




Tennessee CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2021 | CUSTOMER FOCUSED  COMMUNITY DRIVEN

Embrace the True Spirit

Abandon the
holiday
shopping
madness.

Page 6

ALSO
INSIDE

Space
Heaters

Health
and Wellness

ADOBE STOCK
PHOTO BY JILL LANG



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Tennessee CONNECTIONS

Winter 2021 • Volume 1, No. 2

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The Best People You'll Ever Meet

For eight years, I've worked on behalf of your municipal electric system and others like it as director of government relations with Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association. When I started at TMEPA after about 10 years at the Tennessee Legislature, I had a steep learning curve, and every day I still learn something new. However, there are a few things I learned quickly. Some of them, no one had to teach.

First, the men and women who run and work for your MES are some of the best people you'll ever meet. As they carry out their responsibilities, whether during the day or in the middle of the night, their guiding objective is to do the right thing. They only care about figuring out what is best for their customers and their community. Every employee at your MES is willing to leave their family at any time of day or night to get your power back on. They are truly dedicated to their customers and their community.

Second, the public power model—where a community has local control of its electric system—is the most responsive and receptive way to run an electric utility. As a public entity run by the people and the cities it serves, an MES must listen to its customers. Each MES board meeting is open to the public, and every budget is publicly available. Ultimately, your MES is responsible to you, not to shareholders as

private power companies are. This means we are accountable to citizens, taxpayers and customers in our communities, and it is those folks who decide how their electric system should be run to fit their community's needs.

Third, municipal electric systems are not-for-profits and some of the best-run entities in the state. Nearly every MES has a responsible budget and a sound financial situation. Our systems have some of the best bond ratings out of Tennessee's utilities and local governments. Every MES buys its electricity from Tennessee Valley Authority, which has some of the lowest wholesale electric rates in the nation. This means an MES buys electricity at a cheap wholesale rate, and TVA regulates to ensure an MES electric rate stays low, too.

My job is to advocate on behalf of your MES to help keep your rates affordable and make sure your MES can make decisions locally about the best way to serve the community. It takes a lot of hard work by many good people to make sure we don't give a second thought to our electricity being on every day. I'm proud to work on their behalf. ■



Jeremy Elrod



Embrace the True Spirit

Abandon the holiday shopping madness and limit materialistic gift-giving.

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Comfort in a Bowl

Nothing keeps Old Man Winter at bay like a bowl of steaming hot soup.

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Meet the Diversity Council

With Black History Month around the corner, CDE Lightband's Diversity Council and employees love to honor the rich history, culture and influence of African Americans that has greatly impacted and developed the United States.

Follow along as CDE Lightband's Diversity Council shares what diversity means to them, and CDE Lightband employees reflect on and celebrate the endeavors of the greatest minds as they paved the way to our present and into our future. ■



Black History Month is important to me because I was raised during the times of many civil rights movements. The images and inspiring messages of our great Black leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and John Lewis, just to name a few, are embedded in my mind and in my heart.

Their influence has given us great direction and should encourage us to treat each other with respect and dignity.

— **MARCOS MEDINA,**
*Substation Maintenance
Specialist*



Black History is a time when African Americans can take the time to see what the people before us fought for. It's a time of rejoicing, celebrating, and thanking God and those African Americans for giving us hope or a life lesson that could be used. Black History isn't about all the bad times we've been through; it's about integrity, leadership and determination. It's about showing your true character. We have come a long way but have a way to go. With God's help, we will get there.

— **ANNETTE ALLEN,**
*Accounting
Technician*



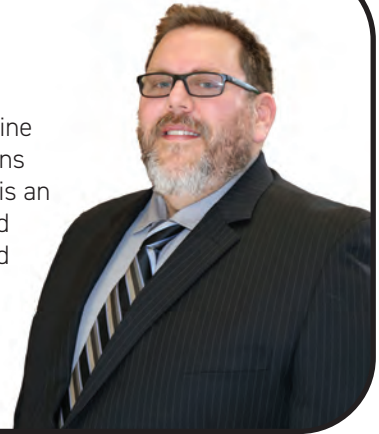
The Diversity Council's logo, the Fingerprint, represents the unique individuality of each one of us. Like the fingerprint, no two people are the same. And yet each one has the ability to leave an imprint on everything and everyone they touch.

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Black History Month is an opportunity to shine a light on the achievements and contributions African Americans have given this world. It is an opportunity for internal growth, to learn and to challenge ourselves to open our eyes and hearts the other 11 months.

— **STEVEN PENNINGTON,**
Information Technology Manager



Black History Month to me means highlighting and recognizing the many accomplishments and contributions that African Americans have made to the educational, scientific and promotion of social justice in our country.

— **CHASE BEARDEN,**
*Senior Customer
Service Specialist*



Black History Month is a time to remember and reflect on the contributions of African Americans who marched for justice and stood for equality for all. It is a time to recognize and honor those who overcame adversity and changed the course of history. It is during this time that I remember them and the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

— **YOLANDA DAVIS,**
HR Administrator



During Black History Month, we have a chance to see how important we have been to the world. It gives us a time to reflect on all the great things that our ancestors have contributed.

— **SHERENA SIMONS,**
*Customer Service
Supervisor*





Embrace the True Spirit



Abandon the holiday shopping madness
and limit materialistic gift-giving



By Pam Blair

Advertisements fill the airwaves, creating a spend-spend-spend and shop-'til-you-drop mentality that plays with our emotions and budgets.

Children clamor for the latest toy. Teens insist the newest electronic gadget is more than a want. They absolutely need it. Last year's model is out of vogue.

Christmas morning can become exhausting as packages are ripped open and quickly forgotten as the recipient moves on to the next gift.

According to recent polls, the average American spends about \$1,000 on Christmas gifts. That does not count the money spent on travel, extra groceries, eating out, decorations, and small gifts for teachers and others who provide us with valued services.

The true spirit of Christmas and the holidays can be in danger of being washed away by the tsunami of materialism that makes us crave stuff we didn't even know we needed.

Perhaps you want a break. The motivation could be financial, spiritual or both. Maybe you simply have a desire to pull back from the holiday madness and stop ceding control to retailers.

If so, consider gifts that are nonmaterialistic or that have a deeper value for the recipient or others.

The 12 Deeds of Christmas

How about giving the gift of yourself? Time spent visiting with someone could be far more precious than any item you could buy.

