

2021

# *Holiday* GUIDE

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Let us know what you would like to see in next year's issue. Comments can be sent to Aubrey Woods, The Tribune, 100 St. Louis Ave., Seymour, IN or call 812-523-7051 or email [awoods@tribtown.com](mailto:awoods@tribtown.com)

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# SWEET TREATS

## Easy holiday recipe to make with some little helpers

Among the decorations, gifts and gatherings of loved ones, there's perhaps nothing quite like family favorite foods that call to mind the joy of the holidays. Whether your loved ones relish building gingerbread houses or dining on an all-in feast, looking forward to annual traditions is part of what makes the season so special.

This year, you can add to the fun with a new annual activity by creating a delightful dessert with the help of little ones and adults alike. With an easy recipe like Peanut Butter Saltine Candy that calls for just a handful of ingredients, you can get the whole family involved in the kitchen.

Ask your little helpers to measure out ingredients while a grownup prepares the pan and uses the stove. Once the base is finished baking, call the kids back to sprinkle chocolate chips and peanut butter chips over the top.

Find more holiday recipes at [gapeanuts.com](http://gapeanuts.com).

### **Peanut Butter Saltine Candy**

Yield: 45 pieces

Nonstick cooking spray (butter flavor)

1 sleeve (4 ounces) regular saltine crackers

½ cup butter

¾ cup creamy peanut butter

1 cup granulated sugar

2 cups milk chocolate chips

½ cup peanut butter chips

½ cup rough chopped, dry roasted peanuts

Heat the oven to 400 F. Line 1-inch-by-15-inch-by-1-inch pan with aluminum foil. Spray foil with nonstick cooking spray then lay saltines flat in single layer on prepared pan. Set aside.

In a heavy duty, 1-quart saucepan over medium heat, combine butter, peanut butter and sugar. Stir constantly until butter and sugar are melted, bringing mixture to boil. Boil 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Pour cooked mixture over saltines and bake 5 minutes.

Remove from oven and sprinkle chocolate chips over saltines. Let cool 3 minutes then spread melted chocolate completely over saltines.

Sprinkle peanut butter chips evenly over chocolate. Return pan to oven 1 minute to soften chips.

Pull pointed tines of fork through softened peanut butter chips to partially cover chocolate.

Sprinkle chopped peanuts on top, gently pressing into candy.

Let cool on rack about 15 minutes then place in freezer 3 minutes. Remove from freezer and break into pieces. Store in airtight container.

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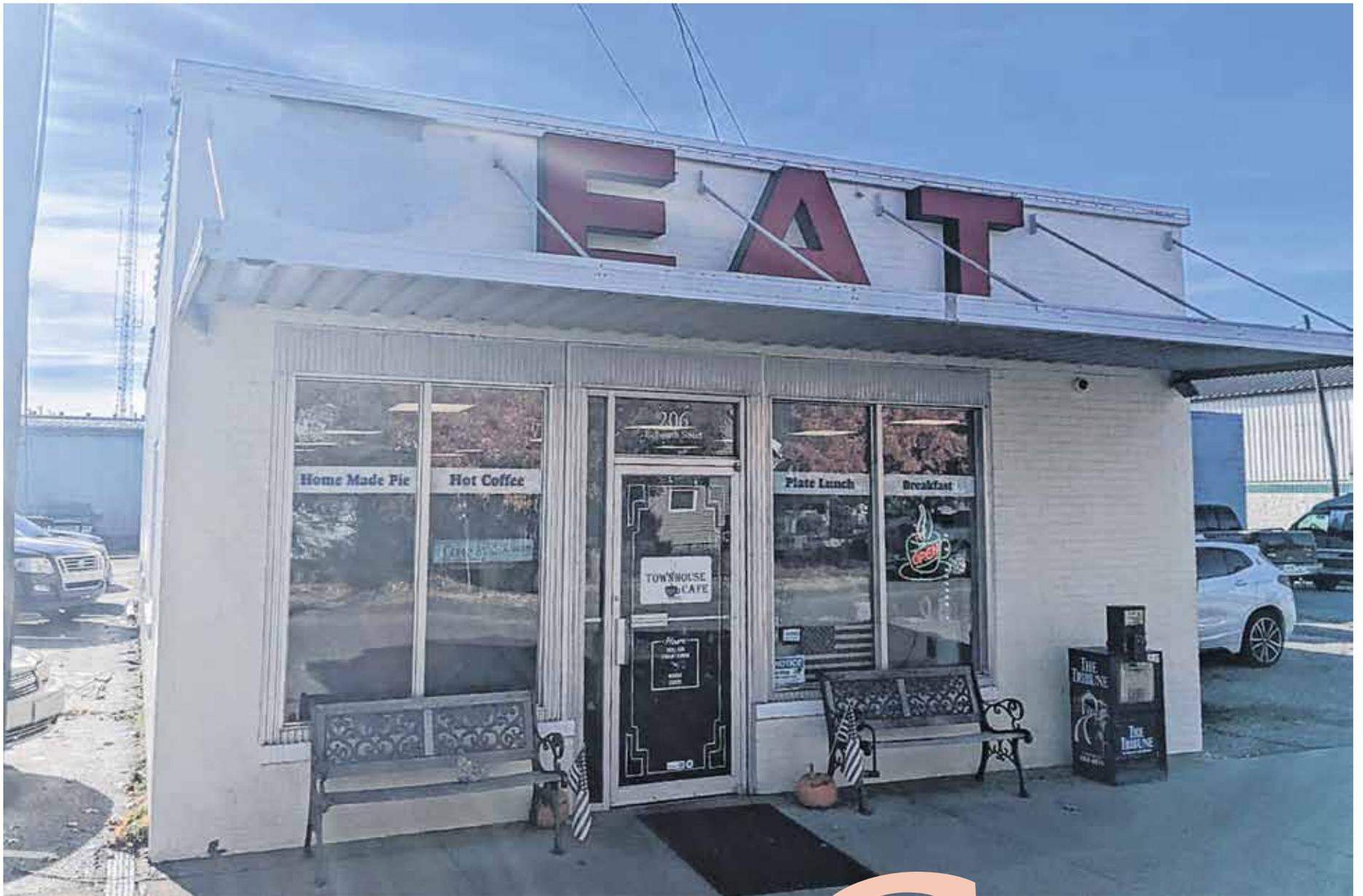
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Townhouse Cafe is located at 206 E. Fourth St., Seymour.

