

# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

*'Find something locally for everyone on your list.'*

Inside...



ANNANDALE  
Advocate

The Maple Lake  
MESSENGER

2020

# Community Calendar (events are subject to change or cancellation)

## Thanksgiving

**Thursday, Nov. 26**

Count your blessings.

## Turkey Trot (Tentative)

**Thursday, Nov. 26**

The annual Annandale-Maple Lake Wrestling program's Turkey Trot 5K run-walk will take place at Maple Lake High School. Runners come when they want from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. There is not a common start. Please wear a mask when registering.



## Black Friday

**Friday, Nov. 27**

Remember to shop locally today and every day.

## Small Business Saturday

**Saturday, Nov. 28**

Small Business Saturday when all local shoppers are encouraged to stop by their local businesses and check out their holiday merchandise.

## Christmas Tree Lighting

**Saturday, Nov 28:**

A community Christmas tree lighting ceremony will take place from 5 to 5:30 p.m. at Clock Tower park in Annandale. This year's event may be virtual. Watch the Annandale Advocate for updates.

## Festival of Trees opens

**Tuesday, Dec. 1**

The Wright County Historical Society's 14th annual Festival of Trees display will open at the Wright County Heritage Center, 2001 Highway 25 N. in Buffalo on Tuesday, Dec. 1 and run through Jan. 8, 2021. The display is free. Each year there are more than 50 individual trees, along with a Santa wright station, animated characters and an electric train display.



## Christ Child Luncheon

**Friday, Dec. 4**

The St. Ignatius CCW will hold a drive through Christ

Child Luncheon at the St. Ignatius Catholic Church, 35 Birch St. E., Annandale. RSVP by phone 320-274-8074 no later than Monday, Nov. 30 to reserve your meal. Visit [www.stignatiusmn.com](http://www.stignatiusmn.com) for information.

## Christmas in Maple Lake (Cancelled)

**Saturday, Dec. 5**

Don't miss Santa arriving by firetruck for the annual Christmas in Maple Lake. This year's event will take place outdoors in the empty lot on Division Street near downtown from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Enjoy fun, food, plus a visit from Santa and his reindeer.

## Family Holiday Walk

**Saturday, Dec. 5 from 2-4 p.m.**

Located in downtown Buffalo. Shop local, see Santa, live reindeer, and more. Walk the downtown route and see holiday sights and characters.

## Main Street Holiday (Cancelled)

**Saturday, Dec. 12**

The Main Street Holiday event has been cancelled, but we encourage you to still shop local. Our local businesses need your support during the pandemic and shut downs.

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Step 5- Adjust your automatic transfer the following year if necessary.

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**Winter Begins**

**Monday, Dec. 21**

The winter solstice marks the beginning of winter

**Christmas Eve**

**Thursday, Dec. 24**

Many businesses close early today. Many churches hold Christmas Eve services.

**Christmas Day**

**Friday, Dec. 25**

Give gifts and give thanks with family and friends. Celebrate the birth of Christ.

**New Year's Eve**

**Thursday, Dec. 31**

Have a safe and happy new year.

**New Year's Eve Ball Drop (Tentative)**

**Thursday, Dec. 31**

Ring in the New year at the seventh annual New Year's Eve ball drop at 9 p.m. at Clock Tower Park in Annandale.



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# Can pandemic be gateway to new holiday traditions?

**By Brenda Erdahl**

We know the holidays are here when December sets in with her softly falling snow and twinkle lights begin to appear along the rooftops in our neighborhoods. By now every station on the radio is likely playing our favorite Christmas songs to get us in the mood for that most wondrous of occasions. But this year is different, oh the radio stations will still play “Oh Holy Night” and the snow will still fall in peaceful wonder, but for many of us our hearts are not at peace, and some of us are wondering how our treasured Christmas traditions will survive this pandemic.

Mary Jo Kreitzer, the founder and director of the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing and a professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota said it’s our mindset as we enter the holidays that can make all the difference.

“It is safe to say that none of us have ever experienced major holidays during a pandemic and it is likely that the holidays this year will look very different. In addition to not having large gatherings of family and friends, there won’t be the usual run of parties, concerts and plays. Many will opt to participate in religious services virtually,” she



File Photo

**Our newly developed Zoom skills may come in handy this holiday season. Some families have plans to eat together and open gifts together virtually.**

said.

Her advice is to not focus on our losses and what we cannot do, but instead focus on the opportunity to create new memories and traditions.

“If you are gathering with a small group or

only your immediate family, ask people what is important to them. Getting input is so valuable. It shares the burden (and joy) of planning. Instead of trying to recreate what happens year after year, create new experiences. Who knows? Something new you do

this year just might become a lasting tradition,” she said.

For those who are alone during the holidays and for families who live long distances apart, our newly developed Zoom skills will come in handy, she noted.

