CAPITAL CITY
parent
An Illinois Times Publication
FREE Take One
Winter 2026



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CAPITAL CITY **parent**

Winter 2026

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The difficulty of dinner time

Strategies for taking the chaos out of family meals

CC PARENT | Pamela Savage

Ahh, yes, family dinner. As we transition into the holiday season and continue to juggle a busy schedule of after-school activities, homework and sports and add in extra festive events, dinner routines can become difficult to maintain. Unfortunately, busy schedules, wiggly kiddos, picky palates and more can all contribute to dinnertime chaos. Despite the challenges of family dinner, meals together have been proven time and time again to be important for family connection, communication and overall well-being. How can parents approach family meals with fresh energy during this hectic season? Read on for some tips for managing family mealtime during the busy evenings ahead.

Try, try again

One of the biggest stressors parents deal with during family mealtimes is food avoidance by picky eaters. We have all been that parent wondering how someone possibly could dislike delicacies such as mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables or that cheese on top of the pizza. And yet, it happens. Some kids and some foods just don't get along, but it's probably not forever. Don't be afraid to put non-preferred foods on a child's plate meal after meal. Even if they remain untouched for a while, the possibility always remains that your kiddo will pick up a less-preferred food if you keep offering it. Worth a try!

"Safe" foods

While you are busy offering new foods, don't forget to incorporate "safe" foods into your dinner routine. Safe foods are proven winners you know your child will eat, even if they are hesitant to try the new thing. The presence of safe foods may also eliminate your picky eater's worries about whether there will be anything for them to eat.



ADOBE STOCK

Let kids help

Listen, I know that "cooking with your kids" is often touted as a fun solution to mealtime woes, but at the end of a (long, busy) work or school day, maybe we aren't in the best mood and just want to get dinner on the table quickly. That's OK. With some pre-planning, we can still find ways to get our kids involved. Allow kids to comb through cookbooks and suggest recipe ideas, bring them along on your grocery trip and let them choose a new veggie, or ask them to set the table "fancy" for the family meal. Even though it's tempting for parents to quickly do everything on their own, involving our kids at mealtime can create family cohesion and overall buy-in on the meal.

Work as a team

Don't just have your kids pitch in with mealtime chores, consider involving other members of your family and community. Whether it's your parenting partner, a nearby relative or a neighbor, invite people in to help out and approach mealtime as a team.





Try a low-key vibe

You know what's not relaxing? The television blasting cartoons in the background. Our cellphones pinging with notifications throughout the meal. Your dog begging for scraps at the foot of the toddler's highchair. Consider what stressors most affect your mealtime vibes and rework the routine to be more lowkey. Think about playing chill music, silence your phone notifications and feed the dog ahead of the family. Try dimmer lighting (candlelight, even?) and keep the pace slow and easy.

Make it a theme night

Try centering dinner around a theme. An easy theme idea is Taco Tuesday (or, even better, Takeout Tuesday?) but feel free to be creative with any idea that works for your family. Theme night dinners could involve your kid's favorite book, favorite shape, favorite color, a favorite cuisine or even a type of food (like pizzas).

Write out the menu

For some, the worst part of dinner is deciding what to serve. And of course, the worst time to decide what to serve for dinner is at 6 p.m. when everyone is hungry. Early in the day, grab a whiteboard, a Post-it note, or even just a piece of paper and announce what's for dinner so everyone knows the plan. Not only does this reduce last-minute decision fatigue for the person preparing the meal, it also gives kids an idea of what to expect day-to-day. Putting a little more structure around the dinner hour can be helpful for adults and kids alike.

Lower the pressure

Sometimes dinners are going to tank. Sometimes kids aren't going to eat much. Sometimes those same kids are going to ask for a snack right after they've brushed their teeth for the night. It's annoying, but try as best as you can to hold it all lightly. If you have recurring issues that need to be dealt with, certainly address them, but if you occasionally just have a crummy night, it's OK to let it go and try again tomorrow.

