a powder as possible: this provides a lovely fragrant Eastern essence to dried fruit.

Add powdered mixture to fruit and nut mixture and combine well with clean hands.

Place remaining seeds into one small bowl and

crystal sugar into another small bowl.

Roll fruit-nut mixture into sugar plum balls, inserting a seed or two into each, then roll in crystal sugar and set on parchment covered cookie sheet to dry a bit.

Store in tightly sealed container and enjoy visions of sugar plums that will definitely come to you as you make these: the possibilities are endless!

Weigh powdered sugar into mixing bowl and set mixer for 1 minute on speed 5-6 and add one tablespoon each of anise seeds, fennel seeds, caraway seeds, and powdered cardamom with salt through hole in lid until blended into fine powder: This provides a lovely fragrant Eastern essence to dried fruit.

Weigh almonds, prunes, apricots, and figs into mixing bowl without washing it; pulse 3 times on highest setting for 1 second each until fruit and nuts are chopped into small pieces, but before mixture forms a ball.

Pour mixture into large bowl; sprinkle powdered spice mixture over fruit-nut mixture and combine well with clean hands.

Place remaining seeds into one small bowl and crystal sugar into another small bowl.

Roll fruit-nut mixture into sugar plum balls, inserting a seed or two into each, then roll in crystal sugar and set on parchment covered cookie sheet to dry a bit.

Store in tightly sealed container and enjoy visions of sugar plums that will definitely come to you as you make these: the possibilities are endless!

- Recipe courtesy of Epicurious



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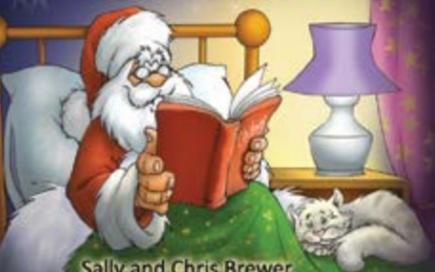
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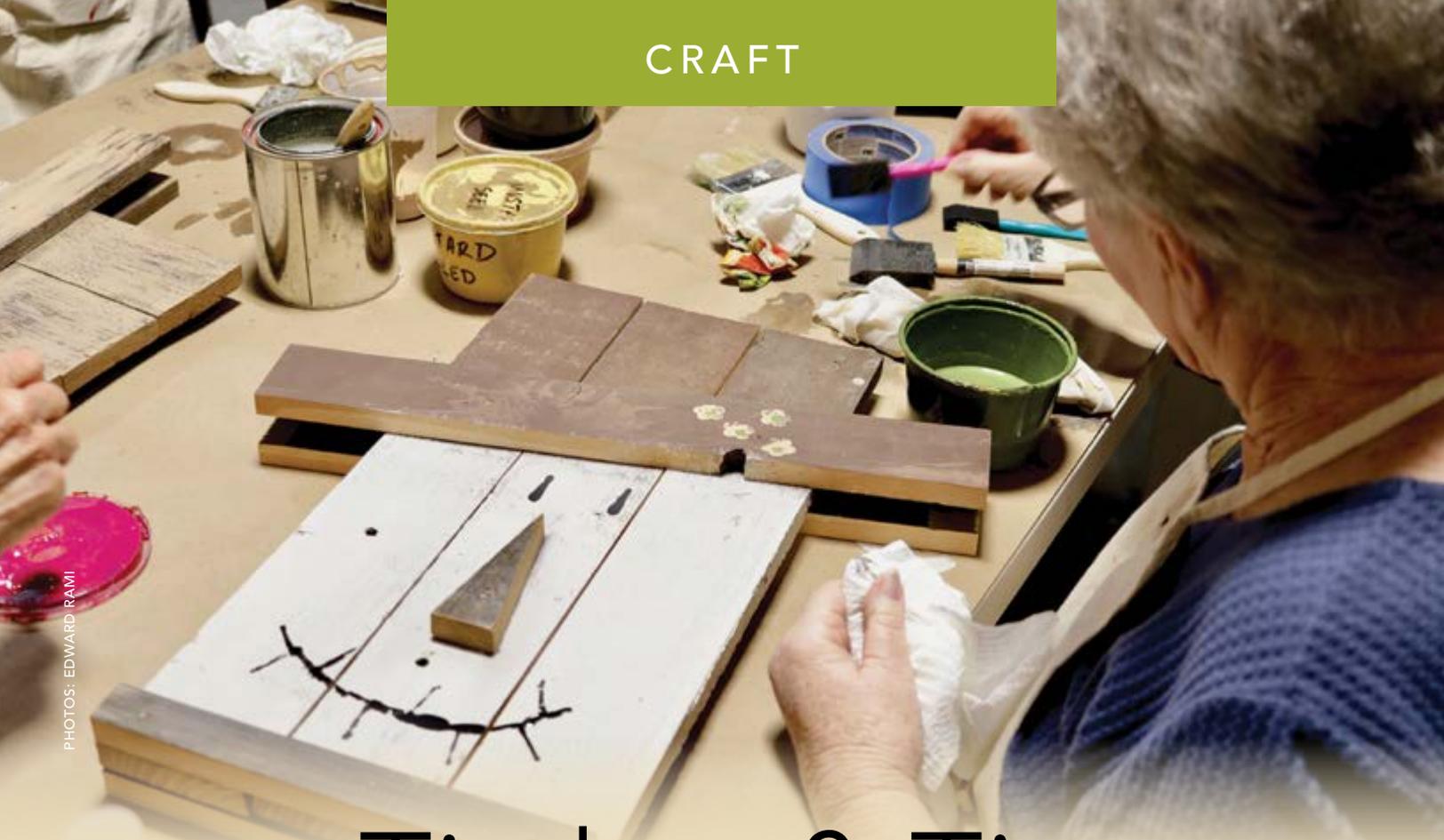
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PHOTOS: EDWARD RAMI

Timber & Tin

Jim and Sarah Tyler build their business and community through craft project workshops for any age and skill level.