Regardless of your age—whether a child or adult—you have more to offer others than you may realize. What do you do with ease that others find a challenge or a chore?

Give a gift certificate of you. It is memorable and appreciated. The options are limitless, but here are 12 ideas:

- **Car wash.** Clean the inside and outside of someone's vehicle. They will smile and think of you as they drive their shiny car around.
- **Babysitting.** What parents could not use a night out? How terrific to have a few babysitting coupons from a trusted friend or family member. Plus, you get to spend time with the children.
- **Electronics repair.** Are you a whiz in the digital world? Someone can use your help.



- **Home cleaning or organizing.** Books about tidying have topped The New York Times bestseller list in the recent past, so many people must share the desire to have a clean, organized home. You could give them a hand.

- **Handyman.** Paint a room in someone's home, make repairs and do odd jobs around the house.

- **Dinners or desserts.** Whether you are a gourmet cook or lean toward homemade comfort food, share some tasty gifts.

- **Yardwork.** Some people love mowing, weeding, planting, trimming and raking. Others would be grateful for a volunteer to tackle those jobs.

- **Carpool.** Parents are pulled in many directions. If you have time to spare, help by picking up the children.

- **Make the lunches.** It is a relatively simple chore, but one less thing a busy parent must do—and offers children a nice change of pace.

- **Sewing repairs.** Not everyone is talented with a needle and thread. If that is one of your gifts, eliminate the hassle and cost of a friend having to take projects to a seamstress or tailor.

- **Tutoring.** What subjects do you enjoy? Kids usually behave better for someone other than their parents, and professional tutors are expensive.

- **A family recipe treasure-trove.** Collect recipes and photos from

friends and family, and assemble a cookbook. You can make it by hand or put together a digital collection.

Make One-of-a-Kind Gifts

The genuine happiness and smiles during unwrapping and revealing a gift are priceless—and there have been some pretty impressive gifts in recent years: iPads, iPhones, TVs, Beats headphones and other hot items snagged during Black Friday.

Consumers do love materialistic purchases, but what happened to good, old-fashioned crafted gifts?

Homemade gifts are some of the best things you can give because they capture the love and admiration you have for that special someone.

Get your creative juices flowing and start crafting one-of-a-kind gifts this holiday season. Here are some ideas to spark your imagination:

- **Layering up.** Food items—especially sweets—are a great go-to for homemade gifts. Customize a food package layered in a Mason jar. Maybe it is your own cookie mix, with each ingredient carefully measured out and stacked on top of each other.

Want to make a special hot chocolate mix? Layer a Mason jar with four sections: one-quarter hot chocolate powder, one-quarter fluffy marshmallows, one-quarter chocolate chips, topped with one-quarter peppermint candies.

Tie a festive bow around the top of the jar. Be sure to attach a tag with directions and a sweet message.

Small touches make all the difference. Need ideas? Check Pinterest for inspiration.

- **Keep the memories alive with photos or memorabilia from a happy time spent together.** Make a photo album with scrapbook or construction paper. Personalize it by narrating each image with a caption recalling the special time. You can even make a complete storybook.

A shadow-box frame also is a perfect medium. What you can put inside is limitless—from movie and concert tickets to fun souvenirs you got on a vacation together.

You can keep photos in their original form or cut them into fun shapes and sizes to create a collage.

Include a special message or inspiring quote to add a loving touch.

- **Sew something spectacular.** Handcrafted gifts from you are just as impressive—if not more so—as the stuff from the mall. If you are a beginner, start with pillowcases or a



fabric pennant banner. If you are more advanced, consider sewing a customized tote bag, cosmetic bag or pajamas.

Remember sewing can be a time-consuming task, so get an early start if you plan to make a few different gifts.

Pair Gifts With Lasting Memories

Give the special people in your life experiential gifts that will leave them with a lifetime of memories. Think of the things each person likes to do, and tailor a gift to their interests.

If you enjoy buying traditional presents, look for something that complements your experiential gift.

Here are a few ideas:

- **Sports.** Buy tickets to a game and wrap up a jersey of the person's favorite player.
- **Music.** Find a concert at a local venue and buy a CD by that performer.
- **Travel.** Pair a carry-on travel bag and tickets to a far-away destination.
- **Adventure.** Shopping for a daredevil? Give a gift certificate for skydiving, white-water rafting, bungee jumping, zip lining or scuba diving. Add a T-shirt that has an image of the activity.

- **Pampering.** Treat your loved ones to spa days, massages and luxurious skin-care treatments. Include a bottle of nail polish or some slippers.

- **Family fun.** Amusement park passes can provide quality time together. Add a board game that is appropriate for all ages.

- **Food.** Book a lunch or dinner sightseeing cruise, a regional food tour or a wine-tasting evening. Include a food item or a bottle of bubbly.

- **Nature.** Create a voucher for a trip to a favorite hiking trail or park, or a kayaking or canoe trip. Wrap up a water bottle.

- **Fitness.** A membership to a gym or yoga studio is remembered at each visit. Include a duffel bag or a mat in the recipient's favorite color.

- **Gardening.** Give a plant or bulbs along with tickets or a season pass to botanical gardens.

- **Museum.** Virtually every interest and passion can be satisfied by visiting a museum: art, space, science, music, history, children's education, automobiles, maritime and sports. Include a book on the topic.

Give Gifts With Meaning to Help Others

How about trying a gift that is outside the box? Rather than spend hours struggling to come up with a good present for friends and family members, give action-oriented gifts in their names to help people in communities and villages around the world.

Charitable organizations offer opportunities to give a variety of items. Whatever your budget and your recipient's interests, a match can be found.

Here are a few organizations and gifts to consider:

- **Apopo (www.apopo.org).** The Belgian organization trains giant African rats to sniff out landmines and, in some countries, diagnose tuberculosis. For \$9 a month, you can adopt a "HeroRat."

- **CARE (www.care.org).** Help an aspiring entrepreneur start a small bakery business for \$22. Support a small farm by donating enough seed for a half acre for \$29. Donate a care package to send a set of library books to a refugee camp for \$30. Buy books and school supplies for a girl to return to school for \$74. Goats are \$75. With a \$175 donation, a cow can be given to a family in need.

- **Communities in Schools (www.communitiesinschools.org).** Dedicated to keeping children in school, this network partners with affiliates in 26 states. Donations help give an at-risk child mentoring, counseling and other services.

