December Holidays

Christmas: The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of the man called Jesus, early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. The winter solstice was a time for rejoicing and looking forward to longer days with more sunlight. Food and drink were plentiful.

In Rome Saturnalia - a holiday in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture - was a hedonistic celebration that continued for a full month. In Scandinavia, the Norse celebrated Yule from December 21 through January. Large logs were set on fire and feasting lasted until the logs burned out.

In the early years of Christianity, Easter was the main holiday. In the fourth century church officials decided to institute the birth of Jesus as a holiday. Pope Julius I chose December 25 in an effort to absorb the pagan Saturnalia festival. First called the Feast of the Nativity, the custom spread to Egypt by 432 and to England by the end of the sixth century. By the Middle Ages Christianity had for the most part, replaced pagan religion.

In the early 17th century a wave of religious reform changed Christmas celebrations in Europe. Puritan forces took over England in 1645 and vowed to rid the country of decadence, including Christmas. When Charles II was returned to the throne, the popular holiday returned.

When Pilgrims came to America in 1620 Christmas was not a holiday. From 1659 to 1681 the celebration of Christmas was outlawed in Boston, with a fine of five shillings for anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit. In contrast, in Jamestown Christmas was enjoyed by all without incident. After the American Revolution, English customs fell out of favor, and Christmas was not declared a federal holiday until June 26, 1870.

The early 19th century was a time of great social and political turbulence and some Christmas celebrations became violent and turned into riots, after which Americans began to see Christmas as a family holiday instead of a raucous carnival. Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", with its message of charity and good will towards all humankind, was one of many influences that inspired this change. Old customs were unearthed by new European immigrants and the Catholic and Presbyterian churches. In the next 100 years, Americans built a tradition all their own, including sharing meals with family and friends, attending church, decorating trees, sending holiday cards, and exchanging gifts. Most families bought into the idea that they were celebrating Christmas how it had been done for centuries, but in reality they had really re-invented a holiday to fill the cultural needs of a growing nation.

"**Chanukah**, Chanukah, feast of joy and light…candles gleam"….this is one of the many refrains sung during this holiday, which is also referred to as "The Festival of Lights". It is an eight-day Jewish holiday celebrating the rededication of the second Temple in Jerusalem over 2000 years ago. According to tradition, a small flask of oil meant to last only one night to light the Temple's menorah burned for eight full days. It was considered a miracle. Families light the menorah each night with the helper candle, *the shamash*, beginning with one candle and ending with all eight. The bright glow of the candles is heart-warming. (The photo shows a Huntcliff friendly menorah as it is lit by battery-operated LED lights and no candles). Blessings are recited when the candles are lit and often traditional songs are sung. Children play a *dreidel* game and small gifts or *gelt*…chocolate coins are distributed. *Latkes*…potato pancakes and *sufganiyot*….jelly doughnuts, both fried, are eaten to commemorate the oil's significance. We all look forward to eating these delicious treats. This year, the holiday begins on December 14. Chanukah celebrates the miracles bestowed upon the Jewish people: religious freedom over oppression and light over darkness. It is important to stand up for your religious beliefs and to find hope even in difficult times.

HUNTCLIFF HARBINGER

December 2025

The mission of the Huntcliff Harbinger is to announce planned events and activities for residents and interested parties. Also included are photographs and stories of resident artwork, club reports, and staff and volunteer recognition. The HH is written and developed by the Harbinger Editorial Staff.

Editorial Staff: Joan Abram, Erma Davis, Dixie Lampert, Marie Robertson, and Ray Bowyer.

Contributors: Marvin Fellner, Dawn Hamer, Sarah Levy, Lila Nathanson, Hal Parker, Brandt Ross, and Art Schultz.

Distribution Marcia Swanson.

Huntcliff Residents Website: www.huntsumres.org. The web site now has the daily activity schedule.

Highlights of DecemberEvents

- Tree lighting December 4
- Brunch with Santa December 6
- Intergenerational Hanukkah December 7
- Visit to Fernbank museum
- Visit to governor's mansion
- Attend Roswell United Methodist Church Christmas concert
- Holiday party December 16
- New Years Eve Gala

Rhannon Purdy

Rhannon Purdy has been Director of Sales at Huntcliff Summit for just a little over a year. She must be doing something right, because the number of apartments rented is at an all-time high. She grew up in Washington, Georgia, between Athens and Augusta. She is a graduate of Georgia Southern University, in Savannah, Georgia. She has 28 years experience in sales, most of it in senior living communities. She has a grown son living in Florida. Her family at this time consists of a boyfriend and three dogs. People are curious about her short hair. It started when her little brother used to tease her by pulling her hair. It continued when she owned a convertible. Now she just likes the short hair. In her spare time, Rhannon likes to create custom T-shirts for friends and family.

Activity Summaries

Hal Parker Players: The Players are taking a break in December. Watch for their return in January!

