

An Evening Sun Publication December 2025

Annie's Thrift Shop embraces holiday spirit with Angels of Hope fundraiser for seniors and Letters to Santa for children

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NORWICH - Each year, Annie's Thrift Shop in Norwich finds a new way to bring joy into the community during the holidays.

This season, owners Annie and Jody Smith are carrying on a deeply personal mission: honoring her mother's memory by making sure local seniors feel remembered and cared for.

The store's Angels of Hope program, now entering its second year, began after Smith saw firsthand how meaningful a simple gift could be.

"My mother lived in the senior apartments in Oxford, and when she received a gift from the Office for the Aging, she was super excited about it," Smith said. "She was very happy that someone thought about her. This year she passed away, so from now on we will be doing Angels of Hope in memory of her."

The holiday drive collects cash and donated items to help seniors across Chenango County feel warm and appreciated at Christmas.

Last year, the thrift store helped more than 300 seniors through the effort, an outcome that far exceeded what Smith expected when she first came up with the idea.

"We didn't know if it would work," she said. "We figured we'd help a few people, but the help we received from our customers was incredible."

Community members donate everything from blankets and clothing to toiletries, pet supplies, and small comforts for seniors who are often homebound.

"Everyone should be taken care of, and we want to take care of the aging population," she said. Donations were accepted from November 1 through December 2, and those who gave, received a 10 percent discount on their purchase as a thank-you.

"I give them the cash and they can do the shopping for what's needed," Smith added. "I like to think of it like Toys-for-Tots, but for the elderly."

While Angels of Hope focuses on seniors, December brings a second wave of community spirit for the youngest visitors: the return of the store's Letters to Santa.

The idea was sparked last year after Santa spent an afternoon at the shop, delighting local families. "The kids were so happy to see Santa," Smith said. "That's why this year we decided to do the letters to Santa again."

Beginning on December 1, children can stop in to write their letters at a special activity table, then drop them into the store's dedicated Santa Mailbox. Annie's elf, known affectionately as Pinky, will make sure the letters reach the North Pole, and Santa will reply with a personalized note letting each child know where they stand on the Nice List.



Annie's Thrift Shop owners Jody and Annie Smith collaborated with the Area Agency on Aging of Chenango County to donate items to Norwich seniors. They are also accepting children's letters to Santa. Located at 5311 NY Highway 12 in Norwich, the business is family-owned and offers clothing, household items, tools, furniture, and a wide selection of new items. Open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday. More information can be found at www.facebook.com/annies-thriftshop15. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

On Christmas Eve, all participating children will be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift card.

Smith, a mother of four, says she welcomes children brought to the store.

"It's just a nice way to be kid-friendly," she said. "I understand what it is to take kids to the store. It doesn't bother us at all, we love to see them come in. There's always a ring pop for them. I let them play in the back room with the toys, and it keeps them busy while mom and dad shop."

Adults also get a little holiday fun. Every purchase throughout the month comes with a raffle ticket for a Christmas Eve drawing on December 24, where a winner will receive a $50 gift card.

Between both campaigns, Smith says the goal is simple: "Christmas is the season of giving, and that's what we do," she said. "We do all sorts of things for our community."

The couple's generosity extends all year.

In the past, Annie's Thrift Store has left hats and mittens on the porch for anyone who needed them and helped families facing sudden hardship.

"We help people who have had a house fire or domestic violence situations and need things to start over," she said. "We've helped foster parents, too, who don't get any budget to buy clothing for the children."

Running a busy store while coordinating multiple community projects could easily be overwhelming, but Smith says she's able to do it because she's never doing it alone.

"I have a wonderful support system," she said. "My wonderful husband and my very good friend Michele help me so much. Without them I don't know what I would do. Part of it is that I'm a mom of four, so busy is what I've always been used to."

For those wanting to get involved, Smith said stop in, drop off a letter, donate a gift, contribute to the jar on the counter, or simply spread the word. "We will take anything that helps put a smile on someone's face," she said.