- **Compassion International (www.compassion.com).** Financing protection from parasites is \$7. A mosquito net is \$18. Garden seeds are





Appreciating Santa at Any Age

Carry on the spirit of the jolly red elf even after the youthful wonderment fades

By Sharon Naylor

When children are little, they glow with the anticipation of Santa's arrival, perhaps sitting with glee on Santa's knee for photos. But as they get a bit older, there is a different feel to the holidays as their sense of wonder about Santa Claus changes.

How do you keep the spirit of Santa in your holiday celebrations when the magic of St. Nick fades?

The key is to help children's appreciation of Santa evolve into an appreciation for what Santa represents: joy, giving, family togetherness and kindness.

During the weeks leading up to the holiday, sit down and talk about the meaning of the holiday season—a spirit that can stay in the heart all year long.

Ask your child to list the values Santa represents and share your list. Take each value—such as giving—and have the child list ways to exemplify that value.

For instance, your child may think of giving holiday gifts to a children's hospital or nursing home, or collecting their outgrown toys to donate to charity, all in the Santa-inspired sense of giving.

Here are some values to inspire you:

- ▶ **Kindness.** Create a holiday tradition of leaving positive notes for members of your family. Your child can do something kind for a sibling, parent, neighbor or friend.
- ▶ **Family togetherness.** If your child is old enough to participate in family holiday gatherings, such as Christmas Eve dinner, invite them to help create the menu, design place cards or make a list of holiday songs to play.
- ▶ **Joy.** Encourage your child to write in a holiday joy journal, listing what they are grateful for and what brought joy that day. The journal might be an excellent place for your child to document how they brought joy to someone else that day.
- ▶ **Giving.** Give your child the opportunity to learn the art and value of giving to others. Make them responsible for choosing gifts for each family member, thinking about what each person might like, shopping with you and wrapping the presents. Gifts do not need to be expensive. At present-giving time, your child sees the recipient's joy.

"Christmas is one of the most important celebrations for Christians around the world, but it can also be one of the most stressful," says Debby Mayne, etiquette expert at About.com. "Between the crowded shopping malls and people's expectations, we all run the risk of feeling let down, which can lead to tension and bad behavior. Avoid letting this happen by taking breaks to think about what the holiday is truly about."

Children also can join in decorating the house, buying or, even better, making holiday ornaments and decorations—which may become gifts for others.

Making it OK to appreciate Santa's lessons and image can inspire your child.

Debby recommends including a good etiquette lesson, too. Send thank-you notes for all gifts received, with personalized messages written by your child. ■

\$30. A safe playground is \$34. A hygiene kit is \$25. An art class is \$50. A sewing workshop is \$185.

- **Heifer International**

(www.heifer.org). For \$20, you can buy a flock of ducks, chicks or geese. A dream basket includes a sheep, heifer, goat, rabbits and a flock of chicks, along with training and education in their care for a donation of \$120. A heifer is \$500.

- **Himalayan Cataract Project**

(www.cureblindness.org). A donation of \$25 can provide life-changing surgery through this organization founded by two ophthalmologists.

- **International Rescue Committee**

(www.rescue.org). Make a cash donation of any amount to help refugees fleeing violence in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the United States.

- **Oxfam America**

(www.oxfamgifts.com). For \$25, you can provide books for children. School supplies are \$30. Irrigate a farmer's land for four months for \$40. A goat is \$50. Train a midwife for \$150. Help build a girls' school for \$1,500.

- **Trickle Up** (www.trickleup.org).

The organization lifts people out of extreme poverty through a "graduation program"—so called because people graduate from poverty. Cash donations fund a gift of a cow or other animal, training, a savings account and other support.

- **World Vision**

(www.worldvision.org). Pay \$20 to provide two soccer balls. Three fruit trees are \$27. A fishing kit is \$75. Three solar lanterns are \$60. A foot-powered water pump is \$250. ■

Margo Young, Jeanelle D. Horcasitas, Julia Price and Chelle Cordero contributed to this story through Creators.com.

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All About Space Heaters

By Leanna Thesken

As the cold winter weather rolls in, make sure you are prepared to keep warm. Portable space heaters are a great option to beat frigid temperatures. Here are some tips and tricks to stay warm this winter.

A Buyer's Guide

Choosing the right space heater depends on the space you need to heat. Keeping your home safe is equally important.

- Determine your heating needs and size requirements.
 - » Finding the correct heater size is important. A space heater that is too large will consume more energy than needed. A space heater that is too small will not heat your space adequately. Find a space heater made for the approximate size of the room where it will be used. You need 10 watts of heating power for every square inch of floor space.
- Reduce the risk of fire and overheating with advanced safety features.
 - » Overheat protection detects when the heater reaches unsafe temperatures, shutting down to prevent overheating.
 - » Tip-over protection shuts off the unit if it is knocked over.



ADOBE STOCK PHOTO BY EVGEN

» Cool-touch housing is built with heat-resistant exteriors that eliminate the risk of burns from touching the unit.

Take Safety Precautions

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, space heaters cause more than 25,000 residential fires and more than 300 deaths each year. More than 6,000 Americans receive hospital emergency room care annually for burns from space heaters. Do not become a statistic. As the temperature drops and the use of space heaters rises, remember to follow all warnings.

- Read the manufacturer's instructions and warning labels carefully.
- Ensure smoke alarms are properly working on every floor of your home.

- Check your space heater for a safety approval label from organizations such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL), Intertek (ETL) or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA).
- Scan the heater for any cracks, broken plugs or loose connections.
- Place the heater on a flat, smooth surface. Do not set it on furniture, tables, carpet or shelves.
- Avoid high-traffic areas, which increase the likelihood of the heater falling and overheating, potentially causing a fire.
- Keep the space heater at least 3 feet from flammable objects, such as bedding, curtains, furniture and papers.
- Never leave a space heater running unattended.
- Always plug a space heater directly into a wall outlet. Do not use an extension cord or power strip.

Focus on Efficiency

As you turn up the heat, make sure you do not turn up your utility bill. Save energy and money with these tips:

- Use a space heater's timer feature and turn off the heater when not needed.
- Avoid heat loss by closing doors to rooms being heated.
- Check the wattage and size rating listed on the space heater and choose the right heater for the size of your room. ■

SPACE HEATER COST CALCULATOR

Heater's wattage ÷ 1,000* × Hours used per month × Co-op's kWh rate = MONTHLY COST

Most space heaters are 1,500 watts.
If you're operating a space heater

8 hours a day and your electricity rate is \$0.12 per kWh, then ...

