

# FARMVILLE

*the Magazine*

December 2023

Vol. 8, No. 8

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## Christmas is about community

I can't really say it any better than author Nora Roberts, when it comes to Christmas trees. "Nothing ever seems too bad, too hard or too sad when you've got a Christmas tree in the living room," she writes. "All those presents under it, all that anticipation. Just a way of saying there's always light and hope in the world."

That's been true for me as long as I can remember. There's just something about the tree sitting there in the living room, shifting from clear lights to multi-colored, with all the ornaments shining. I can sit in my chair and just enjoy the sight for weeks on end. Now yes, for my nieces and nephew, I'm pretty sure the presents under the tree take center stage. Actually, I should say I know they do, because as soon as Black Friday rolls around, we'll put the tree up and place those first wrapped presents under it. And every time, their eyes go right to that first round of presents, trying to determine what exactly is inside, without shaking any of them. We have a very strict look but don't touch policy, when it comes to wrapped gifts.

But that whole visual, the lights, the ornaments, the presents, it gives people something to look towards, a little bit of joy in their lives. You can



Brian Carlton,  
Editor

see a little glimpse of that later on in this month's magazine, that look of celebration as folks came from all over the region to watch the lighting of the Farmville Christmas tree. It's a tradition almost a decade old at this point. Carols are sung, hot cocoa is offered, and a countdown is started, all leading up to that one moment where the mayor throws the switch. It's still a beautiful site to see throughout the Christmas season, lighting up our downtown area.

Now granted, I don't recommend staring at it as you drive by High Bridge Plaza. That might cause a wreck. But pull over, park and take all the pictures you want. And if you see any of the town employees around it, those folks who spent hours putting it up, making sure it was secure enough to stay up in storms and decorated it, be sure to tell them thanks.

But what about the tree itself? Where do they come from? Well, also in this month's edition, you'll have a chance to hear from the folks at Mt. Airy Farms, detailing their efforts to keep a decades old family operation going, so that each family in this area has a place to go and find just the perfect Christmas tree.

We also have recipes to share and other stories to tell, all wrapped up in this month's edition of *Farmville the Magazine*. There's a lot to discover, so I won't keep you from it. I'll just wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and I hope you find the perfect tree this year.

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On the cover: Sidney Allen from Rochette's Florist poses for the camera dressed as the Grinch during the Christmas Open House held on Saturday, Nov. 11. At the left, Giuseppe and Luca Aldi sit on the Grinch's lap.



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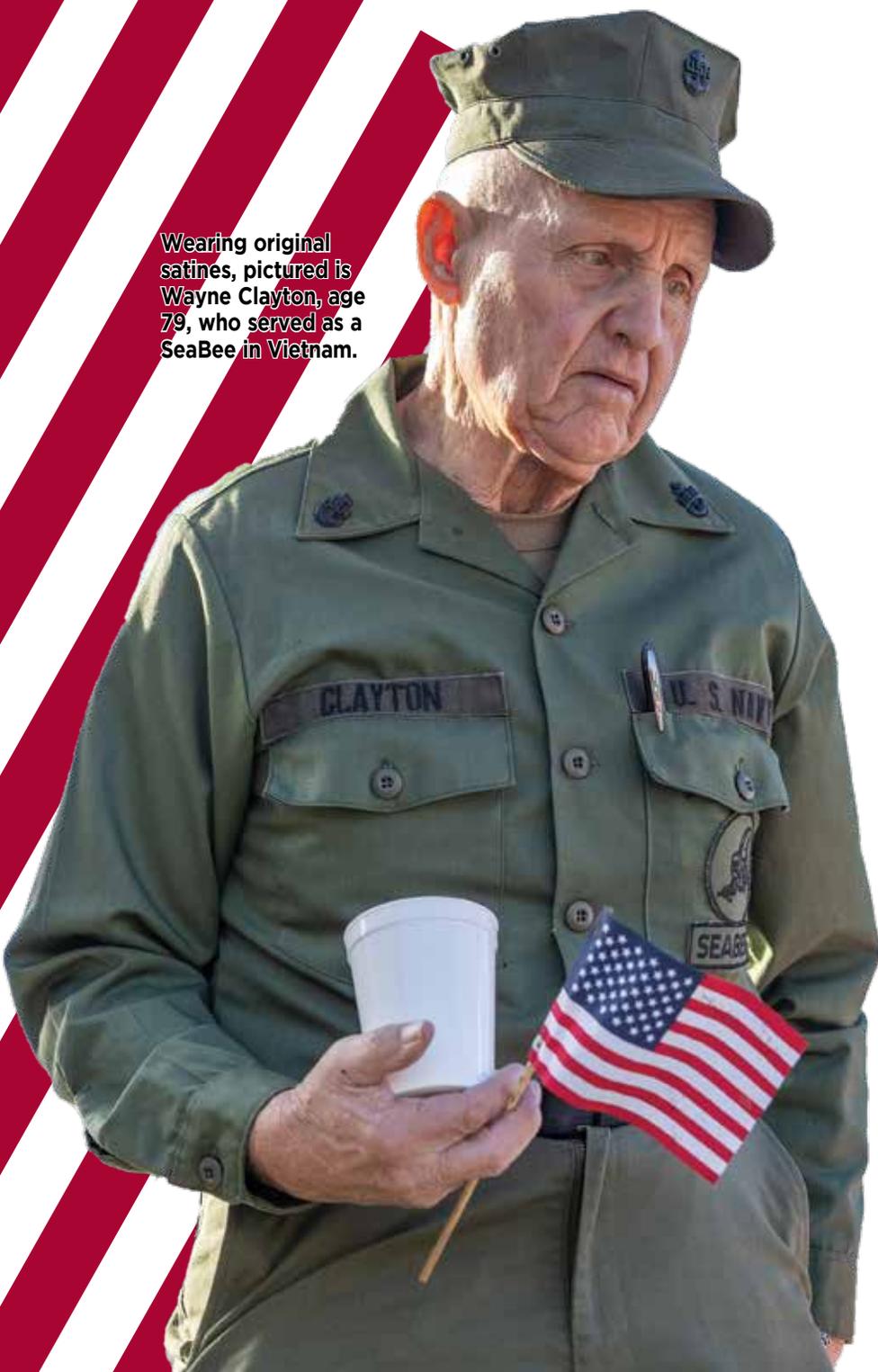
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# SALUTE TO SERVICE WILL RETURN