Story by REGGIE ELLIS

THERE'S NO MORE personal Christmas present than a handmade gift. But let's face it, there is only so much refrigerator space for drawings and only so much wall space for candid photo prints. And where can you ever find space for those unframed and flimsy school projects?

The best crafted gifts are sturdy, easy to mount or hang, polished enough for the mantle or kitchen counter or a perennial fixture in your backyard or garden. Then come the questions, what should I make, what materials do I need and how do I put it all together?

All you really need is yourself ... and a little help from Jim and Sarah Tyler. The Exeter couple holds monthly craft classes in Jim's workshop at 402 South F Street in Exeter. Each class centers around repurposing discarded materials into a craft project. In October, class participants had the option of making a wooden scarecrow or snowman face that would make a great addition to any entryway or yard. Projects have also included birdhouses, angels, and pumpkins. The Tylers provide the raw materials, aprons, paint and

brushes, the place and the know-how.

"Jim is an artist at heart," Sarah said. "He puts his heart and sole into everything he does from the ground up."

Jim added, "Sarah has an eye for design and planning and a real love for finding ways to bring people together."

The classes are an offshoot of their chalk paint business, Timber and Tin, which Jim and Sarah Tyler started six years ago. Jim began using old fence boards, scrap metal, and left-over construction materials to build unique sheds, bird houses, work benches and garden displays to promote their brand of chalk paint. Sarah would fine tune the creation, decide on the colors and market the item online and at antique stores in Exeter and Visalia. Having the chalk paint business underway has given the Tylers the flexibility to offer almost any color of paint for projects. At each class, Jim tries to teach a technique, so those who plan on attending every class, and there are a few, can learn something new at each class. At past classes, Jim has taught distressing wood and metal, staining, torching



Husband and wife duo Jim and Sarah Tyler taught about 25 people to build a wooden scarecrow and a snowman face during one of their Timber & Tin craft classes at their workshop in Exeter. Jim brings 25 years of construction skills and Sarah provides the designing and planning after more than a decade in event promotions.

and spindling wire.

“We make sure the projects are something anyone can do and we walk you through it step by step,” Sarah said. “But we also give people the freedom to be as creative as they want to be.”

The classes have also provided a learning experience for Jim and Sarah.

“It’s not just Jim teaching people techniques, the people in the class are teaching us too,” Sarah said. “One woman taught me a technique to paint pine needles and I have picked up new color combinations watching others try something different. When people think outside of the box, everyone learns something.”

The classes are a mix of every walk of life with ages ranging from 10 to 80 and skill level ranging from those who have never held a paint brush to experienced painters. For couples it’s a date night. For singles it’s a night out. And for families it’s a chance to get off the couch and off their phones.

“No one at our classes is on their phone, at least not until the end of the night for photos,” Sarah said.

“Seeing people engaging with one another and creating something their own, that is fun to be a part of.”

SARAH TYLER
CO-OWNER, TIMBER & TIN

“When else do you see teenagers doing something without their phones?”

“This is entirely different than anything I’ve ever done,” Jim said. “Fifteen years ago, if you were to tell me I would be teaching a bunch of people to paint a snowman, I would have laughed.”

The Tyler name is not new to the area. Jim has been in the construction business since he was a teenager and has owned his own company, Jim Tyler Construction, for the last 20 years.

“After working on construction jobs by myself forever, I didn’t think I was going to like the interaction,” Jim admits. “But I really enjoy passing on the techniques I’ve learned from my 25 years in construction and watching people learn something new.”

Creativity has always been a huge part of the Tyler’s business and lives. For the last 11 years Sarah has worked as office manager for the Exeter Chamber of Commerce. Her duties range from taking payments to managing membership, but her creativity shines in the chamber’s event flyers and its annual Experience Exeter magazine. The couple also collaborate on Jim’s remodeling projects, the complete renovation of their own home and the office they constructed on South F Street, now home to The Sun-Gazette.

“I love it when people share the pictures of where in their homes they displayed their creations,” Sarah said. “Seeing people engaging with one another and creating something their own, that is fun to be a part of.”

The classes have drawn interest from people from Tulare to Fresno. At first the classes were just about diversifying their business, but now Sarah sees the classes as an addition to the shop, dine, stay, play motto of marketing the small town charm of Exeter.

“When people leave here, they are almost always looking to do something else in town,” Sarah said. “We wanted to do something in our town that will bring people from other places here and hopefully it will continue to bring others.”

Classes are \$45 per person with special couples pricing upon request. Snacks and refreshments are provided and you only need to bring yourself, and maybe a few friends or family members. To reserve your spot in an upcoming class call or text 559-280-4540 or email timerandtinca@gmail.com.

