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Mountain WINTER magazine



December 4, 2024

Times  Courier

Your hometown newspaper devoted to the progress of Gilmer County

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Cover photo by René Wilder — Clear Creek along the hiking trail in her neighborhood on Burnt Mountain.

Times Courier

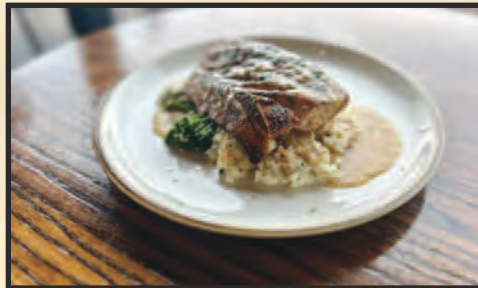
Andy Ashurst, Publisher; **Whitney Sherrill**, Contributing Writer, **Robbie Bills**, Sports Editor; **Rhesa Chastain**, Office Manager;
Keli Fredrickson Parker, Graphic Designer; **April Teague**, Typesetter; **René Wilder**, Advertising Sales; **Ted "Bear" Ensminger**, Advertising Sales;
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House of Applejay built on foundation of tradition

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

Developing liqueurs is a very personal process for Caroline Porsiel, owner of House of Applejay Distillery in East Ellijay.

“When you taste my liqueurs you actually have a very good idea about my character,” she observed.

This is because she pours her passions, talents and immense knowledge of the history of distilling into crafting locally produced flavors. Her goal with each is to pass on a very specific feeling and experience for the person who drinks her wares. For example, her Cranberry Mountain is designed to capture “Thanksgiving in a glass,” while her Winter Cherry Mountain liqueur conjures the sensation of sitting in front of a crackling fireplace with a piece of dark chocolate. The distillery’s signature Applejay can transport you to sitting in a rocking chair on a sunlit porch. Visitors to the tasting room can round out the experience with a sample of her “absolutely clean vodka”

naturally flavored with sweetgrass and an award-winning “edgy” high proof gin.

After tasting the various flavors — each of which has been years in the making — Porsiel noted that visitors to the distillery “know a lot about how I think and how I feel and who I am, probably more than if you were to talk to me for a little while. This is kind of what liqueur making is all about. You really have an idea, and that’s what you want to capture ... You want (the feeling) in a glass transported to the next person that gets the smile that we’re looking for.”

She went on to invite, “Just stop by and come to the tasting room. Get some samples and see what you like and from there

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Caroline Porsiel, right, and her mother, Sabine, operate House of Applejay.

Welcome to winter in the mountains

Winter is filled with a lot of things in the south. For one, it means the holiday season is upon us.

As we publish this magazine, we have just finished with Thanksgiving and our family events for the holiday. Now, we are beginning to look forward to Christmas and all the joy the holiday brings.

In Gilmer County winter used to signify a winding down. The apples were harvested, the Apple Festival was finished and we were preparing for a long hibernation.

These days, people have discovered winter in the mountains is a crisp holiday full of blue skies and lots to do.

To many, the ideas of winter in the mountains brings forth visions of cozy fires, scarves, warm blankets and hot beverages.

Tourists are now visiting us to spend the holidays in the mountains. Families come up and spend their time in the mountains.

We can't fault them. We think this is the best place to be at any time.

Inside this magazine we hope to offer you some ideas and focuses for your winter. You can find recipes and crafts for the family. They will keep old and young alike busy and help create some memories.

An attraction we are proud of in Gilmer County are our Christmas light displays, not just the professional and government displays, but those created by homeowners around the county. We will give you some history of lights in the county.

Please enjoy the magazine and be sure to thank our advertisers for making this magazine possible.

Most of all, we want to welcome you to winter in Gilmer County.

Thank you for reading.

Andy Ashurst, Publisher
Times-Courier

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► **House of Applejay, from page 4**
the journey begins.”

Rooted in fond memories

The known history of liqueur, or Likörs as it is in Porsiel’s native German, dates back to the 1300s when an alchemist began tinkering with sweetened, flavored alcohol.

Today, they are most commonly thought of as an ingredient for making cocktails, but Porsiel described how they can be a standalone beverage as well. She noted that enjoying “a little splash of sweetness” is a wonderful way to close out a meal and offers “a beautiful alternative” to eating a dessert.

As an example of how a liqueur can “with very little effort (make) your life a little more luxurious,” she described how in her native Germany, families have the tradition of gathering together in the afternoon for a coffee hour.

“If you’re a child you get a cookie ... and as you grow older you get

a coffee and very often a liqueur at the side ... I always thought this was the best hour of the day — the time when you get this little sweet treat. It was always a time when the family came together to talk ... I guess this is where my love of liqueur comes from. It’s about coming together. It’s about talking and being family, being a community. For me, it’s a social aspect.”

‘I fell in love’

Porsiel’s journey to opening House of Applejay, which is located in one of the former Sears buildings on Fowler Street, began more than a decade and a half ago. Born and raised in Germany, she moved to the United States in 2011. She has a knack for working with machinery, observing, “I love machines, and machines love me back.” Thus, she found success working for many years in the automotive industry, but then something new caught her attention.