1,500 watts ÷ 1,000 = 1.5 kw × 240 hours/month =
360 kWh × \$0.12/kWh = **\$43.20/month**

*Dividing by 1,000 converts watts to kilowatts

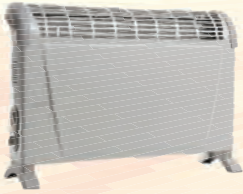


How to calculate costs:

- Refer to your electricity bill to determine how much you pay for electricity per kilowatt-hour.
- Determine the amount of time the heater will be in use.
- Divide the heater's wattage by 1,000. Multiply that number by the hours used per month, then multiply that number by your utility's kilowatt-hour rate.

TYPES OF HEATERS

CONVECTION



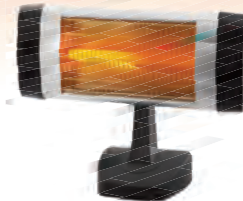
PROS

- Capable of heating an entire room for an extended time.
- Cost-efficient.
- Cool-to-the-touch housing.

CONS

- Quick heat loss.
- Physical objects can block heat transfer.
- Mainly sends heat up to the ceiling.

RADIANT/INFRARED



PROS

- Physical objects do not block heat.
- Heat lasts even when the heater is turned off.
- Cool-to-the-touch housing.

CONS

- Heavy.
- One-directional heat.
- Needs physical objects to absorb the heat transfer. Fewer objects mean less heat.

CERAMIC



PROS

- Compact and lightweight.
- Instant heat and heat oscillation.
- Heat still radiates after being turned off.

CONS

- Does not heat large spaces.
- Takes longer to heat up a room.
- Physical objects can block heat transfer.

OIL-FILLED



PROS

- Does not have to continuously run to provide heat.
- Heat lasts even when the heater is turned off.
- Easy to move around.

CONS

- Cannot control the speed of the heat.
- The housing reaches hot temperatures.
- Does not heat large spaces.

FAN SPACE HEATING



PROS

- Compact and lightweight.
- Instant heat and heat oscillation.
- Cool-to-the-touch housing.

CONS

- Does not heat large spaces.
- Heat immediately stops being transferred after the heater is turned off.
- Physical objects can block heat transfer.

MICATHERMIC



PROS

- Lightweight and portable.
- Instant heat.
- Silent operation.

CONS

- Does not heat large spaces.
- The design collects significant amounts of dust.
- Mainly sends heat up to the ceiling.

Comfort in a Bowl

By Anne Braly

Nothing keeps Old Man Winter at bay like a bowl of steaming hot soup. Could there be a better remedy for taking the chill off and warming you to the bone? Try one of these heartwarming recipes, then cozy up to a roaring fire and enjoy the warmth that only a bowl of soup can bring.

FRENCH ONION SOUP

There's no pretty way to eat this soup, so just dig in. It goes without saying, but don't skimp on the cheese!

- 8 tablespoons butter
- 4 tablespoons canola oil
- 6 pounds yellow onions, sliced
½-inch thick with the grain
- ½ cup sherry
- ½ cup red wine
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ¼ cup garlic purée (see note)
- 1 bouquet garni
- 4 tablespoons concentrated beef base
- 10 cups chicken stock
- 1 baguette, cut into 1-inch slices
- 8 slices provolone cheese
- 2 cups shredded Gruyere cheese
- Thyme leaves, for garnish (optional)

In a large stockpot or Dutch oven, melt the butter and oil over high heat; add onions. Sauté, occasionally stirring, until they start to caramelize, about 15 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-high and continue to sauté until the onions are a deep brown, about 1 hour.

Deglaze with sherry and red wine; cook until the liquid is nearly evaporated. Stir in tomato paste and garlic purée. Add the bouquet garni, chicken stock and beef base; bring to a simmer and cook for 45 minutes.

Skim the butterfat/foamy liquid from the top; discard. Taste for

seasoning and add salt or pepper, as desired. Remove the bouquet garni.

Ladle soup into oven-safe bowls. Top with 2-3 slices of the baguette, then a slice of provolone and grated Gruyere. Place the bowls on a baking sheet and broil for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the cheese is melted. Garnish with fresh thyme leaves, if desired. Serve.

NOTE: Use a store-bought roasted garlic paste or make your own by slicing off the top third of a head of garlic, then place it in a small baking dish. Drizzle with olive oil, add ½ cup water to the pan with a few peppercorns, cover with foil, and bake at 350 F until the garlic is soft and tender, about 1 hour. Remove the garlic from the skins and mash the cloves with a fork or in a blender.



CREAMY POTATO SOUP

This comforting soup is also healthy topped with a dollop of Greek yogurt and some turkey bacon for crunch.

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 1½ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 1½ cups cooked white beans, drained and rinsed
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika

Freshly ground black pepper

OPTIONAL TOPPINGS: chives, turkey bacon, Greek yogurt, cheddar cheese

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onion, salt and several grinds of pepper. Sauté 6 to 8 minutes, until softened.

Add garlic; stir and cook for 2 more minutes. Stir in white wine vinegar and cook for 30 seconds. Add broth, potatoes and beans. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes, or until potatoes are tender.

Let cool slightly. Transfer half of the soup to a blender; add the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil, mustard, lemon juice and paprika. Blend until smooth. Return soup to the pot. Use a potato masher to gently smash the remaining potato chunks and beans. Season to taste with more salt and pepper. Serve.

BLACK BEAN SOUP

This American classic can be made quickly with canned black beans. If you have the time, though, make your own from dried beans.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 3 15-ounce cans black beans, drained but not rinsed
- 3 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth, plus more as needed
- 1 bay leaf

Kosher salt

Freshly ground pepper

OPTIONAL GARNISHES:

sour cream or Greek yogurt, sliced avocado, chopped fresh cilantro, lime wedges

Heat oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and cook until soft and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add jalapeños and garlic; cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add tomato paste. Stir to coat vegetables; cook about 1 minute more. Season with salt, pepper, cumin and chili powder. Stir to coat.

Add black beans and broth. Stir soup. Add bay leaf and bring to a boil. Immediately reduce heat and simmer until slightly reduced and thickened, 15 to 20 minutes. Check seasonings and add more salt or cumin, if needed. Remove bay leaf and let cool slightly. Using an immersion blender or food processor, blend soup to desired consistency. Serve with a dollop of sour cream, sliced avocado and cilantro, if desired. Serve lime wedges on the side.