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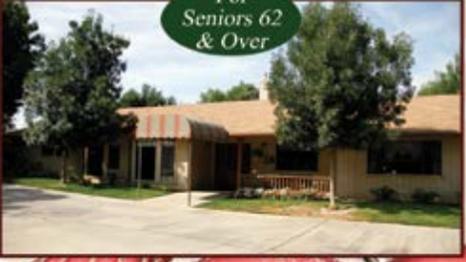
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PHOTO: PAUL MYERS

Sand & Stitch

Greg and Sara Evangelho hand craft their woodwork and crocheted designs for gifts this holiday season.

Story by PAUL MYERS

THE GRIND OF a long day of work, whether its accounting or teaching high school students, can be exhausting. For father and daughter duo Sara and Greg Evangelho, they decided the best self care for them was creation.

Sara creates the endless patterns of crocheted blankets, animals, baby caps and more, while Greg spends his nights in a garage-turned-woodworker station. Together they hit Visalia's Taste of the Arts fair, to show Tulare County what their therapeutic hobby has to offer.

"Overall people were really liking his stuff and they would go grab their friends to see what he's made," Sara said.

Meanwhile, Sara walked away with more money than she has made taking the occasional order from friends and coworkers. Because Greg has so much trouble reconciling his perfectionist nature with natural imperfections of wood, the pieces have to meet a high standard if he is going to sell it. And that goes for his cutting boards, picture frames, coasters and other wooden knickknacks.

Despite the constant challenge of fighting against nature, Greg still sees his woodwork as a way to blow off some steam.

"It's kind of therapy for me because I'm a perfectionist and wood isn't perfect," Greg said.

For Sara, the therapy side of it is a needed break from her Hanford West High School science class. When she is done imparting the necessary formulas and theories that freshmen and sophomores need, she enjoys moving her hands with yarn while listening to an audio book. Greg notes that he is partial to endless Pandora playlists while he sits in his garage crafting his next wooden trinket.

Like all artists, inspiration comes from all sorts of places. Sara said that she sometimes finds patterns she wants to create from Pinterest, but some are just conjured from her mind. But more than that, Sara enjoys the accomplished product, from her mind, through her hands to her customers.

"I enjoy the process but when you are done it is like, 'look what I've done,'" Sara said. "Especially when you design the pattern yourself, and put it all

Sara and Greg Evangelho pose together in Greg's garage-turned-workshop. The father woodworker and daughter crochet artist sell their creations at local shows and online direct to customers. Sara has been working on her craft for 25 years while Greg has been perfecting his woodworking capabilities for eight. They had a recent outpouring of support at local art festival Taste of the Arts fair where local artists have the opportunity to sell their crafts.

together and it's all from you. It's awesome."

Greg noted that he looks primarily to magazines for something he wants to try. Now that he's eight years into his hobby, and some skill under his belt, he can look back and be in awe of how little he knew before.

"I think back three or four years ago and I didn't know what I was doing," Greg laughed. "Once I finally started to get a kick out of it I said, 'wow, I can do this.'"

Sara, who has been crocheting since she was 10 years old when her grandmother taught her, slowly started adding her work to her Instagram, @misse_vangelho. As her work started to get noticed she would find that people were wanting to order something.

"It's gotten to the point if I'm making something,

I make two, three or four of them because someone always wants something that I'm making," Sara said.

Because social media is not necessarily Greg's "thing" his sales came from referrals from Sara.

"She posted [a cutting board] and 10 minutes later she said someone wanted it. I only had one so I went in and whipped up two more," Greg said.

The demand for Greg's works of wood is a welcome sign for the SJVC accountant. While he is not actively drawing in customers they are finding their way

to him. Wanting customers in need of a handcrafted blanket, animal or anything of the sort, or perhaps an artisan wine holder, chopping block can message Sara on her Instagram or perhaps at her email smevangelho@gmail.com.

"I enjoy the process but when you are done it is like, 'look what I've done.'"

SARA EVANGELHO
CROCHET ARTIST,
[INSTAGRAM.COM/MISSE_VANGELHO](https://www.instagram.com/misse_vangelho)

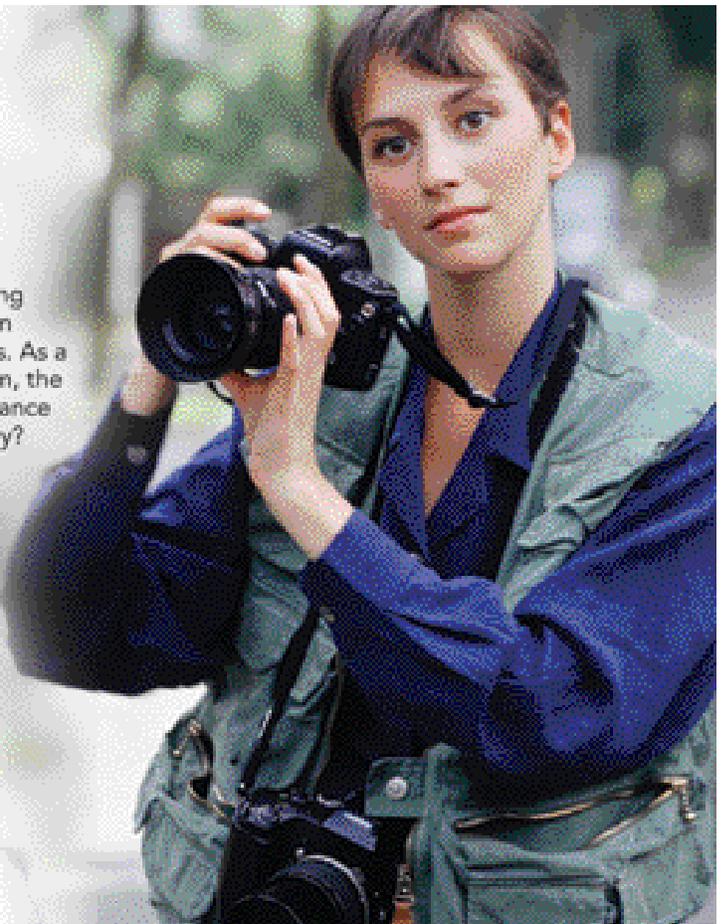
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Sisters Jan Lewis and Diane Michigian make fresh chocolate at Candy Cottage in downtown Visalia