“One day about 17 years ago, I fell in love with liqueur making ... At one point, I decided to just pursue what I’m loving. That brought me here today.”

So began the journey that led her to trade in her manufacturing experience for a “very big and beautiful still pot.”

In preparation for opening her own business, Porsiel worked in several distilleries and learned everything that she could about distilling, including how to set up the machinery and clean fermenters. Drawing from her previous work experience, she recognized that if she was going to succeed, she needed to be familiar with every step in the process.

“Otherwise, you cannot perfect it,” she said.

Processing began at the new House of Applejay location last December, and the business opened to the public in March.

► **Page 14**



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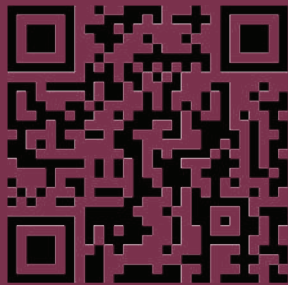
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***Check out
seasonal***

What: Holiday Lights of Ellijay

Where: Ellijay Lions Club Fairgrounds, 1729 South Main Street

When: November 25 – December 30 (except for Christmas Eve & Christmas Day)

Sunday – Thursday, 6 – 9 p.m.

Friday & Saturday, 6 – 10 p.m.

What to expect: The local Lions Club partners with Holiday Lights, an outside event company, to present a walk-through of Christmas lights and decorations that stretch across the fairgrounds.

How much: \$10 for adults; kids 12 and under free.

What: Light Up Ellijay Parade & Market

Where: Vendors will set up downtown on Broad St. and Sand St. and will be open at 12.

When: Saturday, December 7.

What to expect: Santa will be on the courthouse



Photo by Robert Ferguson

steps for photo ops from 3-5 p.m. Gilmer Schools Chorus groups will sing from downtown Welcome Center front porch 4-5:30 p.m. The parade will begin at 6 p.m. Some of the floats will end the parade behind the Downtown Welcome Center for a meet and greet afterward.

What: Downtown Light Nights

When: November 29 – December 22

Where: Downtown Ellijay

What to expect: Roam some of the most scenic streets of downtown Ellijay and cast your vote on the best light displays in town! Pick up a map at the downtown Welcome Center, see the lights, and vote for your favorite display. Awards will be given for the Best Commercial Display, Best Residential Display, Best Window Display, and Best Overall Display.

➤ Page 10



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Times-Courier photos



► Seasonal Events, from page 9

What: Festival of Trees
Where: Gilmer County Library
When: November 19 – January 2
 Please join the Sequoyah Regional Library System as we celebrate the holiday season with our annual Festival of Trees! Visit the Gilmer County Library to see festive trees displayed by various organizations from the Gilmer community.

What: Lions White Cane Day
When: December 14
Where: Lions club members will be stationed at entrances to local parks, LongHorn Steakhouse, Chick-fil-A, McDonald's and Ingle's with donation buckets. All proceeds will provide food baskets for families and toys for young children. Needy families can apply through Tiffany at Family Connection, 706-276-2319.

What: Black Bear Plunge
When: Wednesday, Jan. 1, at 1 p.m.
Where: Fort Mountain State Park
What to expect: Participants take a plunge into the lake on New Year's Day. Online registration will begin soon and is to be posted on the Facebook pages of Fort Mountain State Park and Friends of Fort Mountain State Park. Signups are \$20 for each participant and includes a T-shirt, or \$30 for a hoodie.

There will also be day-of registration from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. before the plunge, but a T-shirt is not guaranteed, a park employee stated. There is a \$5 parking fee per car to enter the park.

There will be a roaring fire on the beach to warm brave participants who take the plunge, and a vendor selling hot beverages.

Winter crafts for kids



Looking for a fun art project to do with your child on a cold winter day? Try turning your little one's footprints into a pair of penguins. Alternatively, have your child wrap a painted hand around an ornament and then decorate the prints of their fingers to look like snowman. Another option is to forget the brush entirely. Use a fork instead to paint a polar bear with a cool, textured appearance.