# A Seymour Staple

Townhouse Cafe celebrating 60 years of business in 2022

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ZACH SPICER

Good home cookin'. Good people. Good atmosphere. Good times.

All four are served up Tuesday through Sunday when Townhouse Cafe in Seymour is open for business.

Whether you're in the mood for breakfast, a lunch special or piece of pie, homemade dishes can be whipped up by one of the talented cooks in the kitchen.

When you walk in the door of the restaurant at 206 E. Fourth St., one of the friendly employees will greet you. And there's a good chance they will know your name and ask if you want "your usual."

In 2022, Townhouse Cafe will celebrate 60 years in business.



Donna Brewer, who has been a cook at Townhouse Cafe in Seymour for 25 years, stirs batter for pie crust.

Valerie Hollowell, who has owned the business with her wife, Karen, since 2014, said one of the things she credits to the longevity of the restaurant is “really strong, hardworking women.”

Betty Haws Leblinc started the business as Betty’s Townhouse in 1962, and then when 12 businessmen bought it from her, her daughter, Joanne Sterling, ran the day-to-day operation. Then Karen’s aunt, Connie Stockhaver, and her husband, Mark Stockhaver, owned it from 1996 to 2014.

“It’s a lot to be a business owner. It’s even more to be a restaurant owner,” Hollowell said.

“Then I think to go through some of the things that the women have gone through in moving locations and changing menus and raising prices and having to sell it to someone else to keep it alive and all that kind of stuff, like Connie ran it for 20 years and she did a great job with it and really built the name and the reputation up, so I really think just some really strong women,” she said.

They all had good work ethic, and perhaps most important, they all knew how to cook, Hollowell said, smiling.

“There’s some stuff that you can’t read in a textbook. You just have to have a knack for it,” she said. “Luckily, we’ve had some really good cooks come through here. I really do think it’s the consistency of the people and the food that have

helped it go six decades.”

The female owners over the years also have been connected, either as family or co-workers.

“The 12 men, they didn’t run it. All they did was keep the door open so they could come in and eat and have coffee, but (Sterling) still ran it,” Hollowell said.

“Connie worked for Betty when she was a little girl. She learned how to make pies and all that kind of stuff. Then eventually, she ended up owning the place and running it herself, so it has stayed in a line of women that have had something to do with it or family-related or something like that,” she said. “This place has a lot of little cool facts about it.”

From the beginning, the restaurant’s food has been homemade.

“I think it’s something that people really crave and yearn — that home cooking — and they just don’t get it very much,” Hollowell said. “It’s expensive to cook for a small family, one or two people. It’s expensive to buy all of the groceries and all of the ingredients to do that, so here, we have your home cooking, feel-good food all of the time.”

At chain restaurants, the same food offerings can be found at any of their locations. Local places like Townhouse Cafe, however, offer unique menu items that people come to know, love and crave.

“I think that’s what we bring to it is a totally different flavor,” Hollowell said.