Sweet Sisters

Story by REGGIE ELLIS

SISTERS JAN AND DIANE didn't have much of a sweet tooth growing up. But they always looked forward to those Sunday drives up to Three Rivers to pick up some sweets from Huffackers candy shop. You know the place as Reimer's now, but regardless of the name family trips up the hill make the candy, and the memories, that much sweeter. To this day, the Lewis sisters still remember the chocolates and candies that were their favorites and how satisfying it was to finally taste the treats after the long car ride of anticipation.

Half a lifetime later, Jan Lewis and Diane Michigian find themselves enjoying more candy than they ever ate as kids, not because they crave it, but because they create it.

In March, the sisters and their father, Glen Lewis, opened the Candy Cottage near the corner of Court Avenue and Main Street in downtown Visalia. Inside the store they have a chocolate lab where they handmake 10 different kinds of fudge. They also make candy truffles, bark, toffees, peanut brittle, marshmallow sticks and covered pretzels on site. Diane even mixes in her creative streaks by baking brownies with caramel chunks or peanut butter balls with dark chocolate chips.

"I love being creative and making something people will enjoy," Diane said.

Jan added, "I am educator at heart and I miss the interaction with the kids. I really like it when little kids come in and I can see their excitement and hear their oohs and aahs about the candy."

Jan's dip into the world of chocolate happened 10 years ago. Raised by educators, Jan started her career as a teacher after moving to the Bay Area. When her school district downsized in 2009, she started considering a career change. Her father Glen Lewis had retired after 40 years of education in Tulare and later with the Tulare County Office of Education. He asked a realtor friend in Cambria to be on the lookout for local businesses and shops coming up for sale.

"Originally we wanted to open a hot dog stand, something simple," Jan said.

The only property available was a cute little candy shop. The serendipitous circumstances triggered heartfelt memories for Jan and her father and they decided to take their first bite in the chocolate industry, which, despite most chocolates' soft exterior, is harder than it looks. Jan said it took her months to master the process of tempering, where chocolate is scientifically heated and cooled to the right temperatures to create the desired shiny coating and hardened shell.

"I had watched some YouTube videos and taken some advice from people but much of it was misleading or totally wrong," she said. "But I figured it out and we started off well."

By 2014, the Lewises had opened two more candy stores in Morro Bay. A year later Jan sold the two Morro Bay locations and decided to concentrate on her Cambria store. In 2018, she decided to sell that too in order to move back to Tulare County to be closer to her aging father following the death of her mother,



Jan Lewis

Carleen.

“Coming back home was all about being closer to dad and family,” Jan said.

Diane joined the family business only after not following in the family footsteps. Instead of education, Diane became an entrepreneur and was self employed for most of her life. After losing her husband six years ago, she decided to join dad and sis in the candy biz. After months of searching for a location in downtown Visalia, the trio just happened to notice a local dress shop was vacating the perfect sized location. It was the second time the Lewis family had found a home for its shop purely by happenstance. Diane used her decorating, painting and bargain hunting skills to create her vision of a local candy shop complete with rare products, gifts and other locally made treats, such as Stafford’s Chocolates in Porterville.

“We brought in things that might be new to the area, like prepackaged cotton candy,” Diane said.

Since opening in Visalia, Jan and Diane said business has been pretty sweet. They are drawing people from Visalia to Fresno and tourists from Los Angeles and Sacramento looking to do something in town before or after a trip to the sequoias.

“They are both very intelligent and very creative,” Glen doted on his daughters. “Once they are given a challenge, they take on the issue with dedication.”

The candy industry has been full of surprises for the sisters. Diane said she was surprised by the difference in people’s tastes from town to town. In Morro Bay and Cambria, primarily populated by retirees, candy consumers preferred the semisweet dark chocolate. But in Visalia, it tends to be more of an even split between milk and dark chocolate, with a slight lean toward milk, as you



Diane Michigian

might expect from the dairy capital of California.

When Jan began in the industry 10 years ago, she was unaware of the health benefits of chocolate. She said she was surprised to find out anything that is at least 70% dark chocolate is considered to have a beneficial level of antioxidants. That’s why Candy Cottage uses 72% dark chocolate. They also offer a dozen different sugar free products, protein balls and dad’s favorite, Diane’s English toffee.