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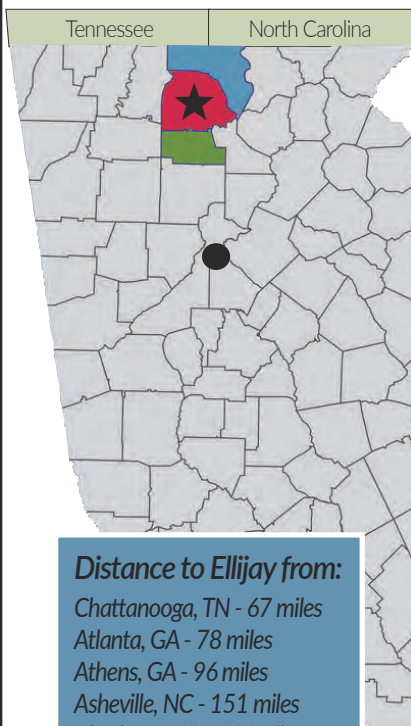
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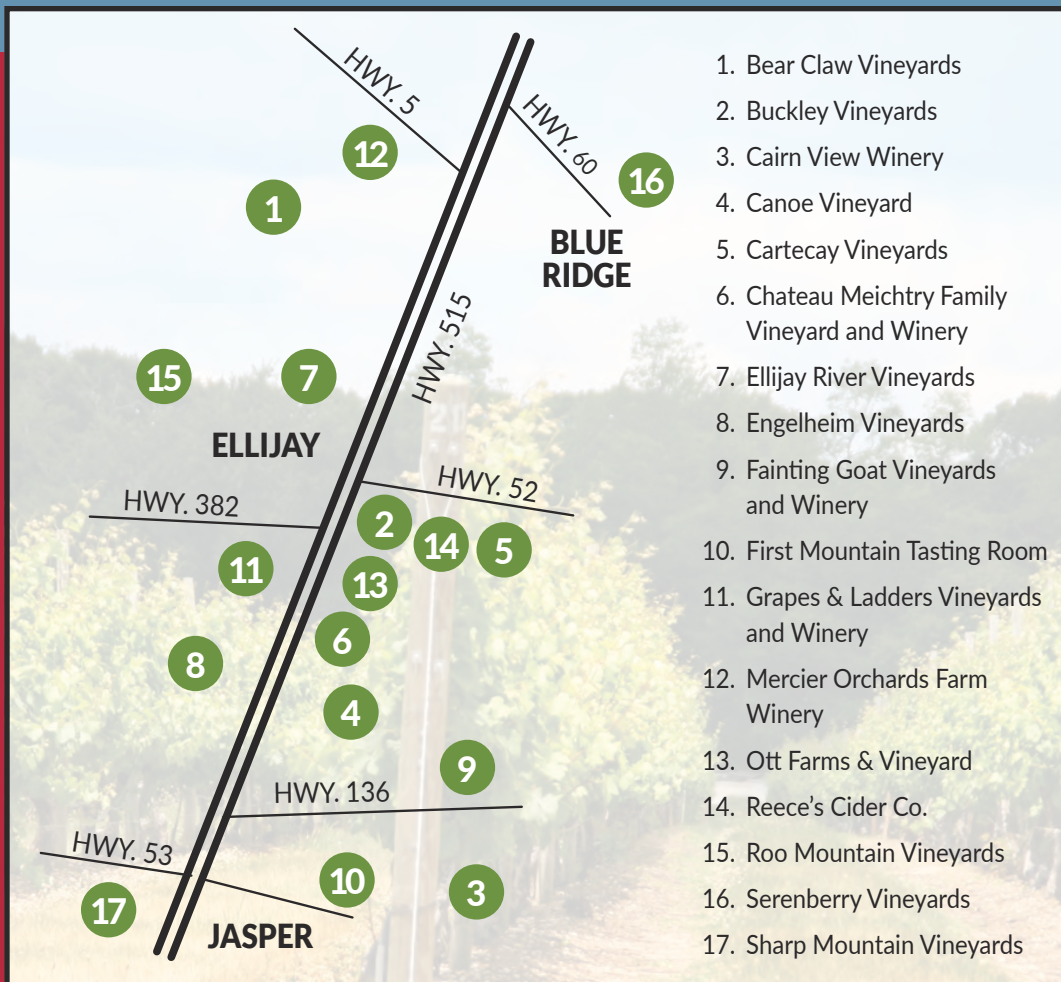


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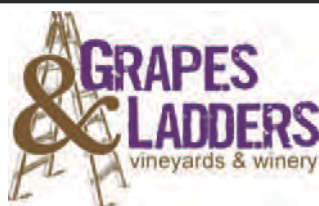
Distance to Ellijay from:

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Athens, GA - 96 miles
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Charlotte, NC - 266 miles
Murphy, NC - 41 miles



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► **House of Applejay, from page 6**

Porsiel, who operates the distillery alongside her mom, Sabine, described coming to the local area as love at first sight. Speaking of the warm welcome she has received from her neighbors in East Ellijay, she especially expressed thanks for her landlord, Tony Arbucci, for his “kind and supportive” help while getting the business up and running.

Award-winning products

The process of launching her dream has not been without challenges. Indeed, a number of people — even those in the industry — tried to discourage her from making liqueurs in the first place because they can be so difficult to get right.

“Don’t make a liqueur. Make another bourbon.’ That’s what they said,” she recalled.

Porsiel would not be dissuaded, however. Instead, she welcomed the challenge.

“I had a lot of people who tried to talk me out of it, but I always knew this was the right path to go,” she said.

And now she has medals to prove it was the right decision.

Earlier this year, House of Applejay received five medals at the 2024 New York World Spirits Competition hosted by The Tasting Alliance.

“For us it’s like going to the Oscars,” said Porsiel. “All of our (submitted) bottles won a medal, and I’m really proud of that.”

The local distillery received a gold medal for its Mt. Wildcat Old Style Juniper Liqueur, as well as three silvers and a bronze medal for other entries. Porsiel described earning the gold as “almost impossible for a newbie.”

‘Set an exclamation mark’

Developing a new flavor is a labor of love, which requires a good nose, patience and time. Porsiel noted you need a minimum of two or three years to create a new liqueur. Referring to herself as a perfectionist when it comes to crafting flavors, she described how she has the added challenge of making sure a new recipe can be produced on a larger scale and has a stable shelf life.