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**Top:** Among the current Townhouse Cafe employees are, from left, Katie Barker, Laurie Brewer, Kayla Stout, Donna Brewer, Morgan Hawkins, Olivia Newkirk, Anne Carpenter, Kelly Bolte and owner Valerie Hollowell. // **Bottom:** Betty Haws Leblinc, who started Betty's Townhouse in Seymour in 1962, crocheted the tablecloths for her restaurant.



## IF YOU GO

Townhouse Cafe is at 206 E. Fourth St., Seymour.  
Hours are 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays.  
For information, call 812-522-1099 or visit [facebook.com/townhouse-cafeseymour](https://facebook.com/townhouse-cafeseymour) or [townhousecafein.com](https://townhousecafein.com).

“Here, it’s very unique to this area. People grew up with it. Our coconut and peanut butter cream pies are homemade. They are big sellers here. They know what they taste like at our restaurant. I just think that consistency is really what has held this together the best.”

Those are two of the five pie flavors available each day Townhouse Cafe is open, and customers also can place an order for a whole pie among nearly 15 flavors.

“We had a request for a cottage cheese pie the other day, and we figured that out and made that for a customer, so we’ll make any kind of pie you want us to make,” Hollowell said, smiling.

Of all of the items on the menu, she said the No. 1 seller is the breaded tenderloin sandwich.

“It’s bigger than your face. That’s

how we advertise it on the menu. It is huge,” Hollowell said with another smile. “That’s our No. 1 seller hands down.”

After that, the next most popular choice is breakfast. Hollowell said not many places serve breakfast the entire time they are open.

The regular lunch specials, including homemade chicken and noodles, country fried steak, salmon patties, beef Manhattan and turkey Manhattan, also are frequently ordered.

On weekends, the specials rotate between items like lasagna, stuffed chicken breast and pork chops.

For about 25 years, Donna Brewer has worked in the kitchen as a cook at Townhouse Cafe. She said she has worked in restaurants quite a bit, including bartending at Chatterbox when she learned Townhouse needed a cook.

“This was close enough I could walk to work and to (Chatterbox),” she said.

Her favorite food to make is chicken and noodles because customers really like it. They also like ordering meatloaf, ham and beans and salmon patties.

“A lot of people don’t make that at home anymore,” Brewer said. “A lot of people are busy, especially if they’ve got kids or grandkids, and they may not have time to fix a homemade lunch or breakfast.”

They like going to Townhouse Cafe, where it’s homemade by people they know.

“It’s all good,” Brewer said, smiling, about the restaurant’s food offerings.

Kelly Bolte also has worked at Townhouse Cafe for about 25 years. She’s a waitress.

“I came in here with a friend. Connie was back here running around ‘I don’t have enough waitresses,’ and I was like, ‘Well, I need a job,’ so it just worked. They started

feeding me every day, so I just kept coming back like I was a doggone stray cat," she said, smiling.

So why has she stayed there for 25 years?

"Because I love the people. I've got the best customers. I've got good co-workers," Bolte said.

And why has Townhouse Cafe been going for 60 years? She said the home-cooked food and entertainment provided by the employees draw people in and keep them coming back.

"My regulars keep coming back," Bolte said. "I started when they were in the little baby seat, and now, they are having babies of their own."

Laurie Brewer, who is Donna's daughter, has worked at Townhouse Cafe full time for nearly 17 years, including the past year as manager. She worked part time before she started full time and began as a cook.

"I think the family kind of atmosphere environment just makes it easy," Laurie said. "The customers are easy to deal with, too. It's just a nice little place with all of the locals ... the good food. I think it's a good show all around."

Hollowell gives a lot of praise to her employees, especially those who returned after last year's three-month shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A month before the pandemic started, the Hollowells had paid off the restaurant from where they bought it from the Stockholders.

"I'm very grateful for our staff that came back," Valerie said. "I'm glad that they got three months off to rest and be healthy in the time of a pandemic. Then when I sent out the message that 'Hey, we're ready, we're going to do this again, we're reopening,' I'd say 95% of the staff was on board, was there, 'What do you want us for?' They came back, we cleaned the restaurant and we had it all put together and ready to go."

They could have gone to work somewhere else or stayed home and collected unemployment checks, but they came back to work and made it happen, Hollowell said of her 18 employees.

"I think that's one thing that makes



Morgan Hawkins makes an omelet for a customer at Townhouse Cafe in Seymour.

Townhouse special is when you walk through the doors, you see a lot of the same faces that you've seen, so to me, the consistency in the food and the atmosphere helps," she said. "That's really the heart and soul of the restaurant is that the staff has stayed here."