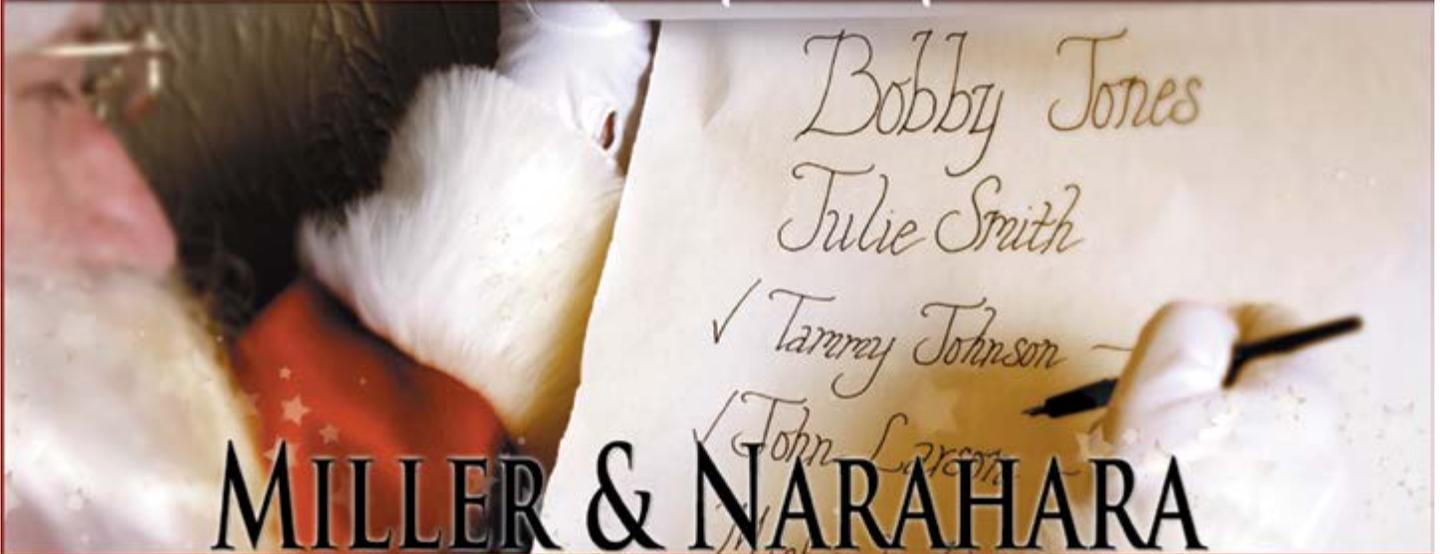
“We all want to have purpose and make something people appreciate,” Glen said.

More than making chocolate, the sisters are making memories for other little girls looking to saunter around the store in hopes of finding the sweets they seek. Jan and Diane say their favorite moments are seeing children’s eye light up at the bright colors and thick consistency of their candy confections. Jan remembers one recent ballerina whose mother brought her in after a dance rehearsal and led customers in an impromptu ballet lesson. Diane recounts visits by regular customers who just come in to talk, in some cases, every day of the week. Sometimes they clap with excitement. Sometimes they sing. But every time they leave with something to satisfy their sweet tooth. Their motto sums up the store best: “It’s fun to act like a kid in a candy store!”

“I want this to be a happy, fun place,” Jan said. “I think we have created that here.”

Most items in the store are sold individually for \$3-\$5 as pricing is done by the pound. The store does offer military discounts and coupons for purchases of \$25 or more. Candy Cottage is located at 110 W. Main St. in Visalia. For more information, visit www.candycottagevisalia.com or call 559-802-5522.

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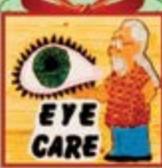
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All Is Merry & Sprite

Nate Norman spends his free time turning his sprite art and paintings into dollars, taking in custom orders throughout the year.

Story by PAUL MYERS

BY DAY NATE NORMAN is a Tulare County library assistant for youth services. He organizes events and programs for kids and teens in the area. But by night he is using beads and colors on canvas to illustrate eye capturing characters and vistas.

Known as sprite art, Norman has put more paint and beads on canvas than he can count. And he has only been using his artistic talent for less than two years. He began his “self sufficient hobby” in February 2018 when his sister, who’s an art major, needed something to fill the other half of her table at a convention.

“The convention was in Bakersfield...and a week before she said she needed help with the table...so it was kind of a spur of the moment thing,” Norman said.

For the time he made simple handheld Pokemon figures. About a week after that he made more intricate pieces that were vastly improved. Each time he applied paints and beads to canvas he realized he was getting better. Before long he started to go to his own art conventions.

“After failing so bad the first time I was like, ‘I can do this,’” Norman said. “We started looking into these other conventions and I was like, ‘I have this one coming up, so I need to make something new for that.’”

Lo and behold there is an open market of people looking for unique art pieces. In Pasadena, Norman sold about 40 pieces. And he has the opportunity to sell more often with the Arts Consortium in town.

“It was about a year ago when I realized we had the Art Consortium downtown and that we have artist events around here. So it started to take off from there,” Norman said.

Without the overhead cost of brick and mortar store, or an online store that takes a chunk of profits, Norman has been happy selling his art directly to consumers over Instagram. Under the Instagram handle @starvingsquid, customers can take a look at his available inventory and see if there is something they want to take home, or gift to someone else.

“They can [direct message] me and I can meet them for the sale, but I’ll also post a schedule of the



Nate Norman explains the process behind his sprite art creations and the process behind layering background paint and applying the beads that make up the character. He accepts sales and custom orders through his Instagram page, or by emailing starvingsquid@gmail.com.

shows I'll be at and they can show up and buy something there," Norman said.

Norman's art ranges in size and price. He sells well crafted fridge magnets for \$3 and five-foot canvases for \$300. His largest sale has been a sprite art piece of a one eyed squid adversary from the Doctor Strange comics, called Shuma-Gorath. The art was intricate to say the least with colors, details and shading. But running into supply issues made it all the more laborious. So much that it was hard to part with the finished product.