Describing how she takes extra care in developing a final flavor, she said, “For me personally, I think there are amazing liqueurs out there ... but I really like to set an exclamation mark at some point.”

Once the flavor is dialed in, making a new batch to sell to the public can be a half year process.

“If you’re not very passionate about making liqueurs, you’ll probably give up at some point along the road because it also has a lot of steps in the processing ... It’s a lot of cleaning. It’s a lot of being really thorough, a lot of

testing, but for me, it's not work. I love what I'm doing," said Porsiel.

The initial step in the process is to produce the base liquor.

"I really don't know why the English language is so tricky, but the second step you take the base liquor to produce a liqueur. Very similar words. The base liquor in our case is a vodka. We distill from wheat. It's a very clean base that we need," she said, adding the distillery uses all natural ingredients and processes.

Once the base has been made, natural essences, distillates and juices are added and allowed to sit so the flavors have time to marry together. This stage is reminiscent of the process' roots in perfume-making.

Most liqueurs do not have a high alcohol content, but the distillery does have three high proof products. As a nod to north Georgia's mountainous terrain, each of these is named after a mountain and has a set of coordinates on the label.

"You can actually hike to our high proofs," Porsiel observed.

➤ Page 16



The inviting interior of a Bear Barrel seating area outside the East Ellijay distillery.




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Those who schedule a tour of the House of Applejay Distillery location on Fowler Street will see the still shown above. Below, a glass of Cranberry Mountain pairs with a hot chocolate.



➤ **House of Applejay, from page 15**

Take a history-inspired tour

Porsiel sees herself and her products as part of a vibrant, centuries-old story, and the way she talks about distilling clearly reflects this mindset. Her conversation is sprinkled with details about distilling lore from centuries past. She is a self-described “hobby historian” and a founding member of the American Brandy and Rum (AMBRU) Campaign, which seeks to promote the heritage of commercial distilling in the United States.

In keeping with her interest in promoting this rich history, Porsiel offers distillery tours filled with historic anecdotes.

“I love to tell people the history because if you drink something there are lots of things where you might ask, ‘Well, why is it done this way?’ So I always explain the history to actually give a better understanding of the product itself,” said the distillery owner.

As an example, she described how when future queen Catherine de’ Medici moved from Italy to France to marry Henry II, she introduced Parisian nobility to a liqueur that was the most expensive drink of the time. The blend of ingredients imported from distant corners of the world resulted in a taste befitting a queen, but “the cost was so expensive the large wine glass shrank to a tiny size, a liqueur glass,” Porsiel said. The tradition of smaller glasses continues to this day.

The local liqueur maker believes that knowing such interesting historical tidbits can enhance the modern experience of drinking liqueurs.

She has many other stories to share on her tours, including tales about medicinal uses, marketing campaigns and examples of criminal history related to distilling. During a tour, she can tailor the discussion to fit the group’s specific interest.

“If people really poke me in the right direction, I probably don’t stop talking,” she laughed. “I can talk like a waterfall.”

Her passion when discoursing about traditions is clearly evident, and from time-to-time people ask her why she has invested so much in learning about the history of distilling. Her response is that “if you really want to make the best gin and win a gold medal,” you need to understand the roots of the industry, so that you can “capture and reflect the complete idea” of what the drink is intended to be.

Visitors who book tours will also see the still equipment, filtration system, fermenters and the laboratory where new flavors are tested and developed.

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Light Up Ellijay brings to life the joy of the holidays

For nearly four decades, Light Up Ellijay has offered a “blend of old-fashioned, hometown charm and time-honored Christmas traditions.”

That was how Clair Dakota Underhill described the holiday festivities in a 2000 *Times-Courier* article. Looking back at the history of the event to that point, she described how since its inception the “celebration of the joy of the holiday season” had become “truly favored by the Gilmer community, often drawing huge crowds in freezing weather.”

A dream becomes reality

When asked what inspired the first Light Up Ellijay event, which took place in 1986, organizer Gayla Pankey recalled, “A dream I had. That was how it started.”

She went on to describe how she always thought fondly of the description of the family’s Christmas celebration in the novel *Little Women* and explained how she wanted to create that kind of heartwarming experience in Ellijay.

“I wish we could all have that, all have a happy Christmas ... and the joy of Christmas,” said Pankey. “Simple. It doesn’t have



By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

**Photos from Light Up Ellijay
events from 2012-2016.**

to be a lot of things you get. It's the joy you have ... I just thought I'd like to do a fantasy Christmas for all the people. It was kind of hard, but I had a lot of good friends that helped me to get it together. We had no money whatsoever when we started out; we just had a lot of help."

Kicking off the holiday season and honoring veterans

Whether the occasion is Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter, Pankey and her family love "to decorate and enjoy the holiday." She put that passion for all things festive to good use as she set out to bring her vision for the first Light Up Ellijay to life.

Armed with rolls of red ribbon and donated greenery, Pankey and other volunteers decorated the flower pots outside downtown Ellijay businesses.