Pamela Savage is a freelance writer living in Springfield. Dinner time is hard for her.







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Turn basic kitchen ingredients into holiday fun

CC PARENT | Pamela Savage

If you've got an endless day with littles ahead and are craving an easy project, look no further than your kitchen. And while baking and cooking are always an option, what about using your kitchen ingredients as crafting items to create something fun and different? Holiday kitchen crafts bring warmth and creativity to the winter season by turning everyday ingredients into festive decorations or opportunities for themed sensory play.

Cinnamon applesauce ornaments

Cinnamon applesauce ornaments are made of exactly what it sounds like – cinnamon and applesauce. In addition to two bottles of cinnamon and ¾ cup applesauce, you'll need a drinking straw and cookie cutters, some colorful ribbon and a few hours at home to enjoy the cozy scent of ornaments slowly baking in your oven.

Preheat the oven to 200°F. Mix applesauce and cinnamon until a smooth ball of dough forms. (You may need to use your hands.) Roll out the dough to about one-third inch thickness. If it's very sticky, either add more cinnamon or roll the dough between sheets of plastic wrap. Using your holiday-themed cookie cutters, cut dough into desired shapes. Make a small hole at the top of the ornament with a drinking straw or skewer (you'll use this to hang your ribbon).

Bake your ornaments for about two-



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and-a-half hours, or allow them to dry naturally over the course of a couple days, turning them occasionally to ensure they are drying evenly.

Add ribbon to the holes at the top so you can hang your ornaments. Decorate with paint markers or puffy white paint "icing" if you'd like.

With proper storage, these memorable ornaments and their signature scent will last for years.

Salt crystal snowflakes

Another fun kitchen craft that requires very few materials and just a little patience is salt crystal snowflakes. Simply cut a paper snowflake (or you could use pipe cleaners as your base), heat some water and stir in as much salt as you can until the salt crystals no longer dissolve. Note: This will be a lot of salt – almost an entire container – but regular table salt will do. No need to splurge on anything fancy!

Lay your paper snowflake on a shallow plate or dish where it can hang out for a few days, and allow your kids to heavily paint salt water onto their snowflakes. Leave the plate in a warm, sunny spot for two to three days (we put ours near our radiator). As the water evaporates, salt crystals will form and sparkle all over your snowflakes. These are pretty fragile, but once dry, you can attach ribbon and hang them in windows for the season.

Ice gems

Have kids that are into pretend play? This one is an easy win. All you'll need is a muffin tin, water and food coloring. Mix food coloring and water into individual muffin cups and freeze. Once frozen, pop your ice molds out and you have colorful, exciting ice gems that are perfect for pretend play outdoors. If you'd like to add a twist, you could even freeze little things inside the molds – tiny play figurines, glitter, sequins, whatever your kids are into. The more food coloring you use, the richer in color your gems will be. Just add imagination and gloves and off the kids go to play! These are especially fun to play with during snow days.

Peppermint playdough

Homemade playdough is much easier than it seems, and you can add a simple,

taste-safe holiday twist with store-bought peppermint extract. Add 1 cup of flour, ½ cup salt, and 2 tablespoons of cream of tartar to a small saucepan. Stir in 1 cup of water, 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil, some red food coloring (as much or as little as you'd like to customize the coloring), and eight to 10 drops of peppermint extract (again, feel free to add scent at your preference level). Cook this mixture over medium heat, stirring constantly, until it begins to pull away from the sides of the pan and form a soft ball. Next, move your playdough to a flat surface and let it cool enough that you can begin to knead it until smooth. Voila – homemade, festive peppermint-scented playdough that you can store in a resealable bag or plastic container for weeks.

Rainbow rice

I'll be honest, you'll want to make sure your vacuum cleaner is charged for this one, but homemade rainbow rice may just end up being the sensory play material that, over time, gives you back hours of peaceful moments. You'll need about 6 cups of plain, uncooked rice (give or take – you'll use 1 cup per color of rice), a bottle of white vinegar, some liquid food coloring, plastic resealable bags, and a drying surface like parchment paper or foil lined-baking sheets.