Once Townhouse reopened, Hollowell made some changes to the menu, and she decided to close on Monday to make life a little easier as an owner and to give the employees a day off.

The interior of the restaurant changed, too, from new kitchen equipment to painting the dining room walls and changing the tables and chairs.

Next year, Hollowell said the exterior will be the focus, including painting the building, putting up a new sign above the entrance and redoing the parking lot. That way, Townhouse Cafe will shine by the time a special 60th anniversary celebration event is set.

Starting in January, some former menu items will be brought back as monthly specials, and there will be giveaways and raffles.

"We're going to celebrate the whole year," Hollowell said.

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# Program brings joy to families



**Left:** Megan Cherry's children, Roman, Carlyn and Maxim, enjoy a visit with Santa. Cherry is executive director of Anchor House Family Assistance Center and Pantry in Seymour. // **Right:** From 2019, Marcia Monroe, left, president of Jackson County Farm Bureau, and Drew Carpenter, manager of Anytime Fitness in Seymour, are pictured with some of the 933 pounds of food that were collected for Anchor House Family Assistance Center and Pantry in Seymour. The organization and business worked together on the project, which was part of a campaign by Indiana Farm Bureau to raise awareness of Farm Bureau's 100th anniversary.



# Holiday Happenings

## TONIGHT - SERTOMA BENEFIT CONCERT & AUCTION

Join us at Pewter Hall in Brownstown at 6PM. All proceeds assist Sertoma's Christmas Miracle program and help buy needy children toys for Christmas. Tickets are \$10 and must be purchased in advance. No tickets will be sold at the door.

## NOV. 27TH - DOWNTOWN SHOP AROUND

Join us in Downtown Seymour for the Downtown Shop Around during Shop Small Saturday. Don't forget to bring your punch card for chances to win gift cards to local businesses.

## DEC. 3RD - CHRISTMAS AT CROSSROADS @ 6PM

Join the Jackson County Chamber for the Christmas at Crossroads!

This event will feature live reindeer, Christmas caroling by The Point, hot cocoa, Southern Indiana Hispanic Services doughnut holes, a visit from Santa Claus and the lighting of the city's Christmas tree!

## DEC. 4TH - MEDORA CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL

Join us in Downtown Medora for the Medora Christmas Festival, featuring Breakfast with Santa & Mrs. Claus, Parade, Lighting of Christmas Tree, Food & Craft Vendors, Entertainment and much more!

## DEC 4TH - SMALL TOWN CHRISTMAS MARKET

Join us at the Knights of Columbus located at 118 E. 2nd Street in Seymour from 9AM to 2PM for the Small Town Christmas Market. There will be a variety of vendors and crafts. Santa will make a stop between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Bring a new unwrapped toy valued at \$5 or more and be entered into a drawing for items donated by the show's vendors. Proceeds will help provide gifts for children in need.

## DEC. 6TH - HOLIDAY HOOP CENTERPIECE

Create this modern display piece at Schneider's Nursery located at 3066 E. US Highway 50, Seymour @ 6:30PM. Choose gold, silver, or black metal rings to accent your live greenery. Candles and other embellishments will be available for purchase. Evening classes include holiday snacks and adult beverages.

Tickets purchased through eventbrite.com prior to the event and all ticket sales are final. Should you be unable to attend, a take-home kit will be made available to you. Schneider Nursery reserves the right to alter classes and schedules due to the ongoing uncertainty of the Covid-19 situation. All CDC protocols in place at the time of your class will be followed.

## DEC. 11TH - CHRISTMAS AT THE LAKE

Join us at Starve Hollow State Recreation Area for Christmas at the Lake event from 4 p.m to 8 p.m. There will be Christmas lights and crafts at the forest education center.

## DEC. 18TH - JINGLE ALL THE 5K

Join us for a 5k in downtown Seymour and have a jolly good time! Each runner will receive a pair of Jingle Bells for their shoes and a hat or head wrap of their choosing (first come first serve). Festive, holiday costumes are encouraged at this family friendly event! Be sure to stick around once you cross the finish line to snap a picture with Santa! Sign up now at [www.seymourmainstreet.org](http://www.seymourmainstreet.org) to get registered today!

## DEC. 31ST - NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY AT THE MOOSE

Join us at the Moose Lodge 418 in Seymour, IN from 8PM to 1AM. They will have a New Year's Eve Party with Soul Express performing.



Visit our Gift shop for awesome Christmas Gift ideas from local craft vendors. All merchandise is made by ONLY local crafters. We also have our Gift Card Christmas Tree. Your one stop shop for gift cards to local businesses.



While our focus is on our Visitors, no matter the reason for their travel here to Jackson County, our hearts are in our communities. As we approach the holiday season, now more than ever, each and everyone of us need to make a commitment to SHOP LOCAL, EAT LOCAL, & GIVE LOCAL.