Last year's Angels of Hope collaboration with the Chenango County Area Agency on Aging filled an entire office with donated blankets, pajamas, books, puzzles, and other essentials.

Agency staff said it far surpassed anything they expected and made a tremendous impact on seniors during the holidays. It set the stage for what Smith hopes will be another season of kindness, and a tribute worthy of her mother.

Annie's Thrift Shop, located at 5311 NY Highway 12 in Norwich, is family-owned and offers clothing, household items, tools, furniture, and a wide selection of new items.

The store's regular hours are Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and closed on Sundays.

Annie's Thrift Shop will be closed on Thanksgiving Day but open for shoppers on Black Friday. Visit their Facebook page (www.facebook.com/anniesthriftshop15) for more details.



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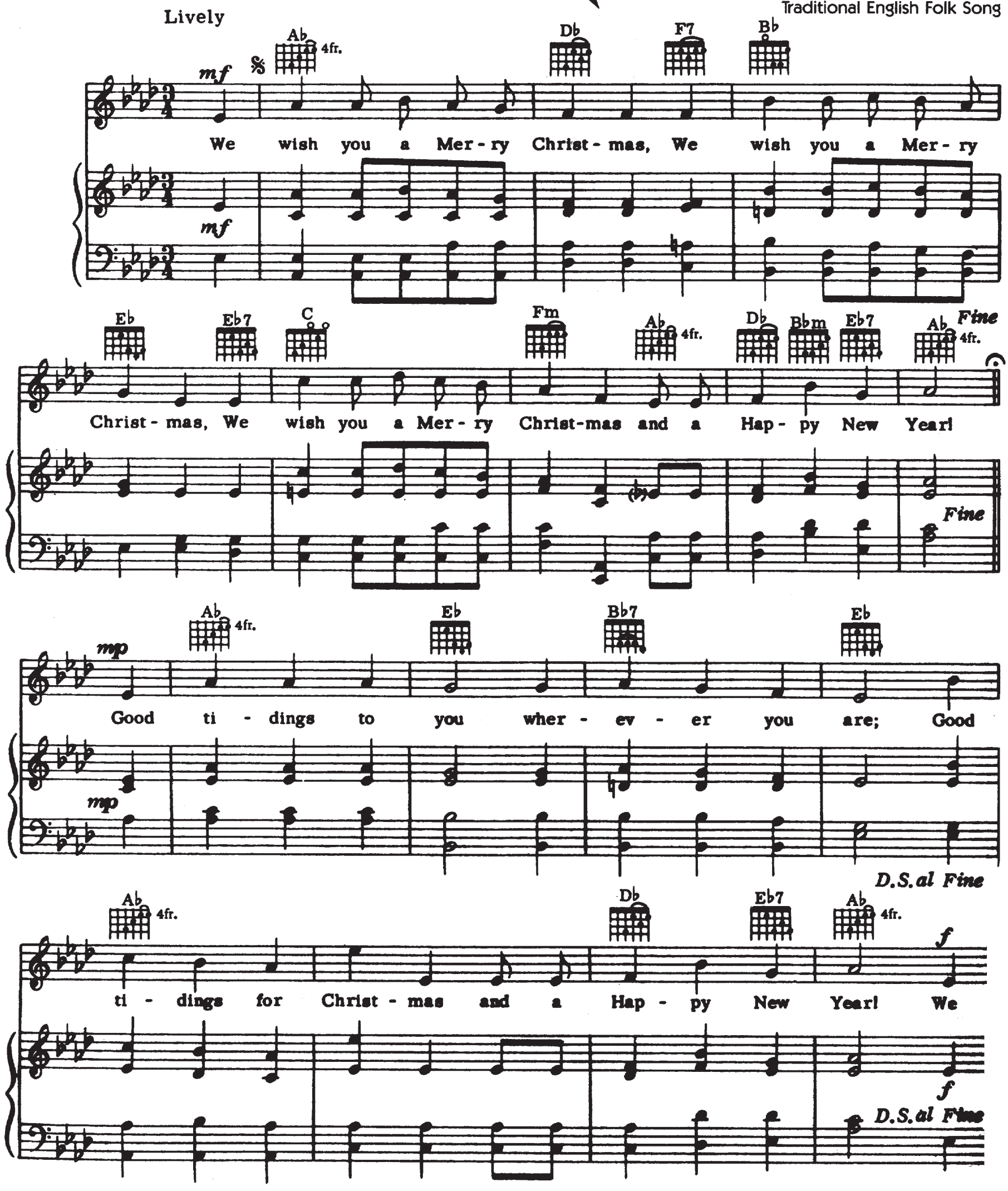