In a resealable bag (such as a Ziploc bag), add 1 teaspoon of white vinegar and 15-20 drops of one color of food coloring to 1 cup of uncooked rice. Push the air out of the bag and seal it so you can shake or massage the rice until every grain is coated in color. Repeat with as many colors and bags of rice as you'd like. Dump each color onto your flat drying surface and let the rice dry completely until it no longer transfers color to your hands when you touch it. I've found that planning to let it dry overnight works best. Pour your colors into a dry container and add measuring cups, scoops, small trucks or toys – whatever your kiddo is into. Rainbow rice lasts years when stored in a cool, dry place.

Pamela Savage is a freelance writer living in Springfield. During her free time, she can often be found puttering around the house looking for cozy projects.







Family traditions

Rachel Lauer Thomas creates keepsake jewelry out of heirloom materials

CC PARENT | Cinda Ackerman Klickna



Rachel Lauer Thomas designs jewelry crafted from heirloom items, from scraps of wedding dresses to swatches of hair. PHOTOS BY CINDA ACKERMAN KLICKNA

In the midst of a moms' night out, a young mother shows off her new necklace – a beautiful oval with a white background and swirled with hues of blue, purple and gold.

"That is gorgeous," another mother comments, to which the young mother replies, "You won't believe what it is made of – my unused breast milk!" The reactions range from puzzlement to awe.

That necklace is just one of many unique creations of Rachel Lauer Thomas, a fourth-generation jeweler. Thomas' great grandfather, Arthur John Lauer, was a watchmaker; her grandfather, Art Lauer, was part of Stout and Lauer Jewelers that served Springfield for many years; her uncle, Brian Lauer, managed AB Lauer Jewelers from 2009-2022; her father, Bruce Lauer, repaired jewelry for Denny's Jewelers and Lauers and then traveled around the country repairing jewelry. Today, Thomas has her own business, RLT Jewelry, and is proud to own the tools her father and other family members once used.

"I remember watching my dad in the shop, his dirty, calloused hands holding a shiny gold ring," she said. "I was only allowed to go into the shop for a short time due to all the chemicals, but I loved the time I could see him working."

Thomas made some jewelry as a youth, and when she officially launched RLT in 2018, she asked her father many questions about the business through video chats. "I discovered I really just had an inherent gift and understood how to do certain techniques," she said. "And I feel blessed to inherit the physical items



An oval pendant designed by Rachel Lauer Thomas that features the mother's preserved breastmilk.

from my family – books, stones and engraving tools they used."

While displaying her jewelry at a show, Thomas was approached by a lady who asked if she could make jewelry out of breastmilk. Thomas was intrigued by the idea. With her father and husband helping, she figured out how to turn the milk into stone, making sure it was free of bacteria and held its color. The process takes three days to turn the milk into powder then involves grinding it to set into an acrylic.

"Interestingly, milk has different colors – bluish, greenish, white," she said. "Much depends on the mother's diet to provide what the child needs." Thomas now works with new mothers through Hospital Sisters Health System, and she said she loves having the chance to meet the moms and celebrate their new babies.

Her work expanded to preserving flowers, then ashes, and now she tackles many materials. "The heirloom material is amazing for making memorial pieces," she said.

She has preserved hair, pet fur, pet ashes, fabrics such as pieces of a wedding dress, sand, shells, a child's tooth and even placentas, although she does not work with placentas often.

"That is difficult to work with, and many hospitals do not allow mothers to save the material," she said.

She is working on making a cuff bracelet out of a man's last, partially smoked cigar, left in his ashtray when he died. From her work area in the basement of her house, she works on items such as repairing a ring that belonged to a client's grandmother that the client wants to give to her new daughter-in-law. Thomas will repair the broken and worn shank with heirloom gold. She is also creating a wall hanging for a client out of several Mickey Mouse watches, all set to various important dates and times.