“I have heard of families and small groups that still plan on eating together or opening gifts together via technology. If you and your family are yearning for a concert or to see a holiday tradition such as “The Christmas Carol,” look online. So many of our local theater and choral groups are creating special performances that can be accessed online.”

Part of the difficulties of celebrating during a pandemic occurs when you come up against loved ones or friends whose views about safety precautions differ from your own. Kreitzer has advice for that too.

“Each of us is responsible for setting boundaries that we are comfortable with and I encourage people to not be hesitant to stick to those boundaries even if it makes people uncomfortable,” she said. “The advice from the health care experts is very clear. Avoid gatherings, particularly indoor gatherings, practice physical distancing, wear masks and wash hands frequently. In Minnesota, the re-

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cent increase in COVID-19 cases is tied to small, everyday gatherings. Many people are experiencing pandemic fatigue, and this is not the time to let our guard down," she said.

Unfortunately, with the rise in COVID cases throughout the state and Wright County, health officials say family gatherings are just as unsafe as any other social gathering at this time. The pandemic in most areas of the country is at a stage of uncontrollable community spread. Traveling distances and getting together with people who may or may not have been taking safety precautions seriously is risky, she said.

So, how do you politely say "no" to a social gathering? Kreitzer said a lengthy explanation is unnecessary.

"You can be polite as well as short and sweet — thanking the person for the invitation and noting that you are avoiding in-person gatherings due to COVID-19 right now," she said.

For more advice on adapting to the holidays this year visit the Bakken Center's Website Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing at [www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu](http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu).



File Photo

This holiday season is going to look very different without the usual large gatherings and run of parties, but it may also be an opportunity to create new traditions.



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# Santa Claus is Coming...to Bertram Park, December 5

**By Brenda Erdahl**

Jump into the Christmas season with a visit to see Santa Claus at the scenic Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park in Monticello.

Walk amid the snow-covered oaks to the Long Lake overlook, weather permitting, to have your picture taken with the red-suited man. He'll jingle his way to the 1,200-acre park at 10 a.m. and hang around until 2:30 on Saturday, Dec. 5 before he heads back to the North Pole to continue his preparations for the big December 25th holiday.

The outdoor event is especially suited to the current COVID-19 environment, but additional safety measures will be implemented including all recommended pandemic guidelines.

"We want to ensure that you, your family, our staff, and Santa stay safe and healthy for the holiday season," Wright County Parks and Recreation organizers said.

Organizers will decorate Long Lake Overlook to make it as close to a North Pole looking locale as possible and it will be there, as long as the weather cooperates, that you or

your tyke can sit on Santa's lap for a picture. The \$20 fee will get you a professional family picture with Santa, a goodie bag and time with Santa to discuss all your Christmas wishes. All of this is being made possible by partnering with the Monticello Community Center and Liberty Bank of Minnesota, located in Monticello.

Additionally, this will be one of the first opportunities for you to check out some of the new facilities at the Bertram Chain of Lakes Regional Park Campground. Two of the camper cabins will be open for you to view, along with the contact station. Not everything will be completed within the facilities, but it will give you an idea of what they will be like when completed.

For more information contact Wright County Parks and Recreation at [parksandrecreation@co.wright.mn.us](mailto:parksandrecreation@co.wright.mn.us) or by phone at 763-684-2387 or the Monticello Community Center at [info@ci.monticello.mn.us](mailto:info@ci.monticello.mn.us) or by phone at 763-295-2711. Register online at the Monticello Community Center website.



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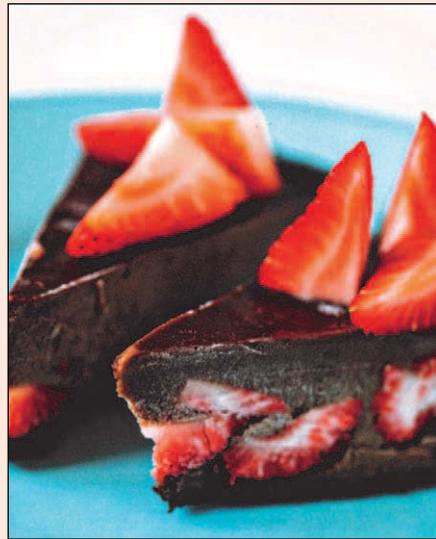
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# A QUICK AND DELICIOUS HOLIDAY DESSERT

The holiday season is synonymous with many things, including delicious foods. While Thanksgiving turkeys or Christmas geese will be found on many a table this holiday season, baked goods and desserts are what many people look forward to this time of year.

Holiday hosts with a lot on their plates might not have the time to prepare homemade baked goods for their guests. Thankfully, the following recipe for Chocolate-Strawberry Pie from Addie Gundry's No-Bake Desserts can be prepared in just 15 minutes, all without turning on the oven.