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Chenango County Toys for Tots to spread cheer this Friday with gift distributions

Shawn Magrath
Evening Sun Staff Writer
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NORWICH – The Chenango County chapter of Toys for Tots is in a race against time this holiday season, reaching out to locals for toy donations and offering help to ensure every economically disadvantaged child receives a gift this Christmas

The U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program is in full swing with its annual holiday toy drive underway across the nation. The campaign follows a remarkably successful 2024 season, which delivered over 25 million toys, books, and games to more than 10 million children in need.

The program last year served more than 1,200 children in Chenango County alone, according to local Toys for Tots Coordinator Terry Potter. Chenango County Toys for Tots opened applications last week, kicking off its busiest season for the program which actually runs year-round.

The organization has sights on starting toy distributions by Friday, Dec. 19.

"We've already received donations. The local Legion in Norwich made a very generous donation and we've had some other very generous donors, so we're off to a good start," said Potter.

Local Marine units and volunteer coordinators are now actively deploying collection boxes at businesses and community centers. These iconic collection sites serve as the primary conduit for public donations of new, unwrapped toys and books.

Potter, alongside other local Toys for Tots volunteers, even marched in the annual holiday Parade of Lights, pulling a donation bin where people could offer toys and ensure that children receive gifts in time for Christmas.

Toys for Tots has also received a number of commitments from local businesses, churches, and other organizations in the area, Potter noted. It's a meaningful start to a meaningful cause, he said.

"We've been pretty fortunate to have a lot of people in the commu-



Chenango County Toys for Tots held its biggest fundraiser on Wednesday. Assisted by Nina's Restaurant and the Colonia Theatre in Norwich, the organization raised money and toy collections while hosting a spaghetti dinner and a special showing of "The Polar Express" on the silver screen. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

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Toys for Tots organizer and volunteer Lon Yerton thanked families and everyone who contribute to the charity, including Nina's owners Dave and Jess Shull; Owners of the Colonia Theater Rich and Todd Barnes, NY Assemblyman Joe Angelino, Mayor-elect Robert Jeffrey, Norwich Police Deputy Chief Matthew Roberts, and Tracy and Mindy Chawgo. (Photo by Tyler Murphy)

nity who pitch in. And there have been a lot of nonprofits in the past who have helped us in a pinch because donations haven't come in as we expected. We're fortunate to live in a community where people and businesses and organizations are willing to step in and help out," he added.

While toy collections are at the heart of the mission, monetary donations are crucial too. Funds allow Toys for Tots to purchase toys when local collections fall short and to provide gifts for underserved age groups, particularly older children.

Chenango County Toys for Tots held its biggest fundraiser on Wednesday. Assisted by Nina's Restaurant and the Colonia Theatre in Norwich, the organization raised money and toy collections while hosting a spaghetti dinner and a special showing of "The Polar Express" on the silver screen.

Organizer and volunteer Lon Yerton thanked families and everyone who contribute including business owners who support and volunteer at the event, Nina's owners Dave and Jess Shull; Owners of the Colonia Theater Rich and Todd Barnes, and the community work of Tracy and Mindy Chawgo, who use of their holiday bus to collect and transport the donated toys to the event.

He also thanked local officials for volunteering, including NY Assemblyman Joe Angelino, Mayor-elect Robert Jeffrey, and Norwich Police Deputy Chief Matthew Roberts, who prepared food and served children at the event.