"There was a drug store having a sale so I bought all

the lights they had," Pankey recalled.

At the time, the veterans memorial was located in the center of the small park in the middle of the downtown square. Today, a fountain occupies that spot, and each holiday season a large frame is erected over the water feature and covered with greenery and ornaments to make the city's towering Christmas tree. In those early years, however, there was not a place for a single large tree, so organizers instead put up four small trees adorned with white lights around the veterans memorial.

In an article announcing the inaugural event, the *Times-Courier* stated that the Christmas tree lighting program would "focus on veterans and commemorate Pearl Harbor Day ... There will be carols, a ceremony, drums and bugles, with the local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts participating."



► Page 22

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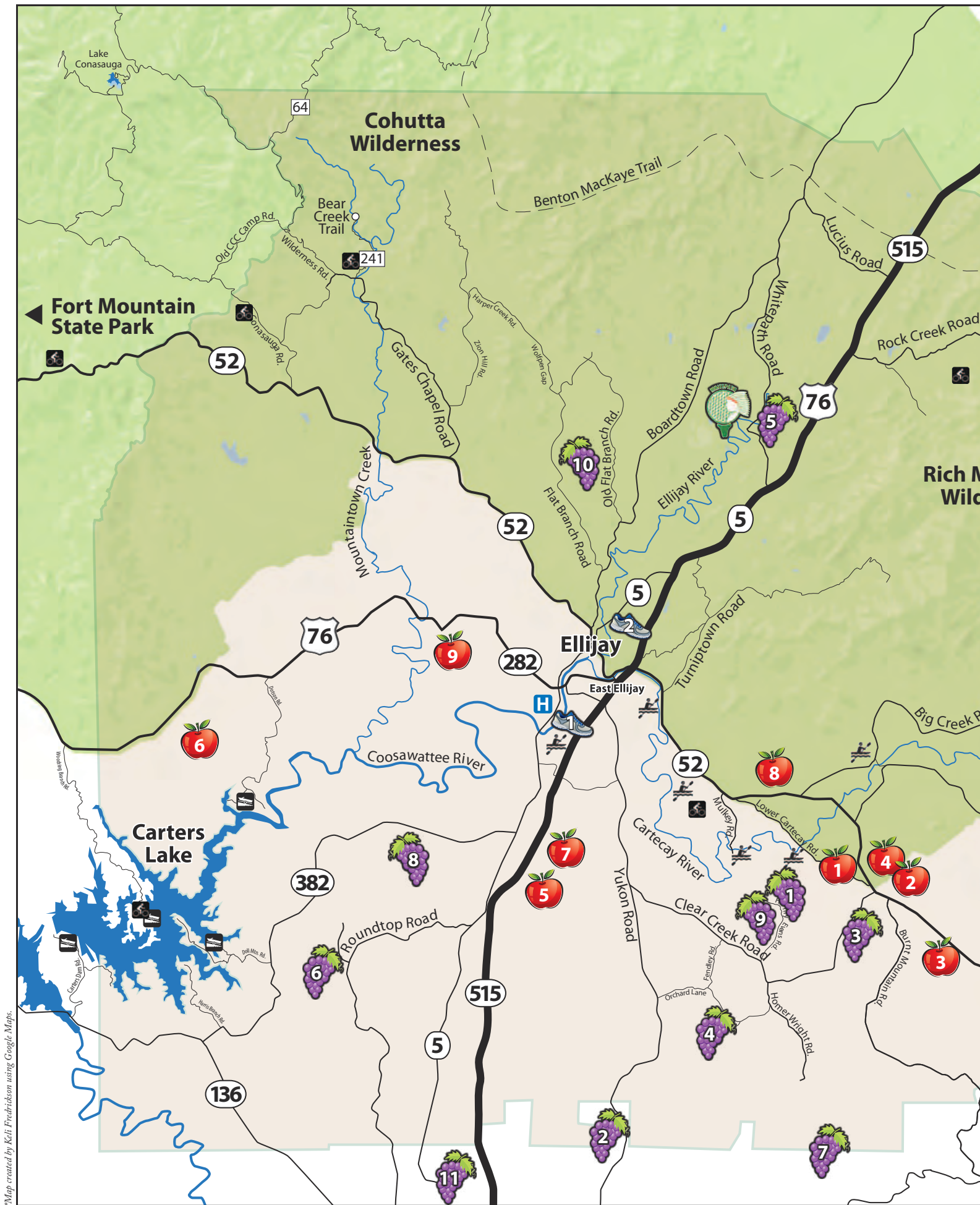
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Map created by Keli Fredrickson using Google Maps.



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2. Canoe Vineyard & Winery
3. Cartecay Vineyards
4. Chateau Meichtry Family Vineyard and Winery
5. Ellijay River Vineyards
6. Engelheim Vineyards
7. Fainting Goat Vineyards and Winery
8. Grapes & Ladders Vineyards & Winery
9. Ott Farms and Vineyard
10. Roo Mountain Vineyards
11. Sharp Mountain Vineyards



Gilmer County Apple Houses

1. Aaron Family Orchards
2. BJ Reece Orchards
3. Hillcrest Orchards
4. Mack Aaron's Apple House
5. Panorama Orchards & Farm Market
6. Penland's Apple House
7. Penland's Apple House II
8. R&A Orchards
9. Red Apple Barn



Walking Paths

1. Ellijay River Park
2. Harrison Park



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► **Light Up Ellijay, from page 19**

“It was just a lot of fun, not anything big or spectacular, but we enjoyed it,” Pankey recalled.