In addition, she is creating something more personal for herself. Her business logo is a dove holding a ring with the text "Keepsakes in the Making." When a client gave her a small diamond and told her to make something for herself, she decided to create a pendant of her logo, using the ring she was given when she lost a baby, along with the diamond.

In addition to the heirloom pieces, Thomas also makes beautiful fine jewelry, using many stones and gems. She is open by appointment and requires a consultation with a client to determine the best design and materials to use for a piece.

"I love making the heirloom pieces, but I also like designing special jewelry for people," she said.

In a long line of jewelers, Thomas has found her niche, making unique keepsakes.

Cinda Ackerman Klickna is a frequent contributor to Capital City Parent *and* Illinois Times.





Free play is more than just fun and games

UIS professor studies the benefits of unstructured playtime

CC PARENT | Cinda Ackerman Klickna

Play – what is it exactly? And how is it important?

In the world of dance lessons, soccer games, karate classes and baseball leagues, children are participating in structured play, which involves adult-directed activities and is important as it builds physical health. But in many families, structured play is overtaking the other important type of play – free play, in which children choose what and how to play without adult direction. Free play builds brain cells, increases cognitive skills and helps children develop social skills.

Alex Wolfe, assistant professor and director of the Exercise Science Program at University of Illinois Springfield, was part of a research study looking at free play in children ages 3-5. As part of the study conducted at Illinois State University, children wore monitors that recorded their physical activity during various types of play – creating, exploring, acting and just doing normal activities such as walking. The research also compared playing with others, playing with others nearby, or playing by oneself.

It turns out free play may do more than thought.

"Previous research has shown that free play has physical, cognitive and social benefits," Wolfe said. "My study showed that the type of activity youth engage in varies in the amount of activity they accumulate throughout the day and that free play may assist youth in obtaining the daily recommended amount of physical activity. This may ultimately lead to improved health and wellbeing in our youth population."



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This makes recess at school, which is free play, even more important. Studies have shown that recess can help children increase learning, develop social skills and improve classroom behavior. Many school districts across the U.S. have reduced or cut out recess to provide more time for academics, a practice which may actually hurt rather than help school performance.

Mason Kuhn, director of the UIS School of Education, teaches a methods course for prospective science teachers, giving them experiences that can be used with future elementary students. The method combines free play with structured lessons.

"Let's say we are teaching energy transfer," he said. "We flip the typical science unit that starts with memorizing terms and instead start with play time. We put matchbox cars on the floor and tell the students to play; they are having fun and become more engaged; suddenly, a few are ramming their cars into each other. At that point, we stop

and introduce questions – what made the car go backwards when it was hit, etc."

Students then design their own experiments (employing creative free play), argue over ideas of why certain things happen and develop a creative project.

Gregg "Bagel" Johnson, dean of the UIS College of Public Affairs and Education, said play is extremely important in education. "We need to expand how we think about play and its role," Johnson said. "UIS serves as examples for others. We teach techniques, students practice and experiment, and we use simulation, which is just a fancy word for play. There is a lot happening to ensure play is part of learning."

So, how can parents encourage free play at home? Set out different items – blocks, toy cars, crayons and paper, animal figures, dress up clothes, etc. Let children choose what they want to do, and let them explore and be creative. Don't interfere or direct.

"Let children play with blocks; don't show them how to stack them, do it for them, or correct what they are doing," said Leah Wilson, executive director of Kidzeum of Health and Science in downtown Springfield. "This is how they learn cause and effect and how to think on their own."

Let children play on their own, with, of course, safety oversight, which helps them learn self-direction. Invite friends over for free playtime, which can help children learn how to get along with others.

Also, get involved with the play yourself. Stack your own blocks, move cars around and ask questions such as "How did you make the castle so big?" or "What do you think these animals are doing?"

Finally, parents need to find balance for themselves and their children. Sports and other structured activities provide many benefits; giving equal attention to free play builds important learning skills.

Cinda Ackerman Klickna, a former teacher, is interested in finding out more about what is happening at UIS. In the meantime, she continues to try out fun, free and structured play with her three grandsons.