ARANN BANKS    JORDAN RICHART    ALICIA FROEDGE    LLOYD HUDSON

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Megan Cherry, left, the executive director of Anchor House Family Assistance Center and Pantry in Seymour, helps Julie Otte organize the shelves in 2019.

“If you’re part of the community, I think everybody should try to give back to their community and that’s a need. People are spending the holiday where it’s not their best situation maybe, but having people care about them and making sure they’re having a good Christmas and the kids are having a good Christmas, that’s bringing joy to people.”

**Drew Carpenter, participant of Anchor House program**

“After we put our Christmas tree up here, we’ll take those notes and paperclip them to the tree like an ornament,” Carpenter said. “Then our members come in and they can take one and go buy the gift and bring it in, either wrapped or if it’s unwrapped, we’ll wrap it. Then we’ll deliver it all to Anchor House maybe a couple of days before Christmas.”

Carpenter said he thinks the program is special because it lets people know someone cares about them.

“Our members get excited about participating in this because they like to do things to help somebody,” he said. “We encourage them to

participate and then bring the paper back that has the item listed on it along with the gift so we'll know that we've got the right things."

He said this is something the members look forward to each year, and the fitness club is always looking for ways to contribute to the community and be involved.

"If you're part of the community, I think everybody should try to give back to their community and that's a need," Carpenter said. "People are spending the holiday where it's not their best situation maybe, but having people care about them and making sure they're having a good Christmas and the kids are having a good Christmas, that's bringing joy to people."

Rachel Tillberry of Cummins

Seymour Engine Plant said Christmas has always been her favorite time of year, so she likes helping with Anchor House's gift program.

"I absolutely love spending the holidays with my family. I want to try to provide support to others so they can create the same special memories," Tillberry said. "I have been involved in this program for a number of years, and it has become my favorite part of the holiday season."

Lindsay Sarver, fund development director for Anchor House, said she wants to thank all of the people who are donating to the program this year and welcomes any new sponsors who would like to be involved in the program to help families.

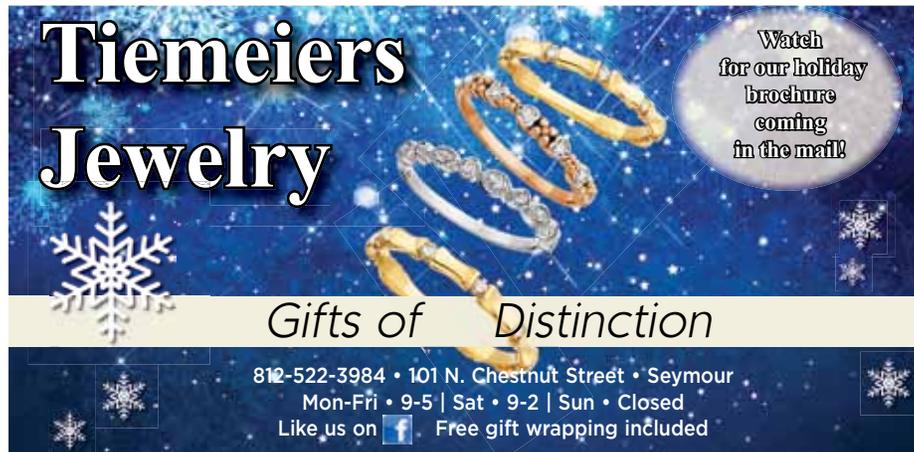
## About Anchor House

Anchor House Family Assistance Center and Pantry is at 250 S. Vine St., Seymour, and the East Shelter is at 326 Dupont Drive, Seymour.

Staffed shelter hours on Vine Street are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. The Dupont Drive shelter is staffed 24/7.

The food pantry at the main location is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mondays and from noon to 5 p.m. Thursdays. Clients must provide proof of residence in Jackson County and can visit twice per month.

For information, email [ahshelter@anchor-houseshelter.org](mailto:ahshelter@anchor-houseshelter.org) or call 812-522-9308.



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# Holiday festivities

## Jackson County Chamber of Commerce hosting festive events

STORY BY MITCHELL BANKS | PHOTOS FILE



Jackson County will have a lot of holiday spirit as it gets closer to Christmas.



The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce is planning many events that all county residents and families can partake in and be festive.



MITCHELL BANKS

Look for a Seymour firetruck decorated with holiday lights in your city neighborhood for the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce's Santa Tour. // Bella Campbell, 5, sits on Santa's lap during the Home for the Holidays event in 2019 at Crossroads Community Park in downtown Seymour. The holiday event was organized by the Seymour Chamber of Commerce, which was renamed to Jackson County Chamber of Commerce over the summer. // The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce building at 105 S. Chestnut St. in Seymour.