The Gilmer Arts Council and Jaycees were involved in the planning process. The latter group also installed more than a dozen holiday decorations on downtown utility poles. They were purchased with funds from the city, county and community members and debuted the previous year during a tree lighting ceremony at the board of education building in Ellijay.

The combination of an old-fashioned Christmas and honoring veterans continued for the first few years of Light Up Ellijay. Each year, Pankey invited a veteran to come and place a wreath on the memorial as part of the tree lighting. Pastors offered prayers, and she always tried to get someone to come sing “O Holy Night.”

“That’s when the veteran put the wreath on and I turned the lights on,” she said.

Pankey also described how she scheduled Light Up Ellijay in conjunction with the annual holiday musical program at First Baptist Church. Following that Christmas pageant in the sanctuary, attendees formed a candlelight procession and walked to the downtown square for a community singalong and the tree lighting.

Some of her favorite memories of Light Up Ellijay through the years are of the quiet moments leading up to the tree lighting, such as working in the cold to decorate the square, thanking the storekeepers who bought the volunteers hot chocolate while they worked and talking with the veterans while waiting for the candlelight procession to arrive.

“It would be quiet on the park, and I would get to know them and hear them tell a story or two about themselves,” she said.

‘It’s them crazy women’

The process of preparing for the event did not always go smoothly. One year in particular stands out in Pankey’s memories for its brush with disaster.

"It was always a challenge to get (the four trees) all lit up," she said. "We had to do wires running everywhere and hope that nobody would trip over them. We tried to get the wires covered up well ... One year, one of the trees caught on fire, and David Westmoreland was mayor, so he had to go out and buy a new tree. His tree was brighter than ours though because he had to get lights too. You could hear the fire truck up there and everybody was saying, 'What's going on? What's going on?' It was before (the ceremony). It had rained really hard, and I guess it had gotten the water into one of the drop cords that we had. One of my neighbors said — but he didn't know who he was talking

to — he said, 'It's them crazy women that decorates those trees up there.'"

Laughing, Pankey recalled how she told him, "You're talking to one



of them."

"That took the cake right there that night," she said as she recounted the incident.

Light Up Ellijay grows

As the years passed, Light Up Ellijay continued to gain steam.

"Later on we got Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus coming and the kids could have pictures with (them), and there was a horse and buggy that they could ride," said Pankey.

Other additions over the years included a parade, a holiday arts bazaar featuring handmade crafts for the Christmas season, window decorating contests, hot chocolate served at the courthouse, a wreath competition, roving carolers, dancers, dress contests and a storyteller dressed in old-fashioned clothing.

The *Times-Courier* announced

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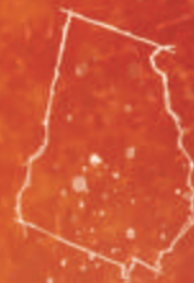
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► **Light Up Ellijay, from page 23**

each year's slate of activities. In 1995, the newspaper reported there were plans for a "full day of merry-making," including a parade of holiday floats, the sounds of the season provided by the Gilmer High School Marching Band and a live nativity "complete this year with camels."

Then, in 2007 it advertised live entertainment from country music performers, an Elvis impersonator and fireworks. And, of course, the downtown area was said to be decorated with thousands of lights giving off "a magic glow" to "delight young and old alike."

Writing after that year's event, the *Times-Courier's* Carly Sharec observed that "a cold rain mixed with sleet ... didn't stop parents and their children lining up and down the streets of downtown Ellijay to catch a glimpse of Santa as he led the parade around the square ... Now, all that's left for the citizens of Gilmer County to do is wait for Christmas."

'Come join in the fun!'

Thinking about the changes Light Up Ellijay has experienced over the years, Pankey observed, "It seems more commercial now. We didn't have all the things then that we have now, but it's still wonderful ... I think children still love to come to it, and I think the adults do too. I think everybody wants to be a child, just for a little while and especially at Christmas ... I am so proud of it ... It brings people together that don't even know each other."

When asked if she imagined in those early days that Light Up Ellijay would still be going strong nearly 40 years later, Pankey said, "I hoped because I'm a very idealistic person. I dreamed that it would go on forever, and I dreamed we would have snow at least one time."

A 1989 *Times-Courier* article about Light Up Ellijay concluded by urging families to "come join in the fun! Dress up like the olden days, browse the shops for unique gifts, view the decorative window displays ... and best of all ... let your hearts be filled with the Christmas spirit."