## Chocolate-Strawberry Pie

Yields 1 pie

- 1 pint fresh strawberries, washed, trimmed and halved
  - 1 store-bought (or homemade) chocolate cookie pie crust
  - 2/3 cup sugar
  - 1/4 cup cornstarch
  - 2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
  - 1/4 teaspoon minced crystallized ginger
  - 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
  - Pinch of kosher or sea salt
  - 6 large egg yolks
  - 2 1/2 cups half-and-half
  - 6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped
  - 1/2 tablespoon rum extract
  - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Additional strawberries for garnish (optional)

1. Place the strawberry halves in a single layer in the bottom of the pie crust.
2. In a medium saucepan, whisk together the sugar, cornstarch, cocoa powder, ginger, nutmeg, and salt over medium heat.
3. Whisk in the egg yolks to create a thick paste. Gradually whisk in the half-and-half until the mixture thickens, about 5 minutes. Bring to a boil and cook for 1 minute. Remove from the heat.
4. Add the chocolate and whisk until combined. Add the rum and vanilla extracts. Cool the mixture for 4 minutes.
5. Pour the filling over the strawberries and up to the top of the crust. Chill the pie for 2 hours or until set.
6. Garnish with additional strawberries, if desired.

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## GREAT Theatre brings back old-time radio entertainment

### Miracle on 34th Street: A Live Musical Radio Play opens Dec. 18

By Brenda Erdahl

Are you yearning for an old-fashioned Christmas, the kind grandma and grandpa used to know? Can you envision those days? Perhaps you are sitting around the evergreen with its tinsel and lights twinkling in the darkening room as winter evening sets in. Perhaps the radio is on, a big old fashioned one with a walnut finish and cathedral style cabinets and you are listening to actors weave a story that ignites the imagination and warms the heart.

That's exactly what GREAT Theatre is offering you this Christmas. On Friday, Dec. 18 the St. Cloud based theatre group will present the Christmas classic *Miracle on 34th Street: A Live Musical Radio Play* directly into your home. Everyone is invited to listen, free of charge, on WJON 95.3FM and KVSC 88.1 FM. Showtime is 7 p.m.

This vintage, old-time radio play will feature six talented, local actors as they take on the challenging task of performing the parts of 30 different characters in the unique style of 1940s radio theatre. Adapted from the 1947 Lux Radio Broadcast by Lance Arthur Smith and based on the 1947 classic movie, the musical tells the story of the last-minute replacement Santa for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade who claims to be the real Kris Kringle. The miracle unfolds when the belief of a little girl makes all the difference in this iconic story.

"It's a story of joy and hope and community, but it's not cheesy either," Director Kendra Norton Dando said. "It's a fun story and full of humor."

"We wanted people to laugh and enjoy themselves and whether you are



The cast of GREAT Theatre's *Miracle on 34th Street: A Live Musical Radio Play* practice virtually before their opening performance on Friday, Dec. 18 on WJON 95.3FM and KVSC 88.1 FM.

five or 95 you can enjoy this show. Even if you are physically distanced you can all listen to the same show together," added Dennis Whipple, Executive Director of GREAT Theatre.

GREAT has done radio performances before on the St. Cloud State University radio station, but never a musical and never with such a small cast. But with most theatres, including the Paramount in St. Cloud closed or offering limited in-person options this year, they knew they had to do something.

"GREAT usually sells 13,000 tickets at its Christmas show, we knew we had to be a part of Christmas somehow," said Whipple.

Safety is the utmost priority of Whipple's concerning the cast. The majority of rehearsals have taken place via Zoom. The few in-person rehearsals have included social distancing and masks.

"Because it's a radio show, we're all at microphones so that allows us to

be socially distant in a real storytelling way," Norton Dando said.

Prior to the night of the performance when masks will be removed, all the actors will be tested for COVID, Whipple said.

#### On-demand

The radio show is only the first of this multi-layered theatrical production. Starting on Dec. 19 and running through Jan. 3, fans can see the fully staged production through On-demand TV. But when we say fully staged, we don't mean the court room where Santa is tried nor the Macy's store where he first appears. You will see a 1947 radio station where six actors dressed in the style of the day pull off this magical, radio feat.

"We actually built a radio station on stage. That's part of the fun," Norton Dando said "You'll see six actors playing 30 different characters. You'll hear all the inside jokes, the backstage humor - what it actually looks like to be a part of live radio."

"It's going to be really cool," Whip-

ple said. "They'll be dressed in 1940s costumes with the hair styles of the times and the old-fashioned microphones."

The radio stage will also be decorated for Christmas in traditional 1940s fashion and will include numerous Christmas songs.

"It's gonna be Christmas 1947!" Whipple said.

Above all, the live production will put faces to the voices on the radio and reveal just how all those little sound effects we take for granted are made.

"We have a whole shelf of sound effects," Norton Dando said. "From horns to different styles of shoes because rubber soles sound different than leather soles. We even have a classic door box."

Norton Dando said it has taken a lot of experimenting to create the sounds they wanted. They discovered how to use pumpkins seeds to emu-

**Theatre - See page 10**



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**Theatre - From 8**

late the sound of footsteps crunching through snow but are still working on how to make the sound of lots of envelopes falling onto the judge's desk.