The Chamber Holiday Passport is returning and can be used through Jan. 3. It is a free passport program where you can be entered to win some great prizes just for shopping at local businesses during the holidays.

Once a passport is completed after visiting a certain number of local businesses, it can be submitted for prize drawings.

Passports will be included in The Tribune and The Jackson County Banner the weekend after Thanksgiving. They also can be picked up at the chamber office or at participating businesses.

Nearly 40 Jackson County businesses are participating. Visiting the following eight businesses garners double points: Big O Tires, Blush and Brush Beauty Bar, Brewskies Downtown, Brownstown Hardware, Far Out Fitness and Health, Jackson County Visitor Center, Premier Farm and Pet and RE/MAX Professionals.

Completed passports must be returned to the chamber office, 105 S. Chestnut St., Seymour, by noon Jan. 3. Prize winners will be announced Jan. 4. This includes the grand prize of an overnight stay at West Baden Springs Hotel, which is sponsored by Steve Silver of RE/MAX Professionals.

The chamber is located at the historic Farmers Club building in downtown Seymour. This year, the building went through renovations

that includes new flooring, lighting, furniture and a coffee bar.

For anyone interested in checking out the new updates, the chamber is hosting a holiday open house from 7 to 8 a.m. Dec. 1. Stop by the office to enjoy some holiday cheer. Refreshments will be served.

Santa, reindeer and Christmas carolers are quintessential parts of the holiday season, and the chamber's Christmas at Crossroads event will feature all of that and more.

It will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Dec. 3 at Crossroads Community Park, 101 E. Tipton St., Seymour.

The free family event will have live reindeer, Christmas carolers, cookies and hot chocolate. Santa is expected to arrive on a firetruck, and the city's Christmas tree will be lit. Make sure to bring your letters for Santa.

Santa will make more appearances in Seymour before Christmas Eve. From Dec. 6 to 10 starting at 6 p.m. each night, the chamber is facilitating a Santa Tour.

Saint Nick himself will tour the city on a Seymour Fire Department truck while being escorted by the Seymour Police Department. Santa will visit each neighborhood within the city limits on the evening of their trash and recycling pickup day.

Formerly the Seymour Chamber of Commerce, the organization changed its name to the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce over the



Candy Cane Chris holds Clarice the reindeer as Evan Ingalsbe pets her and his brother, Hunter Taylor, looks on at Home for the Holidays at Crossroads Community Park in 2018 in downtown Seymour. Home for the Holidays was organized by the Seymour Chamber of Commerce. That organization was renamed Jackson County Chamber of Commerce over the summer.

summer to be more inclusive and build relationships with businesses outside of Seymour.

There also were structural changes for the chamber.

Businesses and community leaders from outside of Seymour are being invited to be a part of the organization's board of directors starting in 2022.

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# Special treasures

STORY BY JORDAN RICHART | PHOTOS BY CARLA CLARK

Annette Johnson stands inside her business, Treasure Room, in Seymour.

## Local business offers gifts for variety of occasions

The season of giving is upon us, and sometimes, it may be difficult to find that perfect gift for someone special.

A trip to Treasure Room in Seymour may help you find that one-of-a-kind gift you've been looking for, but it may take a little bit of planning.

Most of the store's items are custom-made or can be customized, so it's important to know a little bit about the person's preferences when considering buying a gift.

The 44-year-old business focuses on flower preservation, custom macrame plant hangers, table runners, home decor, custom-made silk flower arrangements, wreaths and more.