Wearing original satines, pictured is Wayne Clayton, age 79, who served as a SeaBee in Vietnam.



Story by Jeff Moore  
Photos by John Karrati and Clint Mooney

Hundreds turned out on Veterans Day to have fun, enjoy fellowship, remember the fallen and celebrate the men and women who put their lives on the line in service to the nation.

Organizers said they are excited by how the community embraced the first Salute to Service held at Farmville's Three Roads Brewing Company on Nov. 11.

Committee chairman Kerby Moore said he knows people had a very good time, enjoying the day's warm weather and the chance to come together for a unique celebration. And it's not something just for Farmville or Prince Edward County residents.

"We know for a fact that people came from well over an hour away to attend this," Moore said in a recent interview.

It was such a success that the event will return again next year.

"Three Roads Brewing Company said it was their second largest day ever as far as revenue," Moore said. "If you count the free beer that they generously donated, it was their biggest day. So obviously, the community embraced this."

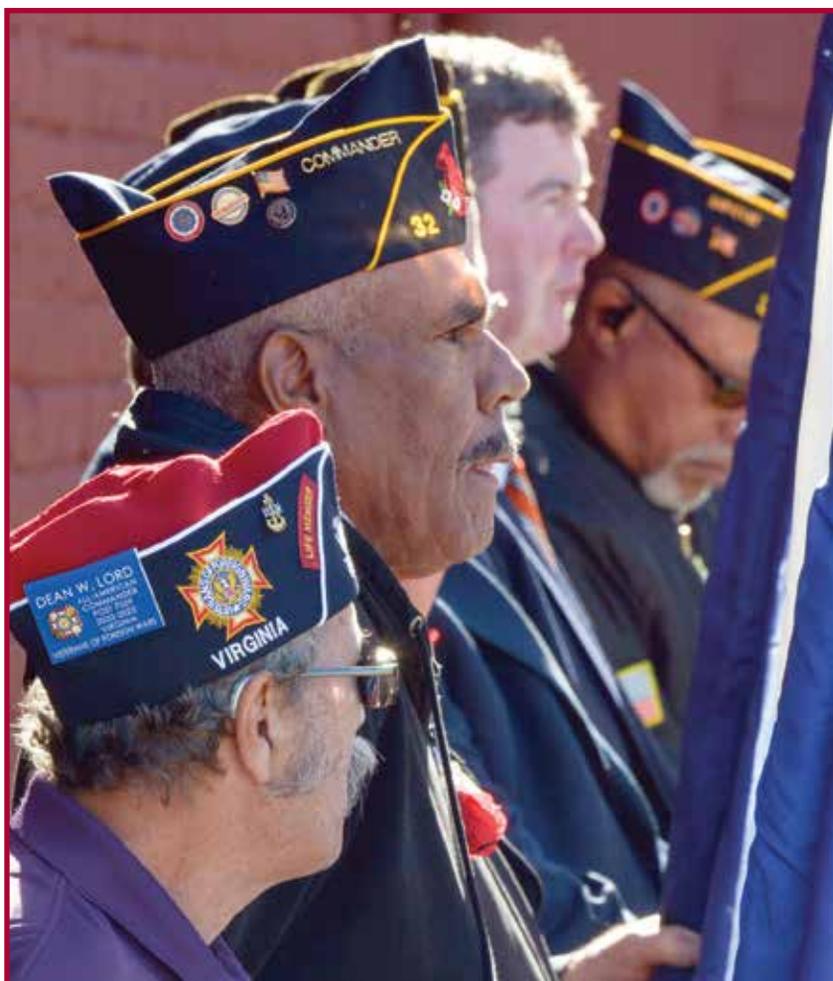
The opening ceremony is the most memorable highlight from the day, he noted.