"I had a show coming up and I wanted to get this character done. I ran into so many technical problems. I ran out of beads or paints and had to one-day order more," Norman said. "When I was at the show I put it up and I waited and nobody bought it. So I thought, 'yay, I get to take it home,' but at the last minute someone paid \$275 for it."

For anyone around the holidays or all year long want to contact Norman for his services, he is welcome to take custom order as long as they come in

early December. While detailed concepts are helpful, customers can also give Norman more creative room to roam. Just recently a customer in Los Angeles said he wanted something space related with characters.

The challenge was that the characters were not a recreation from a comic or animated series. No matter, Norman drew on inspiration from scratch.

Most anything else Norman creates comes from the pop culture of his youth. Littered through his home and others neatly stacked away in totes are canvas among canvas of Marvel characters or pixelated Nintendo games.

"Sometimes I'll try to do what is popular right now but

mostly it will be something that I remember from when I was kid, like a video game," Norman said.

What he likes most about his eclectic hobby is all of the possibilities that come with it, and it is a passion that harkens back to his youth.

Art was always something I was into as a kid but you know, you grow up, get into high school and have homework, you just lose time to do it," Norman said.

"Sometimes I'll try to do what is popular right now but mostly it will be something that I remember from when I was a kid, like a video game."

NATE NORMAN

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CASE IH AGRICULTURE



A Component for Yuletide Fusion

Jon Anderson's Component Coffee Lab in Visalia is a bright, buzzing venue perfect for meetups with old friends during the season.

Story by PAUL MYERS

THE HOLIDAYS IS a time for togetherness and there are few convening drinks quite like coffee. But owner of Visalia's Component Coffee Lab, Jon Anderson, is giving more than just a hub for old friends to gather for the holidays. He is providing a worthwhile experience.

Their offering of coffee, food and atmosphere has made customers turn their heads. So, it is no surprise that Component was nominated for Visalia Chamber of Commerce small business of the year award just after their one-year celebration.

"There's a lot of components to our shop, we are doing a lot of things on a lot of different levels," Anderson said.

It isn't lost on Anderson that a nice place to hang gives people a good reason to stay, but a good cup of joe is what gets them in the door. Which is what gives Component Coffee Lab's owner-operator the drive to get up in the morning.

Everything that goes into the menu is an espresso art form. Component recently received a new Slayer Espresso piece of equipment, and they've been "nerd-

ing" out on it.

"It's like we are playing with a new car and we just got this wonderful machine and it works so well," Anderson said. "All of that goes into the final product and that helps differentiate us from the others."

True to his respect for coffee beans, Anderson has consciously chosen to leave ingredients off the menu, that would be considered more than common at other shops, like vanilla.

"A coffee shop and vanilla, they go hand in hand. I think we wanted to be different in the sense that if we care so much about how espresso tastes why would we mask it with another flavor," Anderson said.

Anderson's goal in business is simple – make the customer happy. It is not unheard of. The happier the customer is, the more money they'll spend over time and the better they'll promote the business. And for Anderson, he is giving Component's customers an entire experience.

"I feel like atmosphere is a tangible product I can offer to our customers...if you've been there, I hope you feel at home," Anderson said.



PHOTO: PAUL MYERS

Jon Anderson, Component Coffee Lab owner, brings a worthwhile experience to Visalia's customers to get together for the holidays.

For the most part, excluding a coffee roasting station nearest the front door, the vibe in Component is homey. Smooth wood tones and eclectic art pieces hanging from the wall makes for a place where people can spend hours of their time.

The business administration major learned a lot about customer service through his time at Starbucks. While it was just a job to get through college, Anderson was keenly picking up on subtle nuances.

“What I learned was how to serve a customer and serve them well,” Anderson said.

Perhaps one of the biggest differences from Anderson's single coffee shop, as opposed to coffee behemoth Starbucks, is the money driven corporate structure. Anderson trains his employees and managers to jump in at the cash register when the line is out the door – and it often is – but not push people through the line.

Patience at the head of the line gives a less than coffee connoisseur the time to actually talk about the product. And having astute baristas allows Component to maintain their customer service standards even when people continue filing in.

Anderson's mode of doing business is helpful for both the employee and the customer, and he has seen other methods go the wrong way. In his second day at Starbucks during college, one employee had more than his fill of Frappuccinos. With empty venti cups lined up on the counter, one more order pushed him over

the edge.

“He said, ‘I don't want to do this anymore’ and throws on the ground a line of cups and walked out,” Anderson said.

Fortunately, no such incidents have taken place at Component.

Armed with a passion for coffee and the knowhow of business, Anderson knew that if push came to shove, he could create a business and do it pretty well. When it came time for him to have a coffee shop of his own, he knew he needed a name. On the table was Base Camp Coffee Co., unfortunately there was already one in Los Angeles.

Anderson and some stakeholders in the business decided to inspire themselves through looking at old stereo systems and derive a name from that.

“Back in the day they called them component stereo systems

because it took a lot of different components to produce sound,” Anderson said.

The parallel was clear.

“It takes a lot of different components to produce what we produce. From the roasting to the customer service side our culture and the food and sourcing good material and quality stuff,” Anderson said.

But the three dots that signify Component Coffee Lab were just what was on the stereo receiver. Although Anderson did choose the colors because of how they attract the eye.

“It takes a lot of different components to produce what we produce.”