The Toys for Tots operation relies heavily on local community support. Once toys are collected, volunteers – often led by active-duty and veteran Marines – transport the items to central warehouses. There, they are sorted by age and gender to match them with specific requests made through registered non-profit organizations, churches, and social welfare agencies that identify families in need.

Community members interested in participating can find official drop-off locations, host a toy drive, or make a direct monetary donation through the Chenango County chapter Toys for Tots website.

Local Toys for Tots campaigns are conducted annually in over 800 communities covering all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

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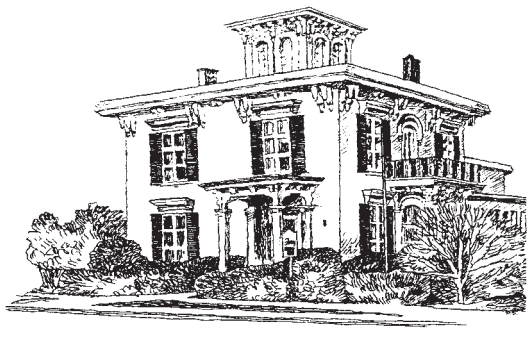

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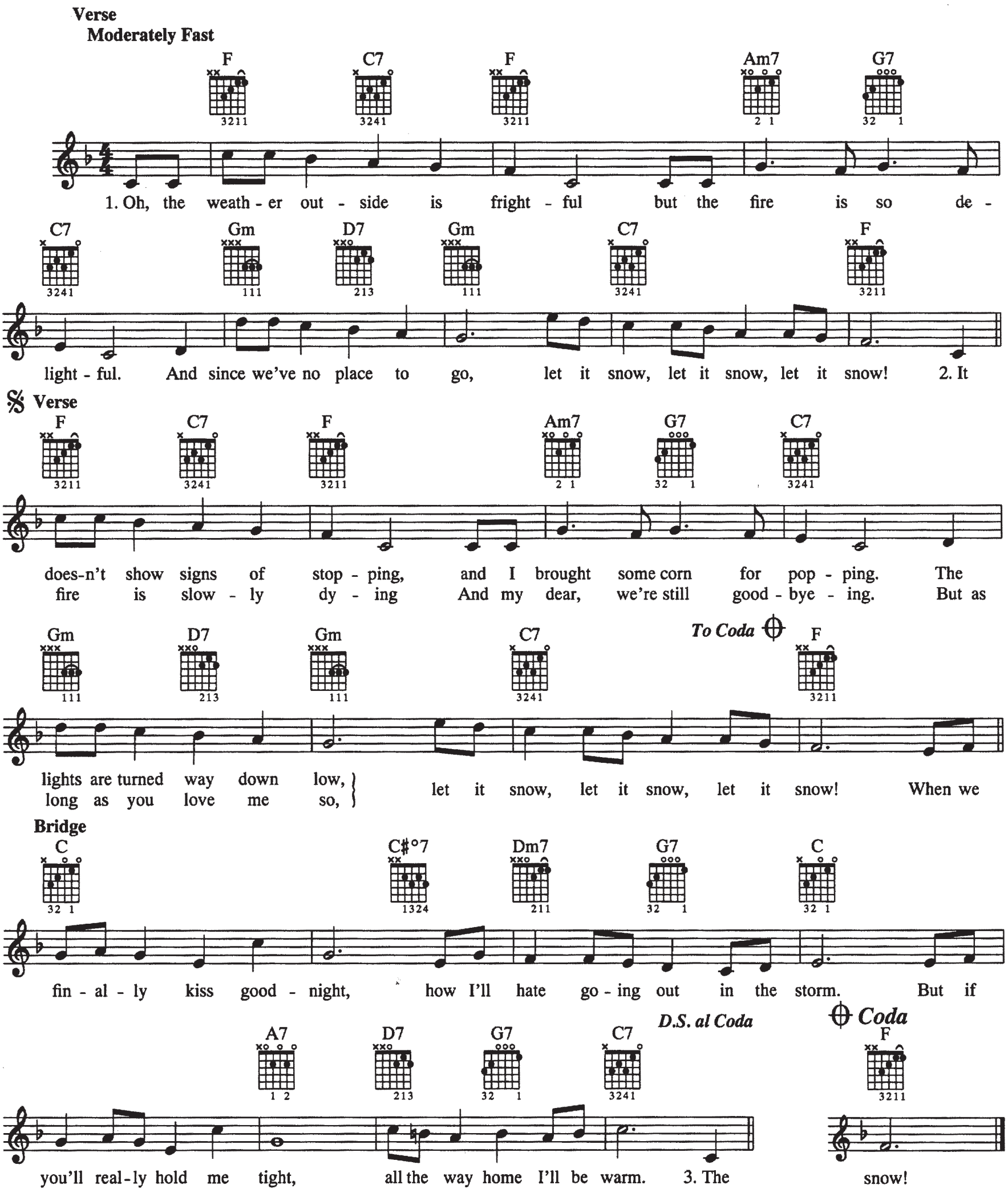