Special rites were performed for prisoners of war and the missing in action. Purple Heart recipients and those who served in each branch of the military were recognized.

"There were folks there who had obviously never seen that and they were quite moved," Moore said. "I saw people crying and it was amazing."



Above, students from the Longwood University ROTC served as the Color Guard for the Salute to Service - Veterans Day Extravaganza. Below, pictured are, from left, Dean Lord, Silas Blanton, John Miller and Raymond Ridley who were part of the group representing each branch of the service.



#### WHAT DID THE EVENT INCLUDE?

The ceremony included the presentation of colors, recognition of Gold Star families and the playing of 'Taps.'

"There were times there wasn't a dry eye in the place," he said.

He believes the day not only recognized veterans for their service, but also educated those attending through the ceremonies.

Moore said it was wonderful how all ages attended — seniors, middle-aged and children.

"The kids had a blast," he said. "We had a lot of big heavy military equipment and the kids could climb in that and sit behind the wheel and get their picture taken on those pieces of equipment."

As a Marine, Moore's biggest highlight from the salute was when he rounded up other Marines and they took over the stage.

"They were not professional singers, mind you, but we took over," he said. "We belted out, not one, not two, but all three verses of the Marine Corps hymn. That was a lot of fun."

Members of the Army, Navy and Air Force be warned, because they've already challenged



**Members of the Sweet Adelines, an cappella group who traveled from Richmond to perform the Star Spangled banner and other patriotic songs, happily clap for the Heart of Virginia Community Band.**

members of those branches of service to do the same thing next year.

“We’re not gonna be alone next year,” Moore said.

#### **VETERANS RECEIVED HELP**

The event proved successful by getting important information in the hands of veterans.

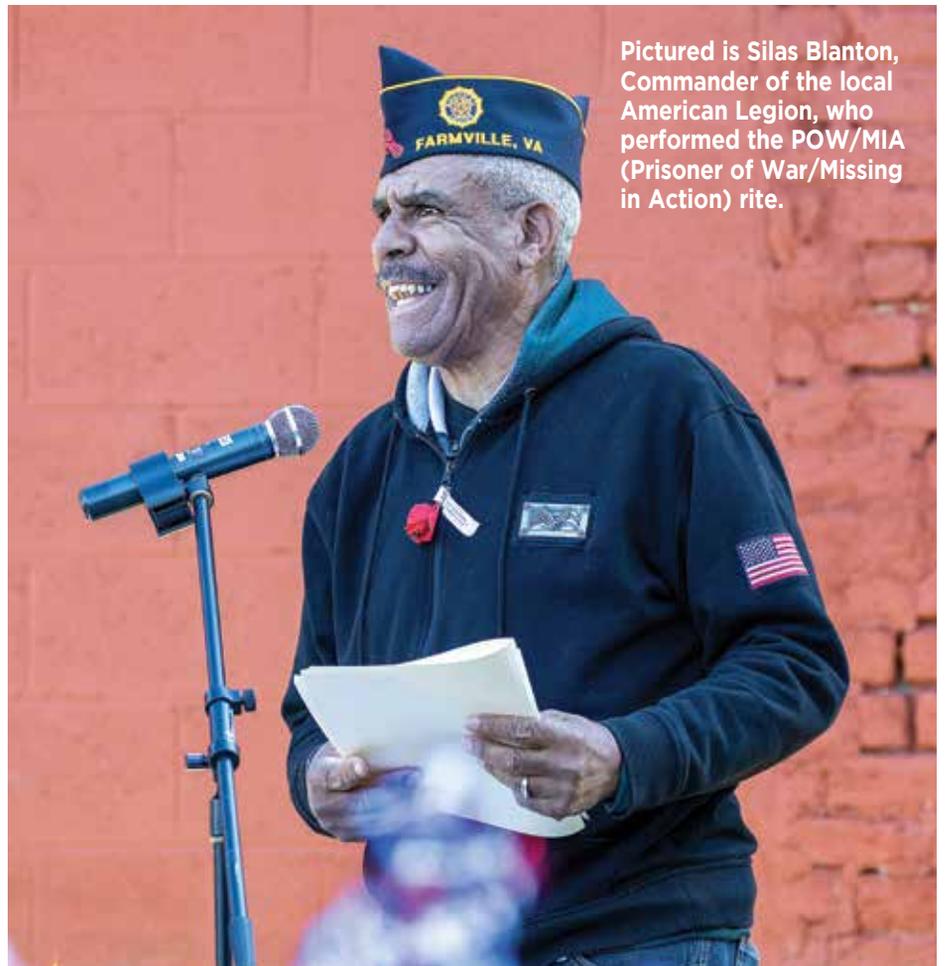
Sponsors with booths, such as American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Farmville Jarhead and others, all reported good days as they talked with those attending.