Besides the actors, the show also features a pianist who, like the actors has multiple roles in the production.

**The actors**

For the actors putting on a radio play is a brand, new experience and the fact that it's a radio musical with such a small cast makes it even more unique.

"We rarely do a show with six people," Whipple said. "We usually have 40 people on stage dancing and singing their hearts out."

GREAT is also known for drawing actors from all over the area for their productions, but this year, because of COVID the actors are all from a little closer to home - the St. Cloud, Sartell and Sauk Rapids area for the most part.

Rick Cicharz plays the part of Kristofer Van Lisberg, the last-minute replacement Santa for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade who claims to be the real Kris Kringle. He is joined by Megan Potter as Cordelia Ragsdale as Doris Walker; Cadence Mix as Gracie DeMarco as Susan Walker; Kyle Seamans as Grady Williams as Fred Gailey; Abigail Schnobrich as Olivia Glatt as Female Character Actor and Luke Reber as Wallace Ainsley as Male Character Actor. Brandon Nordhues is in charge of piano and Foley Sound.

"We're just thrilled to be doing this. At the first masked, in-person rehearsal, the first time we had a five-part harmony, you could just feel it. It was really an emotional time, just to be in the same space together creating art again. We know the arts are special and needed and it's wonderful to be able to safely find a way to perform again," Norton Dando said.

**The when and Where:**

**Radio Broadcast:**

Friday, December 18th at 7 p.m.

**Listen live on:**

WJON 95.3FM and KVSC 88.1 FM

**On-demand TV:**

Dec. 19, 2020 – Jan. 3, 2020.

Watch the fully stage production complete with costumes, set and lights.

**Tickets available starting:**

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[www.GreatTheatre.org](http://www.GreatTheatre.org).

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# EGGNOG IS A CLASSIC FOR HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

No beverage is more associated with holiday cocktail parties than eggnog, which is a beloved beverage come the holiday season.

While it's perfectly acceptable to purchase store-bought eggnog in the dairy case and dress it up with a favorite spirit, most eggnog recipes only feature a handful of ingredients and are quite easy to make at home.

Rum, whiskey and brandy are customary liquors to use in eggnog recipes. However, many believe brandy tops the others for the perfect finished product. Enjoy this version of Quick Brandy Eggnog.

## Quick Brandy Eggnog

- 1 cocktail
- 1 ounce brandy
- 1 ¼ ounces milk
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 1 egg yolk
- Grated nutmeg or cinnamon for garnish

In a cocktail shaker, combine the brandy, milk, simple syrup, and egg



yolk. Dry shake without ice.

Fill shaker with ice, then shake vigorously for about 30 seconds to ensure the egg is well mixed. Strain into an old-fashioned or cocktail glass. Add a dash of grated nutmeg or cinnamon as a garnish.

Note: Only use a fresh egg. Test the eggs freshness by placing it in a glass of water. If the egg floats, discard it, as this indicates the egg is too old. Only use eggs that rest on the bottom of the glass. This will ensure the most flavorful drink and helps to reduce the risk of salmonella.

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# Tis the season for giving

## Toys and gifts needed for Maple Lake Giving Tree/Silent Santa

### Contributed Report

With Christmas just around the corner organizers of Maple Lake's Giving Tree/Silent Santa programs are asking you to give what you can to help Santa help kids, the handicapped and the elderly of the Maple Lake community. As you see toy collection boxes in the community, know the toys or gifts that are dropped off at these sites will stay for residents in the Maple Lake area. Local businesses hosting a collection box this year are: Starbank- Maple Lake location, Irish Blessings Coffee Shop, The Costume Shoppe, Dollar General and St. Timothy's Church. Boxes will be set up November 20- December 8. This year, organizers are encouraging shoppers to support local businesses and be aware of longer shipping times if online shopping. If you prefer to not shop this year, cash donations can be dropped off or mailed to St. Timothy's Catholic Church Parish "c/o Giving Tree" 8 Oak Avenue North or Starbank, Maple Lake "c/o Giving Tree", 100 State Highway 55 E. A link has been set up at [www.churchofsttimothy.org](http://www.churchofsttimothy.org) to make a one-time donation. Click "Donate" and select "Giving Tree Donation."

### Suggested gift items

■ Senior and handicapped adults: Sweaters, craft kits, books (large print), baskets, stationary, postage stamps, lap blankets, gloves, socks, shirts, cologne, slippers, personal hygiene items and sleep wear, bird feeders, bird seed, mixed or 'fancy' nuts.

■ Teenagers (an area they always run short on): Perfume, after shave, body sprays/ cologne, hats, scarves, gloves, books, jewelry (pierced earrings), belts, socks, clothing, headphones/ earbuds, fishing gear, hockey



Submitted photo  
Local businesses hosting a collection box this year are: Starbank- Maple Lake location, Irish Blessings Coffeeshouse, The Costume Shoppe, Dollar General and St. Timothy's Church.

sticks, sports equipment, games, models, craft kits, watches, wallets, curling iron, pajamas, hair dryers, and make-up bags.