Family event calendar

PARENT | Daron Walker

November

Holiday Arts and Crafts Fair
Fri., Nov. 13, 5-8pm and Sat., Nov. 14, 9am-2pm. Find unique gifts, beautiful art and amazing crafts by local artisans. Includes bake sale and live music by local artists throughout the day. Free. Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 745 Woodside Rd, Springfield, IL 62711, 217-585-9550.

MomCo's 2nd Annual Pots & Pals Chili Cook Off
Fri., Nov. 13, 6-8pm. Warm up with a bowl (or two) at this community event bringing together cooks, neighbors and plenty of chili. Chili cooks of all experience levels will compete for both Judges' Choice and People's Choice awards. Guests can sample every entry, vote for their favorites and enjoy side categories such as spiciest chili and first pot emptied. Chili tasting: Adults $10, children 12 and younger $5. Trinity Lutheran School, 515 s. MacArthur, 2178517358.

Pippin
Fri., Nov. 13, 7:30pm, Sat., Nov. 14, 7:30pm, Sun., Nov. 15, 2pm, Fri., Nov. 20, 7:30pm, Sat., Nov. 21, 7:30pm and Sun., Nov. 22, 2pm. There's magic to do when a prince learns the true meaning of glory, love and war in Stephen Schwartz's iconic and unforgettable musical masterpiece. springfieldtheatrecentre.com. $23. Hoogland Center for the Arts LRS Theatre 1, 420 S. Sixth St., 217-523-2787.

"The Road to Adventure: Exploring Route 66"
Wednesdays-Sundays, 9am-4pm. Through Dec. 31. This vibrant, hands-on exhibit brings the magic of the historic Mother Road to life - and it's fun for the whole family. kidzeum.org. $5-$12. Kidzeum of Health and Science, 412 E. Adams St., 217-679-2123.

Girls on the Run Fall 5K
Sat., Nov. 14, 9-11:30am. Support Girls on the Run of Central Illinois participants by joining them at this 5K. Celebrate and honor their season of growth, connection and confidence. Event begins at 9am with family-friendly activities followed by the 5K at 10am. Lincoln Land Community College, 5250 Shepherd Road, 217-726-9808.

Little Flower Holiday Craft Bazaar
Sat., Nov. 14, 9am-4pm and Sun., Nov. 15, 10am-2pm. More than 40 vendors will have hand-made crafts for sale. Concessions available and in lieu of entry fee, consider bringing a canned good for the donation drive. Little Flower Parish Center, 900 Stevenson Dr., 217-529-1606.

Garden Spa
Sat., Nov. 14, 10-11:30am. Kids ages 7–10 can participate in a fun, hands-on class where they'll make their own spa products using all-natural ingredients. Participants will create bath bombs, lip balms, sugar scrubs and a face mask to take home and enjoy. Visit bit.ly/SPD_Garden_Spa. Activity #361132. Residents $25, non-residents $30. Washington Park Botanical Garden, 1740 W. Fayette Ave., 217-546-4116.

Zoo Rangers
Sat., Nov. 14, 10am, 1pm and Sat., Dec. 12, 10am, 1pm. Each month, children ages 6-7 will meet and learn about a new animal in the zoo classroom. Classes include a story, animal encounter, craft and snack. Classes are identical in each session. Registration required 24 hours before each class. Visit: bit.ly/Zoo_Rangers. Activity #340505. Residents $25, non-residents $30. Henson Robinson Zoo, 1100 E. Lake Shore Dr., 217-585-1821.

Dinovember Lego Build & Play
Sat., Nov. 14, 3-4:30pm. An afternoon of Dino brick builds. Supplies are limited. Due to small pieces, program is recommended for ages 5 and older. lincolnlibrary.info. Free. Lincoln Library, 326 S. Seventh St., 217-753-4900.