AFRICAN PEANUT SOUP

This is a versatile vegetable soup. Add leftover chicken, if desired. Crunchy peanut butter adds a wonderful texture.

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped
- 2 large red bell peppers, chopped
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced

- 1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes, with liquid
- 8 cups chicken stock
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
- ¼ teaspoon chili powder
- ½ cup uncooked brown rice
- 1 cup extra-crunchy peanut butter

Heat oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat. Cook onions, bell peppers and

celery until lightly browned and tender, stirring in garlic when almost done to prevent burning. Stir in tomatoes, chicken stock, pepper and chili powder. Reduce heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes.

Stir in rice. Cover and simmer another 15 minutes, or until rice is tender. Stir in peanut butter until well blended. Serve.



The Circle of Health and Wellness

By Pamela A. Keene

What do I need to do to be more healthy and fit? Modify my eating? Add more exercise?

“To attain a moderate level of health and fitness, it’s a dual-pronged approach,” says Natasha Weddle, founder of TNB Fitness and The New Beginnings Center in Nashville, Tennessee. “Sure, you can make better choices of what you put into your body, but healthy eating is only part of the equation. Or you could start an exercise program to improve your fitness, but unless you have a combination of both, you’re selling yourself short.”

A former college basketball player, Natasha learned by experience—and five surgeries—the importance of a well-rounded approach to health and wellness.

After 17 years as a strength and conditioning coach, she created TNB Fitness to promote a full circle of health and fitness that helps people maximize their potential.

As an uncomplicated way to incorporate new habits into one’s lifestyle, Natasha advocates the “Triple Seven Rule,” developed by fitness company Strength Matters:

- **Walk:** seven days a week, taking 7,000 steps a day.
- **Water:** seven days a week, drink seven glasses a day.
- **Sleep:** seven days a week, sleep seven hours a day.

She says these guidelines put you on your way to becoming healthier and more fit, even if you’re not making massive changes.



Natasha Weddle

“The beauty of the Triple Sevens is you can approach it gradually,” Natasha notes. “For instance, if you don’t walk purposefully at all, consider walking three days a week, and aim for an incremental number that’s fewer than 7,000 steps each day—something you’re comfortable with. After a week or so, push yourself to add more steps and another day. Depending on your commitment, you’ll likely build up to seven days, 7,000 steps in four to eight weeks.”

The same holds true for adding water. “Break it down into manageable goals: a glass of water before breakfast, another glass at lunch and another at dinner results in three of the seven each day,” she says. “If you’re already drinking that much water, add another glass between meals or after your daily walk.”

Don’t Neglect Hydration

The average person drinks 1.8 cups of water daily, and nearly 75% of Americans are dehydrated, according to waterlogic.com.

“That’s simply not enough water for your vital organs to function properly,” Natasha says. “Water is not only vital for proper digestion and processing the food you eat, it’s crucial to keep your muscles, kidneys, liver and even your brain working at peak. Research shows that water is much more critical for survival than food.”

She says to avoid drinks with added sugar or empty calories. Fruit juices are loaded with sugar, and sports drinks don’t provide the full circle of benefits of plain water.

As for sleep, Natasha says seven to eight hours is ideal for the average person, but 33% of the population gets fewer than 6½ hours each night.

“The hours of quality sleep you get nightly affect not only your focus and

Five Measures of Fitness

The medical community cites five measures that determines a person’s overall fitness:

- ▶ Cardiovascular endurance.
- ▶ Muscle strength.
- ▶ Muscle endurance.
- ▶ Flexibility.
- ▶ Body composition.

energy level during the day, it contributes to weight gain over time,” she says. “If you’re short-circuiting the amount of sleep you get, you increase your risk of heart attacks, stroke and sudden cardiac death.”

Ease Into Exercise

Upping your walking game adds cardiovascular exercise to your lifestyle, which is especially good for your heart, joint and muscle health. Just be sure to check with your physician before you begin any exercise program to ensure you have no underlying conditions that might preclude exercise.

People often put off exercising because they think it’s too large of a time commitment—and if they don’t have time, they just don’t do it at all.

“Start slowly,” Natasha says. “Increase your movement every day and build up your time. If you’re a couch potato, just a little bit is a good start. As little as 15 minutes a day can boost your life expectancy by up to three years.”

Once you have improved your fitness level, a shorter, less frequent routine two or three days a week will help you maintain it.

“Don’t overlook flexibility and strength training,” Natasha says. “Both will help with your overall health and help you deal with the possibility of arthritis, bone density



Natasha trains a client in proper kettle bell form at TNB Fitness and The New Beginnings Center. PHOTO COURTESY OF TNB FITNESS

issues and osteoporosis.”

People naturally lose bone mass with age. “By rounding out your fitness program with gentle stretching and low-weight work, you’re helping delay the aging process and keeping your body fitter,” Natasha says.

Mobility work is a good part of any routine, but it’s probably the most overlooked because people get into a hurry.

“Warming up before any exercise—walking, strength training or playing a sport—can help prepare your body for exercise,” she says. “A warmup can be five minutes of moving your body plus a little gentle jogging in place—just enough to let your body know you’re changing your pace.”

Food Choices Matter

The Triple Seven Rule is a good foundation to improve overall health and fitness, but what if you want to lose weight?

“First, if you drink water before meals, your stomach will signal your brain that

you’re not as hungry as you feel, and you’ll eat less,” Natasha says. “Also, slow down and be mindful of eating your meal. Sit at the dinner table without distractions, such as television or reading. Chew thoroughly and enjoy the process of eating. Take at least 20 to 30 minutes to finish your meal; that allows your stomach to signal your brain that you’ve satisfied your hunger.”

To stave off hunger between meals, Natasha recommends eating whole eggs rather than a grain-based breakfast.

“The protein in eggs will help you feel more satisfied than cereal, pancakes or toast,” she says, noting that drinking coffee or green tea can also help raise your metabolism. “Studies show the caffeine can boost your metabolism by 3% to 11% and increase fat burning by 10% to 29%.”

She cites added sugar as perhaps the worst culprit in today’s food intake.

“For one, sugar is undeniably associated with the risk of obesity, plus diseases such

as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease,” Natasha says. “Just cutting back on sugar and choosing healthier alternatives can improve your health and wellness.”