Huntcliff Book Club: Research tells us that reading has several health benefits and those benefits can last a lifetime. So, during the holiday season, pull out an old favorite and re-read; or better yet, watch for announcements regarding the Huntcliff Book Club selection for January 2026 (There will be no meeting in December). Read and join in a lively discussion on January 8, 2026 at 2:30 p.m. in the Veranda. The book tentatively selected is "Emma" by Jane Austen. All residents are welcome. Although having read the book is recommended, it is not a requirement for attendance. STAY HEALTHY.

Sunrise Singers: concluded a very successful season with concerts on last November 18 and November 29. Residents, families and friends enjoyed renditions of songs by Cole Porter, Frank Loesser, Carole King, Billy Joel, Woody Guthrie, John Denver, Rogers & Hammerstein and Lee Greenwood. After a break, the 30+ members will resume rehearsals in the New Year for upcoming presentations. Watch for posted announcements.

Huntcliff Mens Club (HMC): The HMC continues to work toward providing exciting, informative and fun-filled activities for both male and female residents. (Some events are for men only.) These activities are always enjoyable. Check the monthly calendar and postings in the elevator, bulletin boards near the mail-room, or the residents web site for dates and times.

Opera: "Amahl and the Night Visitors" by Gian Carlo Menotti. Amahl is a crippled shepherd boy and the visitors are three kings with rich gifts, on their way to find a king. Amahl offers his staff as an additional gift and suddenly finds he can walk.

Art Club: The Art Club will feature two programs in December, both on Wednesdays at 2:00PM One will feature Masterworks of American Art and one will feature World Heritage Sights The last two weeks there will be no programs during Holiday Season and we will return after the first of the year with more interesting and exciting Artists.

CuriosityU Please join us as Huntcliff Summit continues to present CuriosityU, a series of video lectures by college professors on hundreds of different topics. Recent videos have been on King Arthur, Salem Witch Trials, Architecture's Amazing Bridges, and History of America's Cemeteries. Future presentations will include Mount Everest, Ernest Hemingway, the Real Story of the Space Race, and Christmas Movies: Classics, the Best, and the Worst . Each presentation is about 50-60 minutes, followed by a discussion of the material, which lasts only as long as residents are interested in speaking about the topic. CuriosityU videos are presented on Sunday at 2:30 PM in the Veranda Room, and each week's topic is posted in advance in the elevators and on the bulletin board.

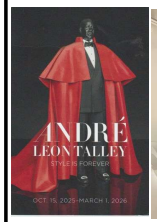
Brandt Ross Programs: "Women of Valor—WWII" (part I) and "Holiday songs for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza, and songs about America.

Gardens: If you have plants that need a winter home, the greenhouse is ready for them. Please read and observe the guidelines for using this space, which are posted inside.

Audible Book Club: A milestone was accomplished in September when Bunny Maran completed the reading of 500 pages of "*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"* by Betty Smith. It took her 4 months, reading 30 pages once a week for 1 - 1 1/2 hour sessions to achieve this goal. Many read the book in their youth and now in their 80's and 90's viewed the story with a different perspective. In November, the group met on Saturday's at 1:30pm. If you are experiencing any special issues and would enjoy having a book read to you and discuss it afterwards, come to the Library on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 1:00pm and take part in this enjoyable activity. Buckeye by Patrick Ryan is the current selection.

The Knit and Stitch group has begun a new project of knitting squares which will be crocheted together to make afghans., Lisa Schilling's church will find those who are in need.

A few souls from Huntcliff tripped up to **Gibbs Gardens** to enjoy a beautiful day strolling through the Japanese garden, seeing the wildflower area, having lunch, and doing some shopping in the unique gift shop, leafpeeping all the way.



Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) Field Trip. On October 22, members of Huntcliff's art class were treated to nearly 70 looks from the personal collection of Andre Leon Talley, distinguished editor, cultural icon, and SCAD mentor. The exhibition entitled "Andre Leon Talley: Style is Forever" featured garments and accessories by designers such as Tom Ford, Ralph Rucci, Manolo Blahnik, and Dapper Dan.

Another Holiday

Kwanzaa is an annual weeklong celebration in the United States that honors African heritage and African American culture. It was created by Maulana Karenga, a professor of Africana Studies at California State University, in 1966 and is observed from December 26 through January 1.

Kwanzaa was originally envisioned as an alternative to Christmas in order to reclaim important African values and build community among African Americans, but was later declared a non-religious holiday so that practicing Christians would not be alienated (Many African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa as well as observe Christmas).

Dr. Karenga created seven guiding principles to be discussed during the week of Kwanzaa which represent seven values of African culture that help build and reinforce community among African Americans. Note: in the Swahili language, these principles are: Imoja (Unity); Kujichagulia (Self-Determination); Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility); Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics); Nia (Purpose); Kuumba (Creativity); and Imani (Faith). Each day a different principle is discussed and a candle is lit on the kinara. On the final day of Kwanzaa, families enjoy an African feast called karamu.

The first Kwanzaa stamp was issued by the US Post Office in 1997. In that same year President Bill Clinton gave the first declaration marking the holiday. Subsequent Presidents George Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden issued greetings in observance of Kwanzaa.