“We gave out a lot of useful information to veterans who were trying to find out more about benefits and what’s available to them,” Moore explained. “I really think it was a win-win all the way around.”

Whether it was the Town of Farmville, the ROTC, the Rotary Club of Farmville or other organizations, he said they offered to assist in any way to make the Salute to Service happen.

“There was no hesitation from anybody to help,” Moore said. “In fact, people called us out of the blue and said, ‘hey, I heard you have this veterans event. Would you like to borrow my flag? Would you like for me to do this folks?’”

Many in the community whom they didn’t even know called out of the blue to help out,



**Pictured is Silas Blanton, Commander of the local American Legion, who performed the POW/MIA (Prisoner of War/Missing in Action) rite.**

he said.

“It was just amazing,” Moore said. “I love Farmville. I love small town life.”

The event organizing committee met a few days after the Salute to Service to look back at their first event and see what lies ahead.

Moore said they’ve already started exploring what was successful, what can be improved and how next year’s event can be even better.

One thing Moore knows is that next year Veterans Day won’t be on a Saturday and the weather may not be as agreeable. Picking a day to hold the salute when people will attend is one of the most important topics, along with weather, parking and other logistics.

With a good framework in place for the event he encouraged folks in the community to contact him and other committee members to share their thoughts on how to make it better.

“We’re always seeking ways to improve and anybody who reads (this) who wants to get in touch with us to share their ideas, we’d love to hear that as well,” Moore said.



**Kris and Jessica Kringle dressed as Mr. and Mrs. Claus for the event.**



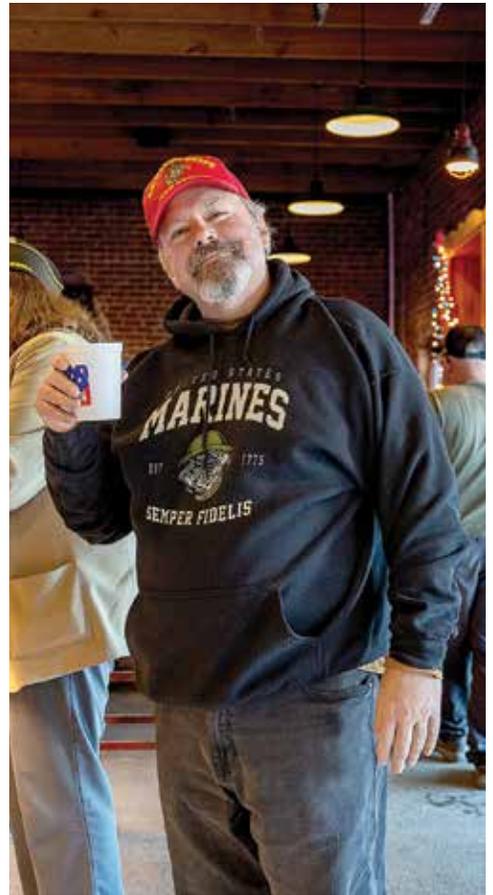
**Lee Wilcox, Assistant Park Manager for Saylor’s Creek Battlefield State Park, giving a demonstration on Civil War musket firing.**



Above, David Ganzer conducts the Heart of Virginia Community Band in association with the Longwood University Music Department. The group performed many patriotic songs, including the theme song from each branch of service. Left, presenting the banners of each branch of service are, from left, Dean Lord, Silas Blanton, George Buckman and Tom Crouse. In back, wearing the white shirt is "DJ Baddogg." In front, at the microphone, is Fred Hill of the VFW who served as Master of Ceremonies



Above, are a few, of the hundreds, of people who visited the nine booths, three food trucks and military equipment display present at the event. This booth belongs to the American Legion. Right, Kerby Moore, who envisioned this event and chaired the Board of Directors through its inaugural year.