If you must snack, she says to have healthy options such as nuts, raw vegetables, fruit, whey protein and unsweetened yogurt.

Natasha recommends adding more fruit, vegetables and fiber to your diet, always being mindful that what goes in your body—paired with some sort of activity—is the foundation to a healthy approach.

“If you only do the Triple Seven, make better nutrition choices and commit to them long term, you will notice a difference in your energy level, your concentration and your mindset,” she says. “Improving your health and fitness is a lifelong journey. It all starts with small steps. It took years to become the person you are, so don’t expect instant results. Fully enjoy the rest of your life.” ■

PLANNER

Holiday lights twinkle, and special events such as caroling and visits with Santa abound. Grab a cup of hot cocoa and be inspired to celebrate the warmth of the season in Tennessee.



CHRISTMAS IN COLLIERVILLE

Through December 18

The town of Collierville goes all-out to create a magical Christmas season for Collierville's families and guests. Christmas in Collierville takes place Saturdays through December 18. Free carriage rides are from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (weather permitting), Santa is in the gazebo on the Town Square for photo opportunities from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and a quarter-million holiday lights shine bright in the historic district through January 1. All events are free.

www.colliervilletn.gov

PHOTO COURTESY
OF CINDY THYMIUS

UNION CITY

Through December 31

Let It Glow Light Show at Discovery Park of America

See more than 1 million lights synchronized to Christmas songs during Discovery Park of America's Let It Glow light show. The drive-thru show is on the park's 50 acres. This year, there is a portion that can be walked through. Food and beverages such as hot chocolate are for sale. Enjoy shopping local, handmade gifts, singing Christmas carol karaoke and more holiday surprises.

discoveryparkofamerica.com

TIPTONVILLE

January 1

First Day Hike

Join Ranger Jake Viamonte on the first hike of the year at Reelfoot Lake State Park. You might see eagles flying over, ice formations at Kiwanis Park, or snow geese and ducks roosting at Long Point or Black Bayou. It's a great day for photography.

tnstateparks.com/events

CHATTANOOGA

Through January 2

Enchanted Garden of Lights

One million holiday lights dazzle during the Enchanted Garden of Lights at Rock City. Explore the gardens by night as your pathway is illuminated with holiday light displays and ambient live music. Stroll through the lighted Grand Corridor in Yule Town, see the icy lights of the Arctic Kingdom and watch the Magic Forest come to life with enchanting displays. All guests must reserve an entry time in advance online.

www.seerockcity.com/events/enchanted-garden-of-lights

PIGEON FORGE

Through January 2

Dollywood's Smoky Mountain Christmas

Dollywood dazzles like a Christmas tree with more than 5 million lights during Smoky Mountain Christmas—now the 13-time Golden Ticket Award winner for best Christmas event. This is a family favorite in the Great Smoky Mountains. Head to Glacier Ridge to see the Christmas light show set to symphonic music, a unique walk-through of the aurora borealis, and many illuminated displays and colorful lights.

Christmas stories unfold onstage, celebrating family, song and tradition. Weather permitting, fireworks fill the sky synchronized to new Christmas tunes every Friday and Saturday.

www.dollywood.com/themepark/Festivals/Smoky-Mountain-Christmas

NASHVILLE

Through January 2

A Country Christmas at Gaylord Opryland

See 3 million lights at Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. New this year is an exclusive Gaylord Hotel original experience: "Mission: Save Christmas featuring Elf." Join Buddy the Elf and answer the call from Santa to collect enough Christmas cheer to power the Kringle 3000 and help Santa's sleigh fly. This multisensory experience includes 12 interactive elements and beloved scenes from the film. The Oak Ridge Boys' "Christmas in Tennessee" dinner show presents classic holiday songs, new songs and timeless tunes. Take part in Christmas-themed scavenger hunts, experience Rudolph's Holly Jolly Breakfast, take photos with Santa, embark on a Christmas cruise, snow tube, ice skate, and drive ice bumper cars.

www.tnvacation.com/local/nashville-gaylord-opryland-resort-convention-center4



BELL BUCKLE'S OLDE FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

Saturdays Through December 18

Enjoy sleigh rides with Santa, carolers, a s'mores pit, and the look and feel of an Olde Fashioned Christmas Saturdays in December.

bellbucklechamber.com/event/old-fashioned-christmas-4

PHOTO COURTESY OF
BELL BUCKLE CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

BYRDSTOWN

January 8

Beginning Weaving

Learn the basics of setting up a small loom for tabby weaving at Cordell Hull Birthplace State Park. Weave a sample cloth to take home with you. A \$35 class fee includes use of looms, yarns and materials. Bring your own yarn if you choose. There are a limited number of seats. Sue Duncan, a retired park ranger from Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, has more than 30 years invested in historical interpretation and education.

tnstateparks.com/events

CLARKSVILLE

Through January 10

Ice Skating at Downtown Commons

Bring the family for outdoor ice skating at Clarksville's Downtown Commons Winter Ice Rink. Regular operating hours are Thursdays and Fridays from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Sundays from 2 to 9 p.m. Hours vary on holidays, during school breaks and special events. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$10 for children younger than 12,

government employees, military and Austin Peay State University students. Ice skates are provided and included in the cost of the ticket.

www.facebook.com/downtowncommonsice

GATLINBURG, PIGEON FORGE and SEVIERVILLE

Through February 15

Smoky Mountain Winterfest

More than 15 million lights line the parkway during Smoky Mountain Winterfest in Sevierville, Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. In Sevierville, Shadrack's Christmas Wonderland illuminates the drive with lights dancing in perfect rhythm to Christmas music played over the radio. New custom-built, all-LED displays surround visitors with holiday cheer. In Pigeon Forge, the attractions get festive, including The Old Mill with its two award-winning restaurants, shops filled with gifts and tours of the 186-year-old working mill. Gatlinburg offers guests the opportunity to take the Trolley Ride of Lights to see holiday magic displayed in town.

www.tnvacation.com/local/smokies-smoky-mountain-winterfest

GALLATIN

February 26

Maker Market & Craft Fair

Bledsoe Creek Maker Market and Craft Fair offers a healthy dose of invention—a family-friendly gathering of creativity and ingenuity. Bundle up and bring friends and family to see what your neighbors create and support their efforts by buying unique items. When entering Bledsoe Creek State Park, please follow the signs to event parking.

tnstateparks.com/events

Include Your Upcoming Event

Want to share a family-friendly event with the readers of Tennessee Connections? Please visit tinyurl.com/TennesseeEvents to submit the details. Thank you.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many events have been canceled or revamped. As of press time, these events are still on. However, you are encouraged to verify plans have not changed.