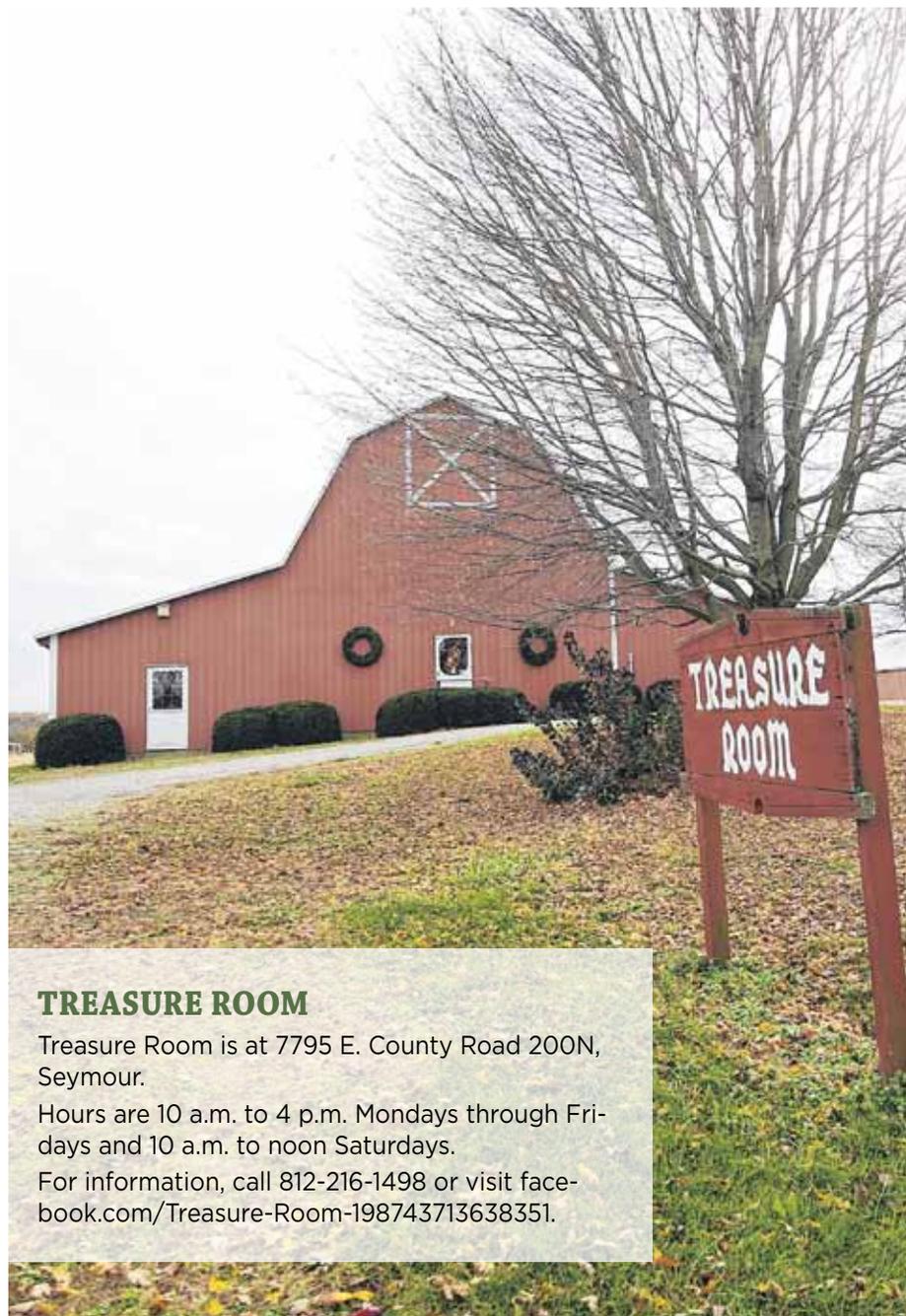
"The macrame went out for a while, but now, it is back in," owner Annette Johnson said.

Macrame is a hanging flower basket that includes jute as the basket with a strong yarn as the material used to make the hangers. Johnson designs and hand makes all of the hangers for the baskets. Some can even hang with two baskets.

The shop isn't just limited to gift giving and arrangements for weddings, funerals and occasions. It also can get you in the holiday spirit with all of the Christmas decorating supplies and custom-made items.

"We tie a lot of bows for trees and large ones that people place outside," Johnson said.

Two rooms fill the store with options for bows and other Christmas decorating supplies to get customers exactly what they need. There also are ornaments, trees, decor items, Nativity scenes, signs, Santa Claus decorations, wreaths and more.



### TREASURE ROOM

Treasure Room is at 7795 E. County Road 200N, Seymour.

Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 10 a.m. to noon Saturdays.

For information, call 812-216-1498 or visit [facebook.com/Treasure-Room-198743713638351](https://www.facebook.com/Treasure-Room-198743713638351).

Treasure Room is located at 7795 E. County Road 200N, Seymour.

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HOURS

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Gift Certificates Available

IN-35089202



Decorative uses of flowers are pictured at Treasure Room. // A Christmas ornament is shown.

“I do love the rooms with our Christmas items in it,” Johnson said. “We do sell a lot of the wreaths, and the best part is we can make them custom for people.”

Johnson also offers custom mantel decor for people. They can be made to fit different mantels and include whatever a customer wants.

“We do a lot of that for people,” she said. “It can be made exactly to what you envision for your mantel.”

One service the shop offers is drying flowers for preservation. Those are popular with brides who want their bouquet preserved and for funeral arrangement flowers.

“We preserve them and can frame them in a frame box or a dome, which is a great keepsake,” Johnson said. “That work keeps me busy.”