History Night at the Old State Capitol: Lincoln and Thanksgiving
Sat., Nov. 14, 5-7pm. Explore the building on a self-guided tour and attend a 30-45 minute presentation offered at 5:15 and 6:15 pm. Learn about the role Abraham Lincoln had in shaping the modern holiday of Thanksgiving and some of its traditions, including the famous pardoning of the turkey. Reservations optional. Free. Old State Capitol State Historic Site, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, 217-785-9363.

Little Lincoln's Fireside Tales: Food
Tue., Nov. 17, 9-11:30am. Calling all little chefs (up to age age 5). Explore the world of food through stories and engaging experiences with the ALPLM Education Team. Advance registration required. Due to increased demand, two sessions are offered. Select ya preferred session. presidentlincoln.illinois.gov. Free. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. Sixth St., 217-558-8844.

Tiny Tots Ice Skating
Wed., Nov. 18, 8:30-9am, Wed., Dec. 2, 8:30-9am, Wed., Dec. 9, 8:30-9am and Wed., Dec. 16, 8:30-9am. Preschoolers ages 2-5 will learn the basics of figure skating with professional coaches. No special equipment needed. Rental skates provided. No class Nov. 25. Register at bit.ly/TinyTots_Skating. Activity #350401. $77R/$97NR. Nelson Center, 1601 N. Fifth St., 217-753-2800.

History in Film
Wed., Nov. 18, 3:30-5:30pm. Enjoy this showing of *A Muppet Christmas Carol* in digital surround sound and some history

of Christmas in Springfield. Film is rated G. Presented by the Sangamon Valley Collection and the State Historic Sites of Springfield. lincolnlibrary.info. Free. Lincoln Library, 326 S. Seventh St., 217-753-4900.

Teen Snowflake Tape Resist Painting
Wed., Nov. 18, 5-6:30pm. Make snowflake tape resist art and meet like-minded minds. Dress for a mess. For teens (13-18). Free. Lincoln Library, 326 S. Seventh St., 217-753-4900.

Songs for All Ages - A Sensory Friendly Event
Thu., Nov. 19, 6:30pm. This performance is designed for individuals with sensory needs. One of Springfield's most-loved singer-songwriters, Tom Irwin has been taking experiences, turning them into songs, and giving those songs life through performances and recordings for more than 40 years. Irwin's most recent album is "One for the Kiddos," and the audience will hear and join in on tunes from that kid-friendly album as well as other songs from his broad repertoire. $10. UIS Studio Theatre, One University Plaza, 217-206-6160.

WonderClubs at the Old State Capitol
Thursdays, 4-5pm. Through Dec. 17. WonderClubs are a series of free and fun STEAM programs for children ages 3-11. Participants will experience hands-on challenges and fun crafts all while learning and wondering at our world. Registration recommended. wonderclubsOSC.eventbrite.com. Free. Old State Capitol State Historic Site, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, 217-785-9363.

Fall Harvest Cluster Dog Show
Nov. 20-22, 8am-5pm. The Fall Harvest Cluster is the premier fall AKC Dog Show in the Midwest. See some of the best dogs in the country in a variety of events and competitions. Includes vendors. Free admission. Parking is $10 per car per day. Lake County Fairgrounds, Grayslake, 1060 E. Peterson Road, 847-680-7200.

Annie
Fri., Nov. 20. Opens Nov. 20. Believe it or not, Annie is 50! Join The Legacy Theatre for its 50th anniversary celebration of this beloved musical. More details TBA. The





Legacy Theatre, 101 E. Lawrence, 217-528-9760.

Zoo Booth
Sat., Nov. 21, 10am-1pm, Wed., Dec. 2, 10am-1pm and Wed., Dec. 16, 10am-1pm. Henson-Robinson Zoo will bring animals, activities and conservation information to Springfield historic sites on selected dates through the fall. At two locations: the Dana-Thomas House and the Old State Capitol. If weather is inclement, Dana-Thomas activities will be moved inside the Old State Capitol. Free. Dana-Thomas House, 301 E. Lawrence Ave., 217-782-6776.