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# DISCOVERING THE MAGIC OF CHRISTMAS, ONE TREE AT A TIME

Story by Michael Hinman  
Photos submitted

It seems everyone knows the story of Charlie Brown making his way to a practically deserted Christmas tree lot, finding nothing but a small sapling with barely any branches.

"I guess you were right, Linus," Charlie said to his trusted friend. "I shouldn't have picked this little tree. Everything I do turns into a disaster. I guess I really don't know what Christmas is all about."

Except we know how that story ends — and so does Sarah Kott, whose family has owned Mt. Airy Farm for generations. She's helped her family sell Christmas trees from the farm every year since she was a little girl. And while they expect to have 400 of some of the most beautiful trees chopped down for the holiday season, there is one particular tree so many people ask for.

"Sometimes people come out, and they're like, 'We want the Charlie Brown tree,'" Kott said. "And we're like, 'Well, you know, Charlie Brown-ish looking trees are not trees that we count as sellable.'"

Yet, that doesn't stop anyone from venturing out into the rows of perfectly planted trees that make up J&J Treeland at Mt. Airy Farms, just outside of the town limits of Farmville, trying to find the one that represents the Christmas spirit best for them.

"We still have people go and find trees that we would have never marked as sellable," Kott said. "And you never really know what people are going to find. We had a tree that my grandfather was going to cut out of the field to make more room for replanting, because it seemed to have grown out instead of up. So, it might have only been six feet tall, but it was about eight-and-a-half feet wide.



Santa pays a visit to the farm, taking a picture with Audrey Kott, whose family has owned Mt. Airy for generations. Photo courtesy of Sarah Kott.



A group of Mt. Airy staff gathers at the farm. They include, from left front, Audrey Kott, John Young, Lester Williams and Rae Dial. On the back row, from left, are Sarah Kott and Nathan Nance.

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“Yet, we had someone that was like, ‘Yep! That’s our tree!’”

**THE HISTORY OF MT. AIRY FARMS**

Kott’s grandfather is John Young, who first opened the Christmas tree lot with his friend Jim Bowen in 1978, calling it J&J Treeland after their first initials. The operation was small at first, and after a few years, Jim moved away, selling his share of the business to Young. But it has thrived.

At the height of its operation, J&J Treeland not only sold trees to local families, but would load up tractor trailers to export trees to other states. Young was even in charge of creating Christmas roping for Colonial Williamsburg.

These days, it’s much more of a family operation, with an occasional hired hand to help out. Familiar faces like Lester Williams, who does a lot of the heavier lifting. And John Young? Yes, he’s still out there, showing that 85 is just a number.

Kott became more involved about 15 years ago, handling the social media and customer contact sides of the business. Yet, the tree farm has been a part of her life from the beginning.

“I grew up there,” Kott said. “My grandparents actually babysat me for my mom. So, I grew up standing at the edge of the tractor-trailers as they were unloaded, with a little clicker to count every tree that was unloaded.”