■ Children: Puzzles, trucks, cars, Legos, tractors, board games/electronic, plastic sleds,

coloring books/crayons, educational toys, books, dolls, doll clothing, craft items, pretend toys (dishes, iron etc), hats, mittens, gloves, clothing and socks.

■ Infants: Soft boots, squeak toys, blan-

kets, musical toys, soft dolls, wind-up toys, socks, educational toys, hats, colorful toys, mittens, sleepers, and clothing.

### More ways to give

Two more ways to support the Giving Tree/Silent Santa is by donating non-perishable food items and by making a cash donation. Organizers ask that as you do your grocery shopping, please think about what you'd like to contribute. Toiletry items are always welcome - toothpaste, facial tissue, lotion, etc. They cannot accept home-canned items or expired food items. Food and toiletry items can be placed in the business toy collection boxes. Cash donations can be dropped off or mailed to St. Timothy's Catholic Church "c/o Giving Tree" at 8 Oak Avenue North, Maple Lake or at Starbank Maple Lake, "c/o Giving Tree" at 100 State Highway 55 E, Maple Lake. A link has been set up under St. Timothy's Catholic Church website at [www.churchofsttimothy.org](http://www.churchofsttimothy.org), click under "Donate", select "Giving Tree Donation" to make a one time contribution.

### Apply for your family

Applications for this program can be obtained from the St. Timothy Catholic Church parish office in Maple Lake, Monday through Thursday from 10a.m. to 3p.m by emailing [parishoffice@churchofsttimothy.org](mailto:parishoffice@churchofsttimothy.org), or Wright County Human Services in Buffalo. These applications are due back by Thursday, December 3. Distribution date is Friday, December 11 at St. Timothy's Church from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. This year it will be a curbside style distribution, please note directions on application. Additional questions can be answered by calling Liz at 763-913-5548. All information is confidential.

"Thank you to all who support and contribute in making the Giving Tree and Silent Santa a success in Maple Lake," organizers said.



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# Hit the Wright County trails this winter

**By Brenda Erdahl**

For some the early snowfall this year is a precursor to what they expect to be a snowy winter here in Minnesota. While some cringe at the thought, others who were born to ride the icy trails on high powered sleds, couldn't be happier.

Fortunately for snowmobiling folk, Wright County has a plethora of groomed trails that go on for miles.

Steve and Brittni Meier who live in the Happy Nolls housing development on the northwestern edge of Maple Lake have only to leave their yard to be on one of the many snowmobile trails that are part the network maintained by the Wright County Snowmobile Association (WCSA). From there they can go as far west as St. Joseph, up to Princeton or head east toward St. Michael.

The Meier's are Arctic Cat people. They own four Arctic Cat snowmobiles and riding is a pastime they and their three children enjoy. The trails in Wright County are a mix of ditches, cornfields and wooded areas said Steve who, along with his wife Brittni are members of the Monticello Trailblazers. The Trailblazers are one of 11 clubs that make up the WCSA. Trailblazer members maintain the trails in and around Maple Lake and Monticello. The success of the trail system depends on snowmobilers' relationships with area landowners, Steve said. As long as riders respect the rules, landowners will continue letting the WCSA make trails across their property, he said.