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Annual Festival of Trees gala raises more than $20,000 for UHS Chenango Memorial





On November 22, the Chenango Memorial Hospital Auxiliary hosted their annual Festival of Trees Gala at the Canasawacta Country Club. The event raised between $20,000 and $25,000 to support hospital programs and equipment. Pictured, The Festival of Trees Planning Committee: Megan McKown, Jamie Gaudreau-Moore, Kelly Collins-Colosi, Virginia Lee, Katie Voss, Jen Bartle and Katie Root. (Submitted photos)

NORWICH – On November 22, the Chenango Memorial Hospital Auxiliary hosted their annual Festival of Trees Gala at the Canasawacta Country Club, bringing together 222 community members for an evening of celebration and philanthropy.

This signature biannual event is organized by the CMH Auxiliary, a dedicated fundraising body for UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital. The 2025 event is estimated to raise between $20,000 and $25,000 to support hospital programs and equipment.

Jen Bartle, Festival of Trees Chair, stated, "This year I took over as Chair of Festival of Trees after learning so much over the past 12 years from Katie Voss and her Mom, Nancy Mirabito." She said, "I was thrilled with the success of our event last weekend and am very proud to support our hospital and the Auxiliary's mission."

The evening's theme, "A Winter's Night Masquerade," transformed the venue into an elegant winter wonderland. Guests enjoyed signature cocktails, dinner, and live entertainment by Brothers and Friends, previously known as Brotherhood. A highlight of the gala was the silent auction, featuring 80 items donated by local businesses and community members. Every single item found a winning bidder, demonstrating the community's enthusiastic support.

Bartle stated, "We are very, very thankful for the generosity of many small and large businesses, as well as individuals, in our community who showed up in a big way with their support."

Funds raised through the Festival of Trees will be directed toward purchasing necessary equipment, facility improvements, and directly impacting the quality of care available to local residents. The CMH Auxiliary recently donated $40,000 to UHS Chenano Memorial Hospital to enhance the new Women's Diagnostic Imaging Suite.

"My wife and I were honored to attend our first Festival of Trees," said Cecil Miller, President and CEO of UHS Chenango Memorial. "The CMH Auxiliary's tireless fundraising and steadfast advocacy strengthens our hospital in meaningful ways – enhancing the care we provide and uplifting every patient and family we serve. We are grateful for their partnership and for all they make possible"

The CMH Auxiliary extends thanks to all sponsors, especially Diamond level sponsors: NBT Bank, Norwich Rehabilitation & Nursing Center, Preferred Mutual Insurance Company, Norwich Wealth Management, Blueox, and Yacanos. Their support and commitment make events like this possible.

Special recognition also goes to the Canasawacta Country Club and Heather McShane, South Broad Mercantile for their contributions, and the dedicated Festival of Trees Planning Committee: Jen Bartle, Megan McKown, Katie Root, Virginia Lee, Katie Voss, Jamie Gaudreau-Moore, and Kelly Collins-Colosi.