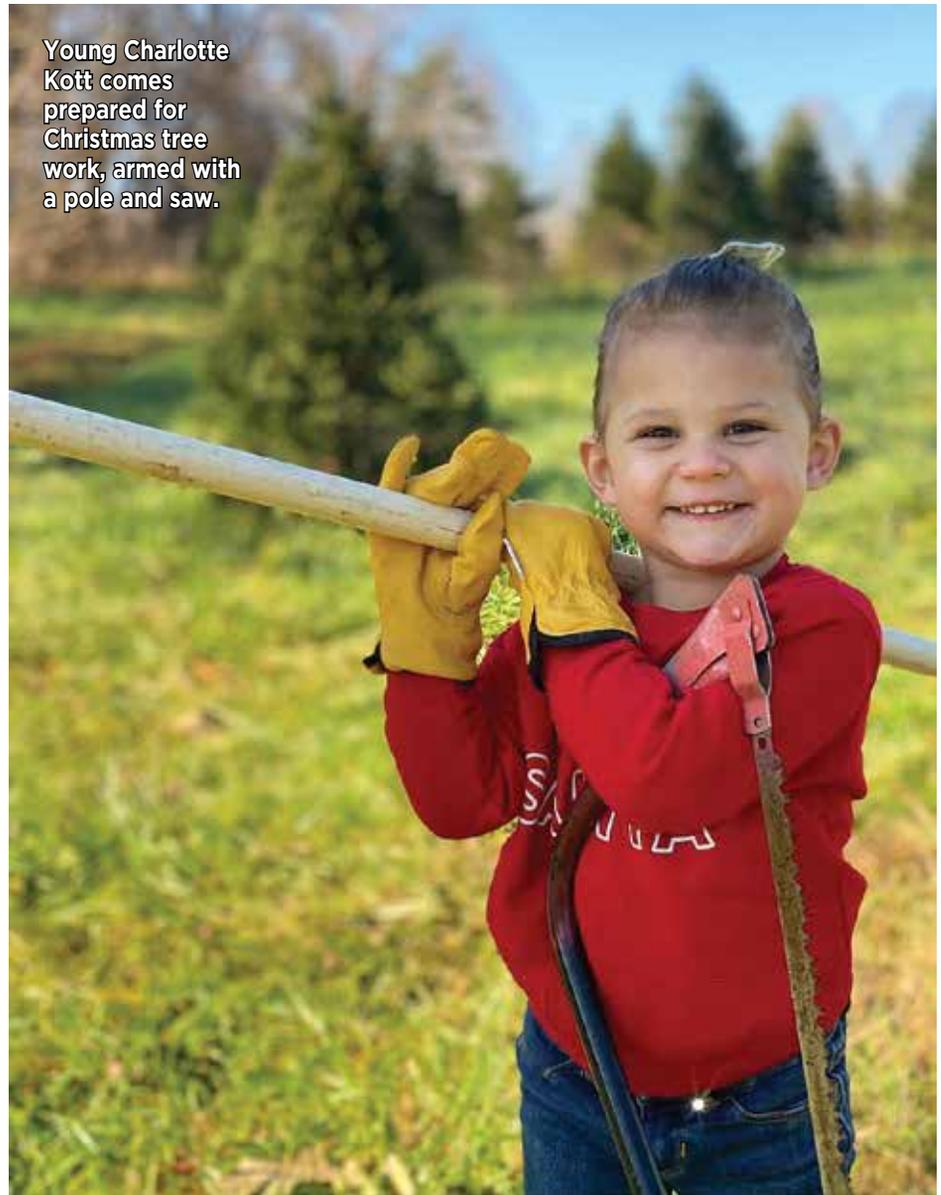
There are far fewer trees these days, partially because of the changing market, but also because of a devastating drought a little more than a decade ago.

“The average tree takes seven years to mature,” Kott said. “So, it takes a while for something like bad planting seasons to affect us, but we felt it in recent years.”

The drought cost the family two years of crops. And while Young tried to mitigate by planting older saplings and young trees to make up the difference, J&J Treeland was still quite limited over the past two years, offering just 200 trees.

“We’ve been doing a limited season to try to not sell the farm out completely,” Kott said, adding that the drought is one of the main reasons why live trees are becoming so expensive in recent years — there just aren’t as many available as there were in the past.

“I’ve had people reach out from New York and Pennsylvania asking if we had any trees we could send them,” Kott said. “That’s why you see the



Young Charlotte Kott comes prepared for Christmas tree work, armed with a pole and saw.

Lowe’s and Walmart prices have risen significantly in the past couple of years, because they’re wanting to get trees.”

**A SHORT WINDOW THIS YEAR**

This year, 400 trees will be available — but the windows to come out and get one is short, on a first come, first serve basis.

“We provide saws, or we can cut trees down for people,” Kott said. “We do allow people to bring in their own handsaws, but we don’t let anyone bring in chainsaws. But we do have our own chainsaws that we can help with if someone needs it.”

And workers hand out measuring sticks, too, because a tree that might look small out in the field could be much bigger than someone thinks.

Typical trees are between six and eight feet,

and range in price anywhere from \$65 to \$110, depending on species.

But for Kott and the Young family, this isn’t a business as much as it is a tradition — one that has passed down not only through their generations, but generations of customers, too. Like one couple who met while attending Longwood University.

“One of their first dates was coming out to get a tree,” Kott said. “And they have come every year since. So, we have seen their kids, and now some of their kids are married. So now they come out with their kids and their significant others. And so I am just waiting for grandkids to start popping up with that family.”

You can start — or continue — your own tradition beginning this weekend. For more details, you can call the farm at (434) 202-4333.