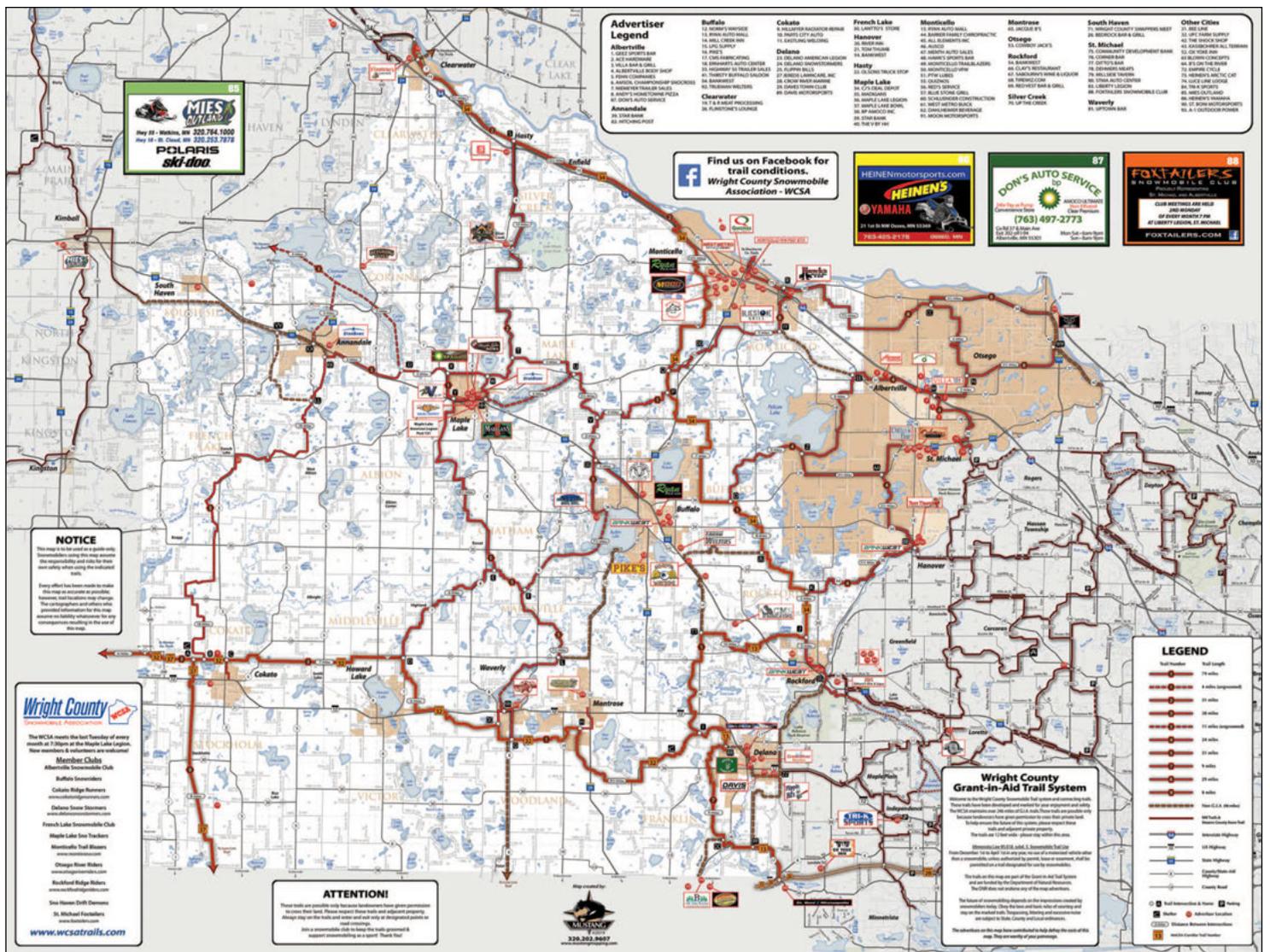
The WCSA was incorporated in 1978 as the Wright County Snowmobile & Trail Association. In 2008, the name was changed to Wright County Snowmobile Association. Club volunteers mark, maintain and groom more than 250 miles of State of Minnesota Grant-in-Aid trails and roughly 50 miles of local trails within the county. The WCSA owns six groomers that are stationed throughout the county and are maintained, stored, and operated by club volunteers.

Each year the club publishes a trail map that shows snowmobile routes throughout the county. The maps are available at business's and on the trails throughout the county. Each year the WCSA makes improvements to its network. Recently they built a shelter complete with a fire pit between Maple Lake and Monticello where riders can stop, warm up and cook some lunch. The trail near Moon Motors in Monticello leads right to it, Steve said.

Wright County trails open Dec. 1 and WCSA members urge riders to wait until then to ride.

"When we get those early snowfalls, it's hard to resist, but you can do damage to the ground because there is no frost layer," said Steve.

The ideal amount of snow is 6 inches for a good base. Another good rule of thumb is to watch for the groomers. If the groomers have been out, then you know the trail is ready to



**The Wright County Snowmobile Association mark, maintain and groom more than 250 miles of State of Minnesota Grant-in-Aid trails and roughly 50 miles of local trails within the county. They publish this updated map each year.**

ride, Steve said. Two years ago, Mother Nature produced ideal conditions for riding and the trail system was put to good use. Last year wasn't as good, but it was decent, Steve said.

Riders often head up north where there is usually more snow and the trail system is more vast and rugged, but there are disadvantages to making the trip north. For one, the cell phone service is poor and if you need help there is less likelihood of anyone receiving your call, Steve said. The distance between gas stations is also a lot longer up north. In Wright County, you can't go very far without finding an opportunity to fuel up. In Maple Lake, both H&H Sports Shop and BP Amoco are accessible from the trails.

As an added convenience, the WCSA submits its most current trails each year to the Polaris Ride Command app so riders can see exactly where they are on their phone when out on the trails.

### A family activity

For the Meiers, snowmobiling is a family activity that everyone, including their two 13-year-olds and 11-year-old can enjoy. At the age of 12, young riders can take a class



**A group of riders hit the trails.**

for a snowmobile certificate that will allow them to legally drive their own sled. Visit the WCSA website for more information. The Meiers joined the Trailblazers Club two years ago as a way to give back to the organization that maintains all trails they've been enjoying for years. They also joined because of the social aspect of the club. In the last two years they have made new friends and gained people to ride with. It's always better to ride with others opposed to riding alone, Brittni said. Not only is it safer, it's a lot more fun. The club also puts together a trip every year for its members. Last year they went to Crane

Lake and enjoyed some beautiful countryside from their sleds.