Holiday Market & Sweet Shoppe
Sat., Nov. 21, 9am-3pm. Shop for handcrafted items, décor and practical gift items created by talented Springfield Ceramics and Crafts Club artisans. The shoppe is loaded with homemade treats and the Cocoa Bar provides beverages. The event supports art education in the community. springfieldceramicsandcrafters.org. Free. Springfield Ceramics and Crafts Club, 2626 S. Pasfield St., 217-638-4847.

Toddler Skate with Characters
Third Saturday of every month, 10-11:30am. Through May 15. Toddler time, for children ages 6 and younger only, is back. October's guests are Woody and Buzz Lightyear. Enjoy a meet and greet, photo opportunities, a skating lesson and dancing with the characters. skatelandsouth.com. $15. Skateland South, 1500 Recreation Dr., 217-546-4543.

Light Up The Gables
Fri., Nov. 27. Parade and tree lighting at 5pm featuring Santa & Mrs. Claus, Abraham and Mary Lincoln and more. Includes children's events from 3 to 5pm. Free. The Gables, 2800 Plaza Dr., 793-3344.

Holiday Zoo Lights
Fridays-Sundays, 5-9pm. Through Dec. 22. Stroll through the zoo and enjoy thousands of lights and themed lighted display. Enjoy a hot chocolate or hang out under the tent to enjoy a s'more after roasting a marshmallow over the fire pit. $7.50 adults, $5.50 children 3-12, free for children 2 and younger. Henson Robinson Zoo, 1100 E. Lake Shore Dr., 217-585-1821.

"Christmas through the Decades"
Fri., Nov. 27, 5-8pm, Fri., Dec. 4, 5-8pm, Fri., Dec. 11, 5-8pm and Fri., Dec. 18, 5-8pm. Candlelight tours are self-guided so visitors can arrive anytime between the hours of 5 and 7:30pm and take as much or as little time as desired exploring the historic house. Doors close at 7:30pm. The Museum Gift Shop will be open. Enter house through the front door. $10 for adults, ages 6-18 $5, age 5 and younger free. C.H. Moore Homestead DeWitt County Museum, Clinton, 219 E. Woodlawn St., 217-935-6066.

Jacksonville Christmas Parade
Fri., Nov. 27, 6-7pm. Welcome Santa Claus to Jacksonville by lining the Downtown Square for WJVO's annual parade filled with lights. Parade begins from the lot across from the Municipal building and proceeds around the Downtown Square before ending at Santa's House. Free. Downtown Jacksonville, Jacksonville, Central Park, 217-243-5678.

SRC Ugly Sweater Run/Small Biz Saturday
Sat., Nov. 28, 8-10am. Besides the run, enjoy doughnuts, hot cocoa (regular and spiked), coffee, an ugly sweater contest and prizes. Springfield Running Center, 2943 W. White Oaks Dr., Ste. 1, 217-787-4400

Illinois Local Holiday Market
Sat., Nov. 28, 9am-4pm. Shop local and discover unique gifts, handmade goods, food and more from Illinois small businesses. This family-friendly event will include Santa, Bluey and Bingo, live entertainment from SYPG, Dayna's Dance Revolution and Springfield Theatre Centre. $5 for age 13 and older. Orr Building, Illinois State Fairgrounds, 801 Sangamon Ave., 217-210-1589.

Christmas at Sugar Creek Vendor Fair
Sat., Nov. 28, 10am-3pm. Start that holiday shopping here. Features more trhan 40 vendors. Bring a non-perishable food item for the local food pantry. Used book sale and bake sale available for purchase. A food truck will be on site for breakfast and lunch. Free admission. Sugar Creek United Methodist Church, Chatham, 1022 New City Road, 217-414-7691.

Kringle Market at the Inn at 835
Sat., Nov. 28, 11am-4pm. Kick off the holiday season with this cozy indoor shopping experience. Discover unique gifts, handmade goods, festive décor and seasonal treasures from local makers all in one of Springfield's most charming venues. The Inn at 835 Boutique Hotel, 835 S. Second St., 217-523-4466.