Serving It Up |

# *Christmas morning muffin mix waffles*

With a few ice cream cones, some green icing and a sprinkle of powdered sugar, you can turn breakfast into a powdery winter wonderland perfect for Christmas morning.



### Story and photos by Alexa Massey

Everybody knows that the last thing anyone wants to do on Christmas morning is to hover over the stove for an hour cooking breakfast for a hungry crowd. Nobody wants to dirty up the entire kitchen before even getting started on Christmas dinner, but after opening presents and checking stockings all morning your family is sure to be a bit peckish.

So, Christmas morning breakfast should be easy, tasty and festive. That's why I've dedicated this month's recipe to my Quick Muffin Mix Waffles. This recipe turns a box of store bought cranberry orange muffin mix into a fast and delicious breakfast. The mix is made with just four simple ingredients, can be put together in just minutes and makes for great waffle or pancake batter. In this month's recipe, I'll show you how to make a fast and festive Christmas morning breakfast using the Quick Muffin Mix Waffles, some ice cream cones and a little bit of creativity.

### HERE'S THE RECIPE:

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 16 minutes (4 minutes per waffle)

Total time: 21 minutes

Yields: 4 waffles (or 8 waffles per 18.6 oz. box of muffin mix)

Waffle batter ingredients:

**2 cups or approx. 1/2 a package of 18.6 oz cranberry orange muffin mix**

**1 cup milk or water**

**1 egg, beaten**

**1/4 cup vegetable oil or melted butter**

Optional toppings:

**One package 'sugar' ice cream cones**

**Green icing (preferably cookie icing)**

**Powdered sugar**

**Maple syrup**

This recipe is just about as quick as it gets. Start by preheating your waffle iron or griddle if you are going to make pancakes instead of waffles. To make your batter, begin by adding your egg, milk or water and oil or butter to a bowl and whisk gently until well mixed. Measure out two cups of muffin mix (I'm using cranberry orange as it's the perfect flavor for a holiday breakfast, but any flavor works) and slowly whisk the mix into your liquid until all ingredients are

incorporated. Do not overmix. If desired, you can also take this muffin mix to a fancier level by adding in a pinch of salt and a splash of vanilla.

Once your batter is made and your waffle iron is hot, spray the iron with cooking spray before adding approximately one cup of batter to the waffle iron. You may need to adjust the amount of batter used if your waffle iron is not full-sized. Be careful not to overfill the iron or a big mess will ensue!

The waffles will take between three and five minutes to cook. I recommend setting a timer for three minutes and opening the waffle iron to peak at its progress before giving any extra time needed. The waffles will be a bit paler than ones made with traditional waffle mix, but they are done once the outside is plenty crispy and a toothpick poked into the center of the waffle emerges clean.

While your waffles are cooking, you can create a fun and easy but optional topping that is just perfect for Christmas morning. Using store bought sugar or waffle ice cream cones, we can create some adorable and edible Christmas



**Left, be careful not to overfill your waffle iron with batter! A traditional-sized waffle iron will hold about one cup of batter. Make sure to grease your waffle iron with cooking spray or butter for best results. Right, with a little bit of finessing and a rubber spatula, you can coat ice cream cones in green icing for perfect little edible Christmas trees.**

trees to top our waffles. To do this you will need your ice cream cones, green icing and a rubber spatula or butter knife.

To make an edible Christmas tree, use two fingers to stabilize the cone while you spread the green icing all around the sides using your spatula or butter knife. Coat the cone completely with icing before placing on a plate or paper towel to dry. If you use cookie icing, the

icing will dry to the touch in just four minutes, about the amount of time it takes for our waffles to cook.

After your waffles have cooked and your edible trees are ready, it's time to assemble! Plate up your waffles and top them with the optional ice cream cone Christmas trees. Top with butter, syrup, and dust on a layer of powdered sugar to create a beautiful, snowy scene!

This recipe is perfect for Christmas morning. The aromatic scent of cranberries and oranges fills the kitchen as the waffles cook. Your guests, particularly any children, will love the edible Christmas tree toppers. The waffle batter can also be customized by using any other muffin mixes your family would like to try, and if you don't have a waffle iron you can use a griddle or frying pan to make perfect pancakes instead!



**Try making these muffin mix waffles any time of the year using different muffin flavors like blueberry, chocolate chip, banana nut, etc. The waffles are crispy on the outside and fluffy on the inside and take just minutes to make. One full-sized box of muffin mix will make around 6-8 waffles.**

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From the Ground Up |

# THE “OTHER” HOLIDAY GIFT PLANTS

If a frizzle sizzle plant's leaves lose their curl after blooming, allow the plant to go dormant and the curls will return.