A couple of days after a wedding or funeral, customers will bring the flowers and Johnson will get to work right away by taking the bouquet apart and drying each flower individually with a powder that is later dusted and brushed off.

“You have to put that powder in between each individual petal, and they’re then sprayed with a

sealer, so it's about a month-and-a-half to two-month process," she said. "We then arrange them in the frames, and people love them. I love doing it."

The craft of preserving the flowers is something she enjoys, but nothing beats seeing satisfied customers who get what they envisioned.

"We see a lot of happy brides and people who are touched by the funeral flowers," she said. "Of course, they are sad, but when they see it, then it's a good memory."

Not only does the shop provide a great selection of products, but it also is housed in a barn that Johnson's grandparents constructed.

Her father lived on the property and her grandparents built the barn that houses the business in 1928. There's a higher level as customers walk in with stairs on each side. Johnson said the higher level is where the feed trough was for the horses and cows that were on the family farm. One lower level was for horses, while the other side was for cows.

When her mother and father moved to the property, her mother started selling items from her back porch. The couple decided she needed space for a shop, so they cleaned the old barn up, and Treasure Room was born.

"I grew up in this business," she said. "Mom was always into crafts and making anything and everything."

Her mother, Vera, still comes in and helps with the business and helps babysit grandchildren to free up some of Johnson's time to dedicate to the business.

Johnson remembers spending her youth helping with weddings every weekend as customers wanted just the right decorations for their special day.

"We made so many arrangements for weddings and funerals back then, and we're still making those things today," she said. "People order it and we make it."



Annette Johnson preserves the flowers and arranges them and mementos from special occasions in a shadow box. The one she is holding is a wedding memory box for Kamy Royalty.

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# PERFECT PRESENT

Can't miss gift strategies for the people who matter

BY ERIC J. MARTIN

Whether you're shopping online or at a brick-and-mortar store, it's easy to get bogged down by one of the most common predicaments consumers face during the holiday season: How to buy the ideal present for a family member, relative, friend or coworker. With so many gift ideas to choose from and much guesswork involved when it comes to the recipient's tastes and preferences, it's little wonder why Americans feel stressed at this time of year.

"Last-minute planning and shopping can result in crowds, higher exposure to germs, a shortage of inventory, and an increase in tension. Walking aimlessly around the mall looking for the perfect gift is not a good use of time, in my opinion," says Kristan Fazio, fair trade advocate for WorldFinds in Westmont, Illinois. "Plus, with the delays in shipping due to COVID and Postal Service cutbacks experienced this year, the challenge will be greater than ever in November and December."

For these and other reasons, Dr. Carissa Coulston, a clinical psychologist in Manhattan, New York and relationship expert at Eternityrose.com, recommends gift planning well in advance.

"It's a good idea to put in the effort and step up your game by carefully looking around before the holiday season, if possible. If you are aware of what caught the eye or attention of one of your recipients, this can be a great way to guide your gift buying," Coulston says. "Remember that, especially for men, last-minute shopping can seriously backfire, as women can instinctively tell if a gift came with a lot of planning and care or was bought in a rush."

Here's some handy advice from experts on how to buy for different types of people in your life this season.

## For a spouse/partner

"I recommend curating an experience that you can do together, such as taking a cooking class or getting a couples massage," says Julie Schechter, a gifting expert and award-winning founder of Small Packages



in New York City. "This sends the message that you're excited not just to celebrate the holidays with them, but that you also can't wait to carve out dedicated time for the two of you in the future."

Fazio suggests picking something creative and meaningful, such as handmade artwork, "especially when photos are included. Every year, I make a photo album of special family moments, and it's definitely a favorite gift," she says.

Don't be afraid to ask your main squeeze for hints, either.

"Sometimes, simply asking and/or talking about what your partner may want can put you on the right path toward the perfect gift," notes Parker Slavin, CEO/president of Los Angeles-based StationeryXpress.

## For a child

Buyers often experience a special kind of anxiety when they are tasked with finding the ultimate toy or other age-appropriate gift for a young one.

"I like to be a little sneaky and ask the child to help me pick a gift for them by saying I am hunting for a present for a different child who is a year older than they are. I find they will usually spill what's on their mind instead," Schechter says.

Fazio prefers gifting items that educate as well as excite kids.

"This could be a book on gardening accompanied by a basket of seeds, or equipment for a new hobby, such as a musical instrument along with a couple of lessons," she says.

Ask Slavin and he'll say that the gift should make the child feel special or important.

"It shouldn't be too complex or overly expensive, as most younger kids don't quite understand the concept of money and taking care of nice things just yet," adds Slavin.

Of course, it pays to keep your finger on the pulse of the latest toy trends and know what's in stock and available.

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