For a complete list of what's happening in Tennessee, visit tnvacation.com/calendar.



PEPPERMINT TRAIL

Through January 2

Follow the Peppermint Trail to discover peppermint specials at downtown bakeries, coffee shops, bars, restaurants and boutiques, illuminated with new, peppermint-themed lighting displays. Downtown Knoxville is decorated for the holidays, including Krutch Park's forest of twinkling trees and the 42-foot Christmas tree in the Krutch Park Extension on Gay Street. The Drive-In at the Midway series at Chilhowee Park presents holiday films, and Knoxville's neighborhoods battle to showcase the best lights, garland and bows in the inaugural Knoxville Neighborhood Holiday Trails. A map of participating neighborhoods is available so guests can take a driving tour.

www.downtownknoxville.org/holiday/peppermint

PHOTO COURTESY OF VISIT KNOXVILLE

Wander through an urban nature park at Shelby Farms Park

PHOTO COURTESY OF
SHELBY FARMS PARK
CONSERVANCY/
REBECCA DAILEY

What Is It?

One of the largest urban parks in the country, Shelby Farms Park in Memphis has 4,500 acres of water, wilderness and buffalo range to explore.

About the Park

In 2007, Shelby County created the Shelby Farms Park Conservancy to run the park. The Conservancy's Heart of the Park initiative invested more than \$70 million between 2010 and 2017, enlarging Hyde Lake, planting thousands of trees, building a new visitors center and other improvements.

Take the Greenline

The Shelby Farms Greenline is a nearly 11-mile paved trail through the Park connecting Memphis to Cordova. Previously a railroad line out of Memphis, the Greenline is a great place to take a walk or a bike ride. To explore the park, hop off the Greenline and on to the more-than 40 miles of trails in the Park.

Buffalo Herd

As buffalo populations dwindled across the country, six buffalo were introduced to the property in 1989. The herd has grown to around 15 in the decades since. In 2013, the park built a new 50-acre range for the buffalo. You can see the buffalo range from your car or on foot from the 2.75-mile Chickasaw Trail.

On the Water

The Park has more than 20 bodies of water. Visitors can rent canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and paddle boats. Fishers can catch catfish, crappie, bream and largemouth bass. The best sport fishing lakes include Hyde, Beaver and Chickasaw lakes, while Jones Pond is stocked with trout each winter.

More Info

Shelby Farms Park is open from sunrise to sunset. To start planning your trip, and for up-to-date information on amenities, activities and local health guidelines, visit www.shelbyfarmspark.org or call 901-222-7275.



Winter Gardening Tasks

Vegetable gardening has always been an exciting topic for many residents across Tennessee. As all gardeners know, a lot of planning goes into a successful and productive home garden.

Even during the winter, you can prepare for the next growing season

(mustard plants, including cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower) and solanaceous (nightshades, including tomatoes, potatoes and bell peppers) around your garden every year.

When planning plant spacing and crop rotations, it is helpful to put your plans on graph paper or use a garden planning app.



A large, bright yellow fire extinguisher is the central focus of the image. It has a cylindrical body, a handle on top, and a long, tapered nozzle with a perforated tip. The extinguisher is set against a plain white background.

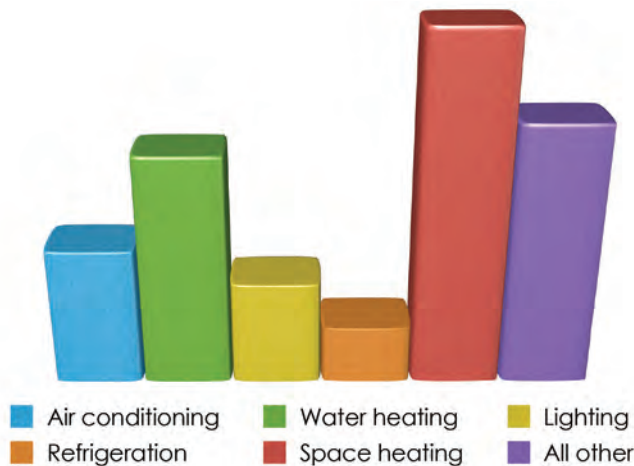
Power Partners

Increased Energy Use Explained

Contributed by CDE Lightband's Energy Services Team

What affects energy use?

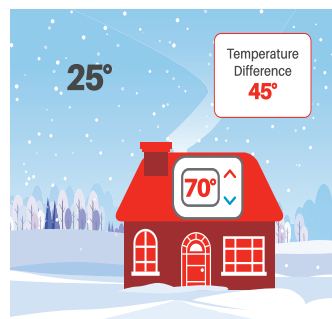
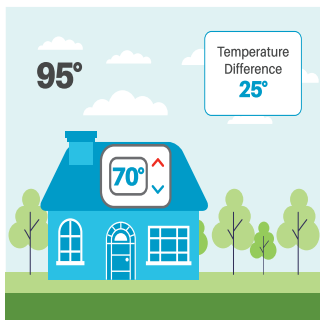
- Weather is the primary factor affecting how much energy is used.
- Space conditioning is the single-largest energy user in most homes.
- Heating in winter typically requires more energy use than cooling in summer.
- Water heating is another significant source of energy use.



Why does the weather have this effect?

The difference between the interior and exterior temperatures affects how much energy is needed for space conditioning because they affect how much heat flows across the building envelope.

As illustrated above, this difference is typically more significant during the winter months, so there is more heat transfer and more space conditioning to maintain comfortable interior conditions.



Extended Leave Energy-Saving Tips for Winter

Are you planning an extended visit for the holidays? Are you a member of the military and deploying soon? Whatever the reason for your extended absence, CDE Lightband wants to help keep your energy costs down while you are away.

Lower Your Thermostat. Heating is the largest user of electricity in the winter season. When leaving, set all the home's thermostats to 50 to 55 F. This way, pipes won't freeze, but energy won't be wasted.

It's important to note a thermostat does not turn OFF a home's heating system. It is simply a controller to tell the heater when to come on. A heater continues to use electricity to keep a home warm, even if the house is empty.

Turn Off Your Water Heater. Water heating represents up to 25% of a home's energy bill. A water heater's heating elements consume electricity to keep the water in the tank hot even if the house is unoccupied.