"If you are riding the trails, I recommend you join a club. You don't necessarily have to participate or help out, but there is a fee, and that money goes into maintaining the trails," Steve said.

With the pandemic putting a damper on indoor activities this winter, snowmobiling may be the perfect alternative for a lot of people. And with the way winter has started out this year, it might be a good time to try it.

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## Get outdoors this winter

Ready to take a break from Christmas shopping? Is the great outdoors calling?

The Maple Lake area is a great place to get rid of cabin fever and get moving this holiday season whether your interests lie in ice fishing, ice skating, snow shoeing or skiing.

Read on to see what you and the kids can do to relax this holiday season. Who knows, these adventures may even lead to a few gift ideas for the family.

### Cross Country Skiing

Lake Maria State Park, located approximately five miles north of Maple Lake on Wright County Road 111, offers 6.2 miles of groomed cross-country skiing trails perfect for beginner to intermediate skiers. Rolling terrain goes through wooded areas, old growth forest areas, and past lakes and ponds. In addition to cross country skiing, the park has two miles of groomed skate-skiing trails.

For directions and information on other park activities check out the Minnesota DNR website and/or the Friends of Lake Maria Facebook page.

While Lake Maria doesn't offer ski rentals, Ney Park just North of Maple Lake off County road 8 does. Beginning in January, Cross country ski and snowshoe rentals are available on Saturdays and Sundays, from noon - 4 p.m. from January through the first part of March. Ney Park consists of 846 acres of marsh and forest with an assortment of wildlife. In addition to its nine miles of trails, including designated trails for hiking, skiing and skijoring, the park has a memorial chapel, access to Lake Mary and is home to the Wright County Parks Environmental Education Center.

### Downhill Skiing

The downhill ski season at Powder Ridge just north of Kimball opens mid to late November, depending on the weather. Snowtubing opens closer to Christmas. Visit [www.powderridge.com](http://www.powderridge.com) for more information.

### Snow shoeing

Lake Maria State Park begins renting snowshoes as soon as there is a sufficient amount of snow. The park keeps up three miles of packed trails and permits exploration as long as it's not on any of the trails groomed for cross country skiing.

The Anderson Loop Trail offers a three-mile hilly excursion through prairie grasslands to an excellent view from the Anderson Hill Lookout. Return to the trail center through an oak and maple forest.

The Big Woods Loop will take you on an up-and-down 5 ½ mile hike where you can explore lookouts, old-growth forests, ponds, marshes and rolling terrain.

The Bjorkland Trail is a mostly flat two-mile loop that includes access to Bjorkland Lake.

The Kettle Kame Trail is a 1.75 hilly trail and is considered the most rugged.

Return to the warming house afterwards for bathrooms and an indoor picnic area.

### Ice Fishing

If ice fishing is your thing, there are close to a dozen area lakes to wet your line in this winter as soon as the ice is thick enough. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources suggests a mini-



Enjoy snowboarding at Powder Ridge whether you are a pro or just learning.



Powder Ridge's tubing hill opens closer to Christmas and offers great fun for the entire family.