UHS Chenango Memorial Hospital is part of United Health Services, a locally owned, not-for-profit healthcare system with 916 beds and more than 40 locations across New York's Southern Tier.

- Information from UHS CMH



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December 16, 2025 HOMETOWN HOLIDAYS 1

'Twas The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas,
When all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugarplums danced in their heads.

And Mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap.

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.



Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a luster of midday to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:,

"Now, Dasher! Now, Dancer! Now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! On Cupid! On, Donder and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! To the top of the wall! Now, dash away!
Dash away!
Dash away all!

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the housetop the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas, too.

And then in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot.
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
As he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes how they twinkled!
His dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry.

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow.
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
that shook,
when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself.
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings, then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose.

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

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2025 Norwich Parade of Lights

RESULTS ON PAGE 14









































Photos by Zachary Meseck



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Winners announced for Chobani Holiday Parade of Lights

Kelli Miller
Evening Sun Staff Writer
kmiller@evesun.com

NORWICH — On Nov. 29, The Chobani Holiday of Lights Parade brought magic to the streets of Norwich with beautiful displays of wintery wonderment.

Parade floats were over the top, from a lit up Polar Express school bus to the Norwich Steam Engine, a BigRig trailer filled with snowy lit trees and a snowmobiler driving through the pines, followed by a long trailer carrying holiday enthusiasts, and more.

Norwich Event Coordinator Mindy Chawgo said every float was amazing with special care given to bring holiday happiness to all. She thanked and congratulated the many participants that effortlessly partnered to make the parade a beautiful holiday event.

"I'd like to say many thank yous to Chobani, Live Event NY, Norwich YMCA, Chenango Greenway Conservancy, City Church Norwich, Kauffman's Buildings, Norwich Tractor, the Norwich Police Department, the judges, the Fords, and Santa," she said.

Chawgo noted judges Shawn Luke Hess-Murphy, Maria and Bug Loughren, and Dave and Shae Harris had a tough job deciding on the top place winners but with deliberate scrutiny, they made their decisions.

"Trophies were awarded, along with bragging rights," she added.

"Everyone that participated was a winner, even if not judged as winning, every entry and participating organization is what made the parade perfect," said Chawgo.

"Thank you all so much, your participation and support completed our parade family," Chawgo continued. "We couldn't have done this without you and we are so blessed with this magical night to escort Santa to his igloo."



The Chobani Holiday of Lights Parade brought magic to the streets of Norwich with beautiful displays of wintery wonderment. Many amazing floats filled the streets, leaving judges with a hard job to place the top winners. More photos on page 12. (Photo by Zachary Meseck)

The parade winners are:

Group Awards:

First Place: Donna French School of Dance

Second Place: Rudolph Rough Riders

Third Place: Cub Scout pack 62

Non-Profit Awards:

First Place: Chenango Christian Church

Second Place: Chenango County Public Health

Third Place: Impact Project

BigRig Awards:

First Place: Charles J Husted, Inc.

Second Place: Don Snow Trucking, Inc.

Third Place: Vinny's Transport

Firetruck Awards:

First Place: South Otselic Fire Department

Second Place: Coventry Volunteer Fire Department

Third Place: Norwich Steam Engine

Float Awards:

First Place: UHS Chenango Memorial

Second Place: NBT

Third Place: Preferred Mutual Insurance Company

Busor Transportation Awards:

First Place: Sherburne Earlville Bus

Second Place: Unadilla Valley Central School transportation team

Third Place: Tri County Collision

Most Participation Award:

New York Central Mutual

Most Creative Award:

Sherburne Police Department- Jeff Newton

Crowd Favorite Award:

Norwich-Alvogen Company

Best of Show Award:

Rentals to Go

In January, the 2026 Chobani Holiday of Lights Parade application will be posted on social media. To enter, visit the Facebook page, Saturdays in the Park with Chobani.