**Story and photos by Dr. Cynthia Wood**

Plants, such as the poinsettia, have become synonymous with holiday celebrations. There's a color for every decorating scheme and a size appropriate for both grand homes and tiny apartments. They're the perfect last-minute gift for almost every occasion. No wonder that garden centers and florists sell approximately four times as many poinsettias as live Christmas trees every year.

If you're looking for a more unique plant for holiday gift giving, however, there are many choices. Why not choose a plant that will last well beyond the holiday season? Some to consider include: The rex begonia, the corkscrew al-

buca (the frizzle sizzle), the rattlesnake calathea, and the dwarf snake plant.

The rex begonia has been called a good-natured plant: easy to grow and easy to use as a decoration. It's a tropical plant, originally from India, Vietnam, and China. The scientific name *Begonia rex-cultorum* refers to all the plants that were hybridized from the original plants collected in the wild. The rex begonia is much admired for the dramatic color, texture, and shape of its leaves, which have patterns of pink, burgundy, green, and even silver. The shape of the leaves varies from ruffled sea shell-like swirls to hearts with ruffled edges. These plants are especially

striking when paired with dusky pink poinsettias for holiday decorations. They also look lovely when grouped on a silver tray.

After the holiday season, the rex begonia is easy to maintain as a house plant. Provide bright but indirect light, and water only when the top inch of soil has become dry. Apply half strength fertilizer every two weeks during spring and summer. If the plant becomes too large or leggy, pinch back the stems. Repot only when the rhizomes reach the sides of the pot.

The corkscrew albuca or frizzle sizzle (*Albuca spiralis*) is a succulent guaranteed to add whimsy to the collections of most plant enthusiasts. It



**The leaves of rattlesnake calathea look as if they've been decorated with brush strokes.**

grows from a bulb and has long, narrow, dark green, tightly curled, corkscrew leaves. This plant has serious architectural interest. It grows best in bright light and should be allowed to dry out between waterings.

Frizzle sizzle plants occasionally produce spikes of yellowish green flowers with a fragrance similar to vanilla. Unfortunately, when the plants bloom, the leaves lose their curls, so just remove the bloom spikes if they appear.

The rattlesnake calathea (*Goeppertia insignis*) is another tropical plant with colorfully patterned leaves. The splotches are said to resemble the markings on a rattlesnake. The leaves are also interesting because they move upward at night and then return to their original lower position during the day, a phenomenon known as nyctinasty.

The rattlesnake calathea grows best in medium to bright indirect light. It prefers high levels of humidity, but only needs to be watered several times a month or when the soil is dry halfway to the bottom of the pot. Plant rattlesnake calathea in a loose mix of potting soil, pine bark, compost, and perlite. To increase the humidity around the plant, place the pot on a saucer of gravel containing a small amount of water.

The rattlesnake calathea grows 8 to 20 inches tall and is a lovely statement plant on a low table.

And there is always the miniature snake plant. Unlike the larger plants, the Hahnii snake plant (*Dracaena trifasciata Hahnii*) grows only 8 to 10 inches tall. The leaves form a rosette and are mottled in a variety of colors – green and gold, silver and green, and various shades of mottled green. There is even one that has cream colored leaves edged in green. The Hahnii snake plant is just as tough as its much larger relatives, and they're adorable.

Plants make great holiday gifts and there are many choices – traditional poinsettias, plus lots of unusual houseplants. Why not select something different? Happy Holidays!



**The leaves of rattlesnake calathea look as if they've been decorated with brush strokes.**



**Rex begonias have been hybridized to have decorative leaves with unusual shapes, textures, and patterns.**



Poinsettias are the top selling holiday plant. A local garden center has more than 3,500 ready for the holiday season.

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# Party Pix

## THE LIGHTS GO UP IN FARMVILLE

The tradition is almost a decade old, marking nine years as of 2023. The high school band plays a Christmas carol, a switch is flipped and the lights go up on the Farmville Christmas tree. Originally, the town used a synthetic tree, one donated by Longwood University that had previously been in the Rotunda. But starting in 2020, the Town of Farmville went shopping for one of their own. This year's tree, named Bruce the Spruce by a poll of local residents, is decorated with more than 250 ornaments. Town officials estimate it took six or seven Farmville employees at different times to install and decorate the tree. (Photos by John Karrati)



# Party Pix



*We believe that  
women deserve  
excellent care  
close to home.*



## **Centra Southside's Women & Children's Health Team is here for you!**

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