If the home will be empty, turn off the water heater at the electric panel. Upon returning, flip the same breaker back on. Allow several hours for the water heater to recharge.

In the winter, drain pipes that hold water located outside the heated area of the home.

Another tip to save energy: Set the water heater thermostat to 120 F.

Your Refrigerator. Refrigerators and freezers also use energy whether or not the home is occupied. If the house is not used, consider defrosting and unplugging the refrigerator and freezer. Prop the doors open so there won't be problems with mildew.

If choosing not to defrost or unplug the refrigerator, fill it with gallon jugs full of water to help the refrigerator run more efficiently. Depending on the contents, consider raising the temperature of the refrigerator while away.

Phantom Load. Many TVs, cable boxes, chargers and other electronics have instant-on features or small clocks that consume energy all the time. This can be deceptive because the device looks like it is turned off. When away, unplug these devices from the wall or outlets.

Curtains. Opening the home's curtains acts as an additional heat source. Take advantage of free energy from the sun.

Lighting. If leaving lights on for security, install timers or photocell day/night sensors to ensure electricity is used only when it is important for home safety. Install LED lights in the fixtures used often. ■

For more energy-saving tips and articles, please email energyservices@cde-lightband.com or visit partner.cdelightband.com.

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GET OUTSIDE

ADOBEE STOCK PHOTOS BY JEFFREY BANKE AND MICHAEL O'REILLY

Tennessee's Big Game Comeback

It's hard to imagine how much Great Smoky Mountains National Park has changed since its early days, when industrial logging depleted most of the timber and more than 1,200 landowners left the park's hollows and river valleys to find new homes.

While covering the Smokies as a newspaper reporter, I came across a correspondence dated July 7, 1934, between the assistant chief ranger and the park superintendent. It included a rough census of the park's wildlife populations.

Congress had recently authorized full development of the Smokies' 300,000 acres. The park now covers 522,427 acres. Wildlife biologists were eager to get a fix on the resources they would be managing.

About 80% of the park had been commercially logged. Except for some remnant stands of virgin timber, the forest was a thick entanglement of young trees mixed with blackberry bushes and grapevines.

According to the report, the newly minted national park contained about 100 black bears. Today, an estimated 1,900 bears inhabit the Smokies. The number of whitetail deer was only 18—six in North Carolina and 12 in Tennessee—and the park's entire flock of wild turkey was thought to be about 315.

Anyone driving the 11-mile Cades Cove Loop Road can attest to the park's modern abundance of turkey and deer.

Just a few years after the park's 1934 wildlife census, Tennessee biologists began an aggressive effort to reestablish whitetail deer, which had largely disappeared from the landscape due to habitat loss and overhunting.

The stocking program kicked off in 1937 when 14 deer from North Carolina were released onto what is today the Chuck Swan Wildlife Management Area. Between 1940 and 1950,

wildlife officials bought 800 deer from out of state and released them in wildlife management areas across Tennessee.

The deer restoration program ended in 1985. By 1988, all 95 counties in Tennessee were open to deer hunting. Last deer season (2020-2021), 159,962 deer were harvested across the state—the highest total in six years.

Tennessee's wild turkey comeback follows a similar storyline. Between 1940 and 1950, biologists tried to restore the turkey population by releasing 3,719 birds raised in captivity. Few had the survival skills to live in the wild.

Beginning in 1949, the Tennessee Game and Fish Commission trapped 119 turkeys in areas of the state with self-sustaining turkey populations and began releasing these birds where turkeys were scarce. By 1960, eight counties were open to turkey hunting.

Stocking continued throughout the 1990s until all 95 Tennessee counties were open to turkey hunting.

The past few hunting seasons, Tennessee's turkey harvest has exceeded 30,000 gobblers a year, according to the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.

"A lot of people don't realize that our agency worked diligently to restore these wildlife populations," says Barry Cross, TWRA outreach and communication coordinator. "Back in my dad's day, coming across a deer track was something to talk about. Our turkey and deer have rebounded better than anybody imagined, especially over the last 20 years." ■



Morgan Simmons is the former outdoor editor for the Knoxville News Sentinel and seven-time winner of the Tennessee Outdoor Writer of the Year award. He lives on a farm in Clinton, Tennessee, with his wife, a donkey, six goats, two dogs and several chickens.

Ensure Christmas remains merry by childproofing your home before young visitors arrive. PHOTO BY PEXELS/PIXABAY



Keep It Safe

Invite Safety Home for the Holidays

Before your visitors arrive, take time to properly prepare

It is easy to get caught up in the hectic pace of holiday entertaining: cookies to bake, decorations to hang, presents to wrap.

Don't overlook safety during the rush. The winter holiday period marks peak time for home fires and preventable injuries.

The good news: It is not difficult to make your home ready to safely host all of your favorite holiday activities. Follow these tips from the Electrical Safety Foundation International:

- Take time out from your party preparations to test your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Both should be installed on every level of the home and outside each sleeping area. Smoke alarms also should be inside each bedroom.
- Discuss your family fire escape plan with any overnight guests.
- Inspect all decorations, cords and outlets for damage before use. Keep electrical cords out of doorways and high-traffic areas where they pose a tripping hazard. Do not damage cords by pinching them or attaching them with staples or nails.
- Arrange your holiday decorations to avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many

lights, cords or appliances.

- Keep young visitors safe by preparing your home before they arrive. If your home is not already childproof, install tamper-resistant receptacles or use safety covers on all unused electrical outlets.
 - Put away small items, such as buttons, coins and jewelry, which are choking hazards.
 - Store breakables, candles, matches and other potentially dangerous items in inaccessible or locked areas out of reach.
 - Use safety gates at the top and bottom of stairs to keep babies and toddlers safe.
 - Safety does not stop when the party starts. Keep decorations, gifts and other combustibles at least 3 feet from heat sources or open flame.
 - Never leave the kitchen when something is cooking.
 - Make sure children are supervised at all times in the kitchen and anywhere space heaters, candles or fireplaces are being used.
 - Turn off and unplug all decorations before leaving home or turning in for the night.
- A safe and happy holiday remains the best gift you can give friends and family. ■



www.cdelightband.com

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Clarksville, TN 37040

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The business office will be closed on December 23 and 24 for the Christmas holiday, December 31 for New Year's, January 17 to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day and February 21 for Presidents Day.