JON ANDERSON
OWNER, COMPONENT COFFEE LAB

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METRO GRAPHICS

Field of Dreams

Gardening team Pattie and Neil Fernbaugh discuss the perks of converting their property to drought-tolerant native plants.

Story by PATTY PHILLIPS & NEIL FERNBAUGH, UCCE MASTER GARDENERS

ABOUT SIX YEARS ago we decided to convert a large portion of our property to a drought tolerant, low maintenance native plant garden. With all the recent concerns about loss of bees, decline of Monarch butterflies, and dwindling wildlife, we wanted to find out whether changes in our garden could make a difference. Within a few years, we discovered that it could. We now have a greater variety of birdlife, and we have observed a far greater variety of native bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects than we had ever seen before. And all this has occurred despite the fact that we are citrus growers, surrounded by acres of monoculture.

What we have learned is that even in our small garden, we can contribute to biodiversity, simplify our garden maintenance, and significantly cut our water use, while creating a beautiful home, not just for ourselves, but for the creatures and critters.

Out of state visitors say there are no seasons in California. It's either hot, or drab and rainy (if we're

lucky). In our native plant garden though, we see constant changes through the seasons. We have almost year round flowers but have learned to see the beauty of our native grasses turning from green to golden, and have watched our native buckwheats change in color from green to pink, to white and finally to a summer bronze. We have come to appreciate that California is truly a Golden state and enjoy colors beyond what a year-round green lawn has to offer.

Fall is the right time to make changes in your garden, and now is the best time to plant natives. After six years of success, we are pretty comfortable in saying that our choices are good for the San Joaquin Valley, but our garden soil is clay, and depending on what soil you have, other varieties may work as well.

We started with some "foundational" plantings that would stay green all year round. Our California Lilac (*Ceanothus* 'Remote Blue') has lived for the last several years with virtually no summer water. The same is true for our California Toyon (*Heteromeles*

arbutifolia) and Sugar Bush (*Rhus ovata*), both of which seem to be loved by a variety of bird life. We also found some success with one particular Manzanita that seems able to survive in our clay soil -- Austin Griffiths Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos manzanita x densiflora*). These larger shrubs can provide privacy, habitat, and visual impact in home gardens.

A variety of native buckwheats and sages have also survived with minimal water and care. California Buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum foliosum*) is a bush that grows to about a yard tall and changes from white to pink, to bronze in fall. You've probably seen it along the sides of the highways all around the state, but not noticed that it is a perennial and annually returns to its winter green color. Other Buckwheats like Shasta Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum polyanthum*) are much shorter but have beautiful, long lasting yellow flowers. San Miguel Island Buckwheat (*Eriogonum grande rubescens*), which needs part shade inland, loves clay soil and flowers a bright pink-red into mid-summer. Juncos, towhees, quail and other seed loving birds are particularly attracted to this low growing plant.

Sages are another dependable planting in our San Joaquin Valley soils. Cleveland Sage (*Salvia clevelandii* 'Deer Springs') and Grey Musk Sage (*Salvia* 'Poza Blue') are tough, low water bushes with blue flowers and strong but wonderful fragrances. There is also a "Creeping Sage" (*Salvia* 'Bees Bliss') that works well as a grey, spreading groundcover. Hummingbird Sage (*Salvia spathecea*), which needs more shade here in the valley, lives up to its name for attracting hummingbirds and butterflies.

Among our favorite ground covers are yarrows and coyote bushes. Pigeon Point is a Dwarf Coyote bush (*Baccharus pilularis* 'Pigeon Point') that can spread 5-10 feet quickly as a ground cover. A few plants could cover what at one point might have been a lawn. We think that the plantings around the Tulare County Office of Education on South Mooney are a coyote bush variety. Again, these take no summer water, and are loved by native bees, flies, and beneficial insects. Even the most low-laying white yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) can serve as a great groundcover, and mowed back yearly, will easily spread.



METRO GRAPHICS

M E R R Y

Christmas



TAKE A PEEK

See for your elves
what local fun the
holidays have in
store.



NOVEMBER

27 Home for the "Holiday" — The Sun-Gazette is bringing back its Paper & Pastries Promo from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. at 402 S. F St. in Exeter. Stop by for free coffee or cocoa, free pastry, free newspaper, and a free copy of the 2019 edition of Holiday Magazine while supplies last.

28 The Race Against Hunger 5K run/2-mile walk, a.k.a. Turkey Trot, provides a large portion of the annual funding for the VEAC food pantry and day to day operations required to assist over 1,000 families each month. The race is from 7 to 10 a.m. on Main Street in Downtown Visalia. Entry is \$15-\$30 at veac.org/turkey-trot1.

29 Family Night at Visalia Adventure Park, Hwy 198 and Akers St., 9 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. \$18 wristband gets you unlimited access to go karts, bumper boats, mini golf, batting cages, and laser tag. Karaoke mic will be available, too. For more info, visit adventurepark.com/family-fun.

DECEMBER

1 American Legion Auxiliary No. 94's Country Craft Fair from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building, 324 N. Kaweah Ave. in Exeter. Toys, gifts, wood crafts, jewelry, art, apparel, and dolls. Free admission. For more information, call 559-804-9669.

1 Join the Visalia Police Activities League — PAL and members of the Visalia Police Department for the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony at Lincoln Oval Park at 5:45 p.m. Mix and mingle with members of your Visalia Police Department and meet jolly old St. Nick himself!