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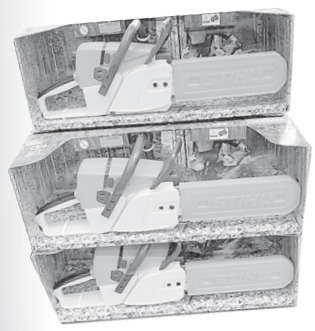

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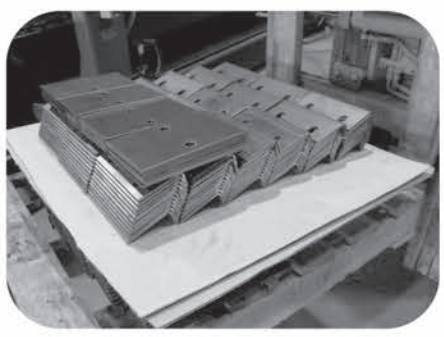

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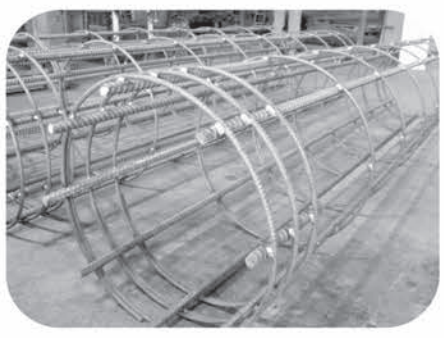

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Norwich YMCA seeks donations

Dear Friends and Supporters of the Norwich YMCA,

When my family moved to Norwich in 1956, one of the first places I became a part of was the Norwich YMCA. Nearly 70 years later, it continues to be a cornerstone of my life—and now, I've been honored with the opportunity to chair this year's annual fundraiser.

The YMCA has not only shaped my life but has also had a lasting impact on my entire family. All our children and grandchildren have been Y members. As a kid, I took swimming lessons, played every sport available, lifted weights, joined the Leaders Club, and enjoyed my all-time favorite Spaceball!

As an adult, my connection with the YMCA grew even stronger. I served on the Board of Directors, was proud to be named Family of the Year in 1980 and was recognized three times as Volunteer of the Year. Over the years, I've held running and baseball clinics, coached YBA, led weight training, and even organized a lift-a-thon to help purchase a universal gym.



Norwich YMCA Campaign Chair Mick James has been a part of the local Family YMCA since 1956 and is encouraging the community to support the organization during its key annual fundraiser. Donations can be mailed to: The Norwich Family YMCA, 68-70 North Broad Street, Norwich, NY 13815 or online donations can be made at www.norwichymca.org/donate (Submitted photo)

Now, in my senior years, I still go to the YMCA six days a week. While I may no longer be on the courts, you'll find me on the bike, rowing machine, or doing strength and core workouts. Staying active has always been important to me, especially now as I enjoy the adventures that come with this stage of life.

The YMCA truly offers something for everyone—regardless of age. From youth programs like Bolts track, basketball, soccer, tee ball, the Dolphins swim team, Y Camp, and after-school activities—to adult offerings like exercise classes, pickleball, racquetball, squash, water fitness, Silver Sneakers and more.

In celebration of the Norwich YMCA's 163rd Anniversary, our campaign goal this year is $163,000. These funds will support scholarships and vital facility improvements assuring that more children, families, and seniors can continue to benefit from all the Y has to offer.

Norwich has always stood behind its YMCA and I'm confident that together, we can continue that tradition. Please consider making a gift to help keep the Y a thriving, welcoming space for generations to come.

Donations can be mailed to: The Norwich Family YMCA, 68-70 North Broad Street, Norwich, NY 13815. Or online donations can be made here: www.norwichymca.org/donate

With gratitude,
Mick James
2025-2026 Norwich YMCA Campaign Chair



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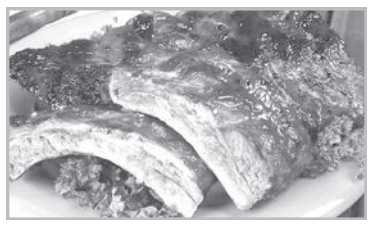



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