It's an invitation that still applies today as Pankey's dream continues to bring delight to families and spread Christmas cheer. ❧



Pinecone cheddar cheese ball

- ◆ 8 oz shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- ◆ 16 oz cream cheese
- ◆ 2 green onions, chopped
- ◆ 1/2 cup bacon bits
- ◆ 2 1/2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- ◆ 1 tsp paprika
- ◆ 1 tsp dried parsley
- ◆ 2 tsp garlic powder
- ◆ 1/4 tsp black pepper
- ◆ 1/2 tsp oregano
- ◆ A dash of cayenne pepper
- OR 1 tsp hot sauce
- ◆ Whole almonds
- ◆ Sprigs of fresh rosemary

Mix softened cream cheese until smooth. Add all other ingredients except for almonds. Stir until well combined.

Gather mixture into a ball. Divide and then shape each half so it resembles an egg. Cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour.

Prior to serving, cover the outside of the two cheese balls with the whole almonds. Align the nuts so they are pointing the same direction like scales. Place rosemary sprigs on plate beside pinecone-shaped cheese balls. Pull the cheese out of the refrigerator at least 20 minutes before serving so it has time to soften. Store leftovers in an airtight container in the refrigerator. ❖

Treat your taste buds this season

Fruit and cheese delight

- ◆ 16 oz cream cheese,
- ◆ 2 Tbsp honey
- ◆ 3 Tbsp maple syrup
- ◆ 2 tsp cinnamon
- ◆ 1 tsp nutmeg
- ◆ 1/2 tsp cloves
- ◆ 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- ◆ 1 Granny Smith apple
- ◆ 1 pomegranate
- ◆ Graham crackers

Dice apple and remove seeds from pomegranate. Set aside. Mix spices, cream cheese, honey and maple syrup until well blended. Fold in apples and cranberries. Form into a ball and chill in the fridge for at least an hour. Roll cheese ball in pomegranate prior to serving. Top with an ornament cap to give it a holiday flair. Serve with graham crackers. ❖



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Pull apart puff pastry Christmas tree

♦ 2 sheets puff
pastry dough

♦ Pesto sauce OR
hazelnut spread

Unroll a rectangular sheet of puff pastry dough and place on parchment paper. Spread spoonfuls of pesto or hazelnut spread over the surface of the dough. Place a second sheet of puff pastry on top of the first so the filling is no longer visible.

Cut the dough into the shape of a Christmas tree. Place a ruler down the middle of the tree in order to make regular cuts down each side of the dough. These will become the branches.

Use cookie cutters to cut out stars from the excess dough.

Carefully lift a branch of the tree and twist it two or three times. Press the dough together at the end if it starts to separate. Repeat for each branch on the rest of the tree.

Bake in a 375 degree preheated oven for 12 to 15 minutes.

Serve with marinara sauce if using a savory pesto filling or dust with cinnamon sugar if using a sweet hazelnut spread.

Get creative with how you fill your pastry. Try shredded cheese and a dash of cayenne pepper or a blend of brown sugar and butter. You may also decide to decorate your tree with other toppings. ❖



Christmas pizza

Adding a helping of holiday cheer to your family's next pizza night is easy. Simply use Christmas cookie cutters to cut out shapes from pizza dough. Top each "slice" with sauce, cheese and desired toppings. Cook according to dough package directions. ❖



Double chocolate peppermint cookies

- ♦ 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- ♦ 2 tsp baking soda
- ♦ 1/2 tsp salt
- ♦ 1 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- ♦ 1 cup brown sugar
- ♦ 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- ♦ 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- ♦ 2 eggs
- ♦ 1 1/2 tsp vanilla
- ♦ 1 cup dark chocolate chips
- ♦ 1 cup Andes Peppermint Crunch baking chips

Sift together flour, baking soda, salt and cocoa powder. In a separate bowl, cream butter, granulated sugar and brown sugar until fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla. Stir until well combined. Add flour and mix until just combined. Dough will be thick and fudgy. Fold in chocolate chips and peppermint chips. Scoop rounded tablespoons of dough and roll them into a ball. Evenly space on parchment paper lined baking sheets. Bake in an oven preheated to 350 degrees for 9 to 11 minutes. ❄️

Sugared cranberries

- ♦ 1/2 cup water
- ♦ 1 1/4 cup sugar
- ♦ 3 cups fresh cranberries

Combine water and 1/2 cup sugar in a saucepan. Stir until sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil, and cook for three or four minutes or until mixture starts to thicken into a syrup.

Remove from heat and add cranberries. Stir to evenly coat the fruit. Using a slotted spoon, remove the syrup-covered cranberries from the saucepan and spread out on a parchment paper-lined tray. Allow the cranberries to dry for one hour. After which they will still feel tacky but not wet.

Put remaining 3/4 cup sugar in a bowl. Add cranberries and toss in sugar until evenly coated.

Keep refrigerated. ❄️



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Enjoying the holidays does not have to break the bank

By Whitney Sherrill
Contributing writer

Feeling a financial crunch this holiday season? Rather than nursing discouragement about rising prices, keep in mind that your family's celebrations do not have to break the bank in order to be special and memory-building.

Here are some tips to help bring a bit of cost-savings into your holidays:

The foundation of your efforts should be to create a budget and stick with it. Be sure to include things like travel expenses and charitable donations, as well as how much you want to spend on gifts and holiday meals. Avoid overspending and resist the urge to get anything and everything that comes to mind for the holiday season. Instead, make a gift-buying plan and stick with it. Try to avoid impulse buys as even small ones can add up quickly and derail your cost-cutting plans. You may find it easier to stick to your budget by paying with cash rather than credit card.