2 Come join the fun at the Annual Candy Cane Lane Parade in Downtown Visalia starting at 7 p.m. This Parade is filled with all the sights and sounds of Christmas. Dancing, music, characters, and of course, the man himself, Santa. Bundle up and come kick off the holiday season right. *Chairs not to be set up before 4 p.m.*

5, 12 and 19 Enjoy Exeter's old-fashioned holiday charm at the 28th Annual Exeter Christmas Open House every Thursday evening during the holiday shopping season. Shops will be open late, from 5 to 9 p.m. and hosting festive events, offers and refreshments for your shopping pleasure.

5 The Beach Boys will perform a holiday show live at the Fox Theatre at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$59-\$99 at foxvisalia.org.

6 Join the Arts Consortium in downtown Visalia for First Friday from 5 to 8 p.m. to showcase local artistry. This downtown art walk is a great outdoor activity where you can walk between unique locations to view art work and even grab a bite to eat in one of the local Downtown restaurants.

6 The Visalia Chamber's 39th Christmas Tree Auction to benefit local charities. Doors will open for VIP at 6 p.m., with general admission at 7 p.m. at the Visalia Convention Center. Enjoy electronic bidding for trees and silent auction items, wine tastings, food samples from the Central Valley's best restaurants, and dancing. Tickets are \$85-\$150 per person; table sponsorships for 8 range \$1,200-\$5,000.

6 Exeter Christmas Parade from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. along Pine Street downtown. For more information call the Exeter Chamber at 559-592-5262.

7 Arts Consortium presents 1st Saturday in Three Rivers from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Art studios, restaurants and merchants open their doors and invite all for a town-wide celebration. Go to the Three Rivers Historical Museum, 42268 Sierra Hwy. for a map of participating venues. For more info, visit 1stsaturdaytr.com or call 559-561-3463.

7 Opening Day for Ice Skate Visalia offering a unique and fun skating experience on our synthetic ice surface which makes skating easier and safer for all ages. Admission is just \$10 per person and includes skate rental. Located at Garden Street Plaza in Downtown Visalia.

7 Exeter Kiwanis Club's Spirit of the Holidays premier wine-tasting event from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Building in Exeter. Tickets are \$60 at eventbrite.com.

8 Hike to the Nation's Christmas Tree with ceremony to honor of the men and women of the Armed Forces, carolers and more at the base of the General Grant tree in Kings Canyon National Park. Chartered buses leave from Sanger. Reserve at 559-875-4575 or visit sanger.org. Event starts at 2:30 p.m. Admission to the park is waived.

8 Join the combined choirs of El Diamante and Golden West from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Visalia Fox Theatre as they share the quintessential holiday work, Handel's Messiah. The concert will feature the Christmas portions of the nativity story with soloist and chamber orchestra in its original orchestration. Tickets are \$25-\$50 at tickets.vendini.com.

12 Throwback Thursdays' screening of Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) at 6:30 p.m. at the Fox Theatre, 300 W. Main St. in Visalia. Tickets are \$5 at eventbrite.com.

14 and 21 Pancake Breakfast and Ice Skating with Santa from 9 to 10:30 a.m. at Garden Street Plaza, 101 S. Garden St. in Visalia. Tickets are \$5-\$10. Reserve with Visalia Parks and Rec, 559-713-4365.

14 Winter Trout Derby from 9 to 11 a.m. Children ages 15 and under are invited to Plaza Park Pond to compete for a catch of their own for prizes. Entry is \$10-\$12. Participants need to bring their own fishing poles, bait, tackle and fish stringer. For more info, call Visalia Parks and Rec, 559-713-4365.

14 Ugly Christmas Sweater Pub Crawl from 4:30 to 9 p.m. beginning at Lum Lums in Downtown Visalia. No cover charge at all locations plus great drink and food specials with your wristband. \$12-\$36 to participate. A portion of the proceeds of the event will be donated to the Valley Oak SPCA. Must be 21.

14 Fiesta Navidad with Mariachi Los Camperos at the Visalia Fox Theatre from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tickets are \$21-\$43 at eventbrite.com.

17 Disney Junior Holiday Party on Tour from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the Visalia Fox Theatre. Kids of all ages and their families are invited to the biggest celebration in town, with special guest Santa Claus! Tickets are \$42-\$166 at disneyjunior.com.

18 Wayback Wednesdays' screening of Miracle on 34th Street (1947) at 6:30 p.m. at the Fox Theatre, 300 W. Main St. in Visalia. Tickets are \$5 at eventbrite.com.

19 and 20 An Irish Christmas, a night of spectacular dance, singing and Irish traditional music celebrating the international spirit of the holiday season. From 7 to 10 p.m. at the Visalia Fox Theatre. Tickets are \$12-\$34 at eventbrite.com.

20 and 27; JAN. 3 and 10 Family Friday Skate Night at the ice skating rink at Garden Street Plaza in Downtown Visalia. \$5 per person from 6 to 9 p.m. All ages welcome. Visit iceskatevisalia.com for more info.

27 Family Night at Visalia Adventure Park, Hwy 198 and Akers St., 9 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. \$18 wristband gets you unlimited access to go karts, bumper boats, mini golf, batting cages, and laser tag. Karaoke mic will be available, too. For more info, visit adventurepark.com/family-fun.

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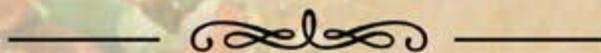
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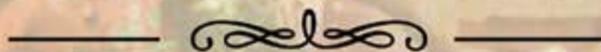
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