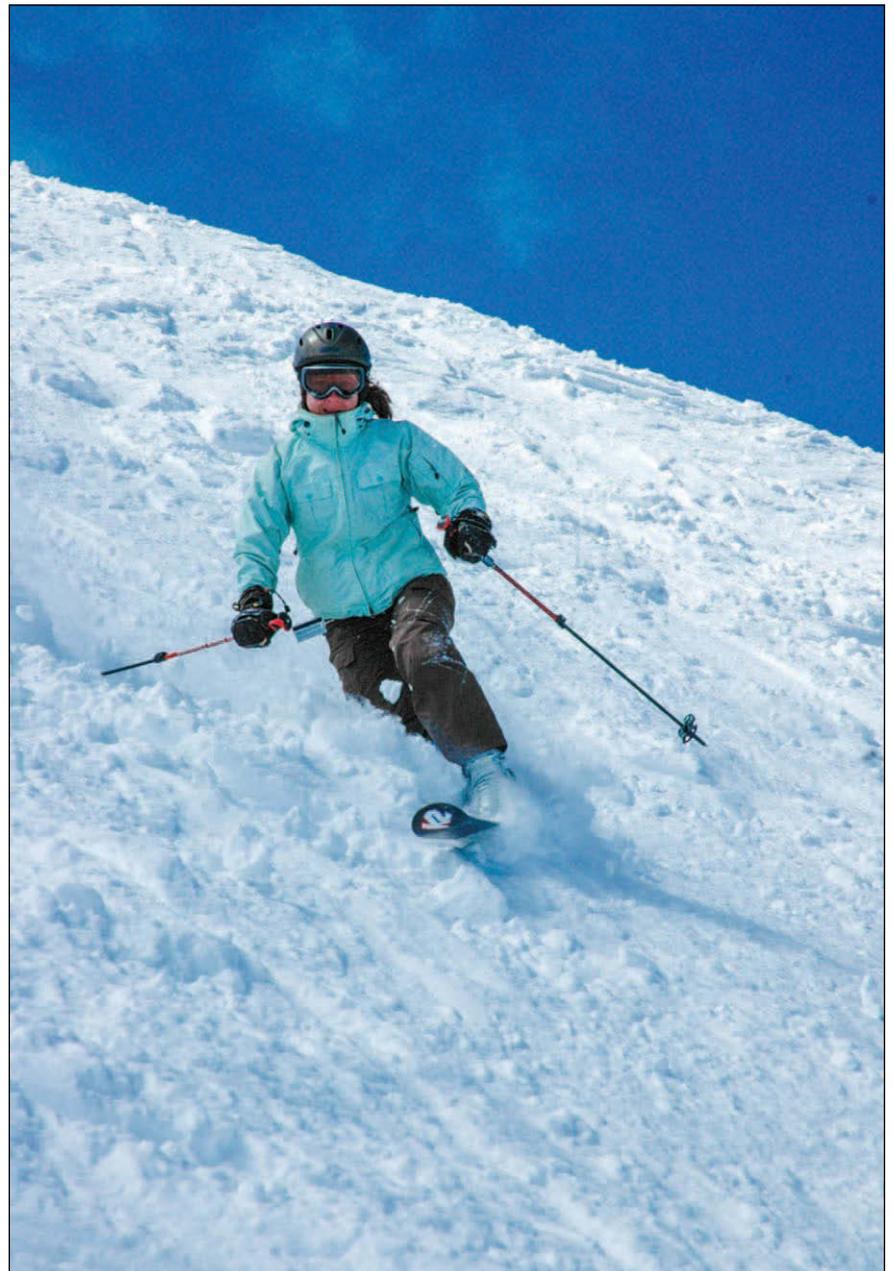


There are plenty of lakes in the area that offer some great ice fishing opportunities.

mum of four inches of ice for fishing or other activities on foot. Five to seven inches is recommended for a snowmobile or ATV; eight to 12 inches for a car or small pickup and 12 to 15 inches for a medium truck. Visit [www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/ice/thickness.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/ice/thickness.html) for more information in ice safety.



Staying fit through the holidays can be a challenge. Make it fun this winter with a snowshoe adventure at Lake Maria State Park.



Powder Ridge in Kimball opens for downhill skiing Mid-November.

## Shop Safely this Cyber Monday

Cyber Monday is a lucrative day for retailers. According to Adobe Analytics, which measured transactions from a majority of popular online retailers in the United States, consumers spent an average of \$11 million per minute between 11 p.m. EST and midnight EST on Cyber Monday in 2019. And it wasn't just the final hour of Cyber Monday that proved popular, as total sales in 2019 increased by roughly 19 percent compared to Cyber Monday a year prior.

The internet has made holiday shopping easier than ever, and retailers capitalize on that convenience every year on Cyber Monday. Savvy consumers recognize there's great deals to be had on Cyber Monday, but the popular shopping holiday also marks a great time for cyber criminals to target unsuspecting online shoppers.

Holiday shoppers spend more time and money buying gifts online every year, so before the buying season begins it's wise for shoppers to consider a few strategies for shopping safely this Cyber Monday.

■ Beware of malvertising. In recent years, cyber criminals have employed malvertising to trick online shoppers into taking them to websites that look reputable. But looks can be deceiving. Malvertising injects malicious code into legitimate online advertising net-

works. If consumers accidentally click a malicious ad, the malvertising can trigger a code that installs malware or adware on their computers, redirect users to a malicious website instead of the one the ad suggests or redirect users to a website that looks just like a legitimate retailer's site, even though it's not. Update antivirus and ad blockers prior to Cyber Monday. In addition, update browsers and plugins, which can often prevent malvertising attacks.

■ Update your software. Skipping or delaying software updates on a computer, tablet or smartphone can make online shoppers vulnerable to hackers and other cyber criminals. Install new operating systems on your devices when such updates become available, and check to see if any new updates can be installed before shopping on Cyber Monday.

■ Avoid searching through search engines. When shopping, resist the temptation to look for deals through search engines. Cyber criminals can insert malicious links into search results, directing unsuspecting consumers to malicious websites designed to target their personal information. When looking for deals, visit the websites of established retailers instead of conducting searches through browsers like Google or Firefox.

■ Read a URL before buying anything.



One old yet still effective trick cyber criminals employ is creating websites that look identical to those of trusted retailers. These copycat sites may only be one letter different from legitimate sites. By reading URLs closely prior to entering any personal information, such as their credit card numbers,

consumers can protect themselves from copycat websites.

Cyber Monday is a popular shopping holiday. Cyber Monday shoppers should be as cautious about cyber criminals as they are excited about finding great gifts for their loved ones.

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