The earlier you start shopping in the year, the more you can compare prices and time your purchases to take advantage of sales, but avoid the temptation to buy something just because of a sale. You may also consider scouring online marketplaces to find lightly used items that can fit the bill for a holiday gift.

Rather than buying gifts for everyone on your list, consider making them. This is a great way to master the

art of giving from the heart, not your pocketbook. Knit a hat. Bake a pie. Personalize a picture frame. For more ideas for some homemade gifts that are sure to please, see the how-tos accompanying this article.

Keep in mind that not all gifts have to come with a price tag. If you have loved ones with kids, give a gift of your time rather than something that costs money. An offer to babysit for an evening might just be the best thing they receive this holiday season. Another idea for an out-of-the-box gift is to create a scavenger hunt that will take your family around town. You can also volunteer somewhere as a family. In so doing, you can make giving your time together a gift to one another, as well as the organization of your choosing.

If you are hitting the road this holiday season, pack snacks and a meal in a cooler rather than planning on eating out on the way to your destination. Use an app to look for the cheapest gas options along your route.

Rather than buying decorations, make them together as a family. Maybe this is the year to bring back such nostalgic classics as strings of popcorn garland and paper snowflakes.

When hosting, prioritize quality time over trying to impress your guests with new decor and an elaborate holiday spread. Elect to do a potluck-style meal and skip the alcohol in order to cut down on your party budget. Serve sparkling cider or punch instead.

If you are celebrating with a group, organize a Secret



Homemade chai tea mix

- ◆ 1 cup nonfat dry milk powder
- ◆ 1 cup powdered nondairy creamer
- ◆ 1 cup powdered French vanilla nondairy creamer
- ◆ 2 cups granulated sugar
- ◆ 1 1/2 cups unsweetened instant tea (may be called unsweetened iced tea)
- ◆ 2 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- ◆ 2 tsp ginger
- ◆ 1 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- ◆ 1 tsp black pepper
- ◆ 1 tsp cloves
- ◆ 1 tsp cardamom

Thoroughly whisk all ingredients. Put one cup of the mix at a time into a blender and blend until becomes fine powder. Repeat for all the mix. Store in an airtight container.

To serve, mix two heaping tablespoons in hot water or milk. If mixing in water, you can make it a bit creamier by adding a splash of milk. The mix can also be used to make cold treats. Blend with milk and ice cream to make a chai shake or chill and serve as an iced chai latte. ❄️

Santa or White Elephant game rather than buying a gift for everyone in attendance.

Above all, take to heart the lesson the Grinch so memorably learned that “maybe Christmas ... doesn’t come from a store. Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more.” ❄️

Santa flowerpot

- ♦ Flowerpot
- ♦ Buttons
- ♦ Red yarn
- ♦ Hot glue
- ♦ White yarn

Use hot glue to attach yarn to the exterior of the flowerpot. Continue looping the yarn around the pot several times in order to make it fluffy like a sweater. Decorate with buttons when finished.

Before gifting, fill the decorated pot with cookies or a Christmas cactus. ❄️

See page 27
for cookie
recipe.





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Creative giftwrapping



When making potato stamps, simply cut the potato in half and push a cookie cutter into the cut side. Carefully, use a knife to trim out some of the potato around the cutter so the interior part sticks out.

Looking for ways to personalize the presents under the tree this year? Try starting with the wrapping paper. Unleash your creativity by turning simple brown paper packages into thoughtful works of art that add to the joy of the gift-giving season.

Pictured above are a tree made of zig-zagging ribbon, a string of thumbprint Christmas lights and a painted Rudolph with a three dimensional nose. Below, scrapbook paper becomes ornaments and a soda can tab transforms into a belt buckle on a Santa gift tag. The white dots in the background were painted on with cotton swabs.

Sprigs of live evergreens can also add a touch of whimsy to packaging, such as with the tree-toting car below and the solitary pine in a snowy field at right. The stars in that photo were made out of orange peels.

Kids will love making stamps out of potatoes, left, and using them to decorate packages. ☒



To make dried orange peel designs, use small cookie cutters to create desired shapes. Bake in a 200 degree oven about 30 minutes or until the edges start to curl slightly and they are stiff and dry.



Frosted jars

- ♦ Glass jar
- ♦ Fake snow
- ♦ Epsom salt
- ♦ Ribbon
- ♦ Decorations
- ♦ Decoupage glue
- ♦ Paintbrush
- ♦ Hot glue
- ♦ Tea light

Mix desired amounts of Epsom salt and fake snow (the kind made from bits of shredded plastic) in a bowl. If you want a jar with more sparkle, use more of the salt or just forgo the fake snow entirely. More fake snow will result in a more heavily frosted design.

Apply decoupage glue to the exterior of the jar using the paintbrush. Pour the mixture of salt and snow over the glue until the sides of the jar are completely covered. When dry, hot glue ribbon around the top of the jar and add your choice of embellishments. Place a tea light candle inside as a finishing touch. ❖



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