DECEMBER
LLCC Choir Concert "Americana"
Fri., Dec. 4, 1-2pm. The LLCC Choir, directed by Dr. See Tsai Chan, will perform pieces from jazz, musicals, folk, traditional hymns, gospel and works by American composers to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the nation. In A. Lincoln Commons. llcc.edu. Free. A. Lincoln Commons, 5250 Shepherd Road, 217-786-2200.

White Christmas
Fri., Dec. 4, 7:30pm, Sat., Dec. 5, 7:30pm, Sun., Dec. 6, 2pm, Fri., Dec. 11, 7:30pm, Sat., Dec. 12, 7:30pm and Sun., Dec. 13, 2pm. Based on the beloved, timeless film, this heartwarming musical adaptation features 17 Irving Berlin songs. springfieldtheatrecentre.com. $23. Hoogland Center for the Arts LRS Theatre 1, 420 S. Sixth St., 217-523-2787.

Christmas Market
Sat., Dec. 5, 9am-3pm. Shop more than 50 local vendors while enjoying live music and food from cottage bakers. Santa Claus will make a visit. $3 each or $5 for a family, children younger than 12 free. The Brinkerhoff Mansion, 1500 N. Fifth St., 217-361-5555.

Holiday Open House
Sat., Dec. 5, 1-4pm. See Edwards Place in holiday finery while listening (and singing!) carols around a piano once heard by Abraham Lincoln and meeting a Civil War-era Santa Claus. Refreshments provided. edwardsplace.org. Free. Edwards Place, Springfield Art Association, 700 N. Fourth St., 217-523-2631.

The Nutcracker
Sat., Dec. 5, 2pm and Sun., Dec. 6, 2pm. The timeless holiday classic that has enchanted Springfield-area audiences for generations, now under the banner of the Copper Coin Ballet Company. Created by Julie Ratz, Ronda Brinkman, Gina Russell and Grace Nanavati, and performed by a talented company of more than 100 local dancers. UIS Performing Arts Center, One University Plaza, 217-206-6160.

Holiday Lights Parade
Sat., Dec. 5, 5:30-6:30pm. Kick off the 2026 holiday season in style with Springfield Jaycees' Holiday Lights Parade. Parade route: Begins at Seventh and Jefferson streets. Heads west on Jefferson. Turns south on Fifth Street. Goes east on Monroe Street. Turns north on Sixth Street and ends at Washington Street. Free. Downtown Springfield, 1 Horace Mann Plaza, 2176381068.

Frostbite Festival 10-mile and 2-mile races
Sun., Dec. 6, 9am-12pm. Celebrate the start of the winter season with this iconic west-side Springfield race. The 63rd annual Springfield Road Runners Club's Frostbite Festival offers a 2-mile race and 10-mile race. All race finishers will receive a medal. Runners and walkers of all paces are welcome. Varies. AMF Strike N Spare Lanes, 2660 W. Lawrence Ave., N/A.

Fall Concert
Mon., Dec. 7, 7-8pm. The LLCC Band will perform. Free. A. Lincoln Commons, 5250 Shepherd Road, 217-786-2200.

Mary Bryant Choir Holiday Celebration
Wed., Dec. 9, 11:30am. Welcome the holiday season with the sounds of the season by the Mary Bryant Choir. Includes complimentary punch and cookies. Senior Services of Central Illinois, 701 W. Mason St., 217-503-4643.

Holiday Pops in the Heartland
Fri., Dec. 11, 7:30-9pm. Lights, camera, holiday cheer! Celebrate the season with a festive blend of cinematic magic and holiday tradition featuring music from *Home Alone*, *The Snowman*, *The Polar Express*, and more. ilsymphony.org. $35-$70. UIS Performing Arts Center, One University Plaza, 217-206-6160.







Growing up is a big job.

Staying healthy shouldn't be.

Regular checkups give your child's doctor a chance to monitor growth and development, answer your questions and catch potential concerns early.

Make your child's health a priority. Schedule their annual appointment with their primary care provider by calling **217.545.8000** or visiting **siumed.org**.

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