

# December 2024





# Beyond the Hollywood checklist: The true essence of the holiday spirit

**Hadassa Ferreira**  
Arts and Culture Editor

November has arrived, and the black, orange, and purple of Halloween gave way to the red, green, and white of Christmas. The only remnant of orange remaining is the one that represents Thanksgiving. All this visual change can only mean one thing—and you know exactly what it is: the holidays are just around the corner!

The holiday season is a time of year that touches everyone in a special way, warming hearts and bringing people together. It's a time for spending with loved ones, enjoying delicious food, celebrating family traditions, and looking forward to the year ahead.

It is a fact that throughout humanity's history, the media has played a key role in shaping how the holiday season is portrayed and how people are expected to celebrate it.

Some of the most famous Hollywood movies present the holiday season as a time of winter, snow, hot chocolate, cookies, gifts, and family gatherings. This portrayal leads some to believe that the perfect holiday spirit revolves around cold weather, snow, gifts, and family reunions.

Beyond that, for those who

don't have all these elements, it can lead to feelings of exclusion, as they may believe their holidays are missing something essential to the holiday spirit.

The reality is, there is no one specific way to define what the holiday spirit is.

The holiday spirit can differ from family to family, region to region, generation to generation, and culture to culture.

In Southern American countries, this season of the year marks the beginning of summer. As a result, those who live there could say that the holiday spirit is all about extreme heat, bright sun, days spent at the beach, family barbecues outside, and pool parties with friends.

"During the Christmas period, we [in Bolivia] are in the middle of the summer, so it's pretty common to go to the pool or open field activities," said Carlos Salas, a sophomore accounting major. "It's a time that feels dedicated to your friends and family," he added.

For those with smaller families, instead of a traditional dinner, a trip to explore new places and try new experiences might be their holiday tradition.

Immigrants or international students living abroad might celebrate with a Friendsgiving and a fun game night, and for them,

this could be their definition of a perfect holiday.

One of the most common ways to celebrate the holidays is by reflecting on cherished memories with those you're spending the season with. Sharing stories and laughing about how life has "lived" and led you to where you are today creates lasting memories.

Using this time of the year to do good things for those in need is also always a meaningful way to celebrate the holidays and embrace the season's spirit. This time of year is about being grateful for the blessings of life and health as we reach the end of another year. Sharing what we have, even if it's just our time—which is precious—can be a powerful way to feel the holiday spirit.

Holidays are about staying positive and focusing on what we still hope to achieve, knowing that a whole new year lies ahead to try again. Taking time for self-reflection during this season is another meaningful way to embrace the holiday spirit.

"The holiday spirit for me, as a Christian, is about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ and reflecting on His love for us and salvation," said Stevenson Michel, a junior student majoring in biomedical sciences.

Michel also mentioned, "For my family, the holiday spirit means coming together, celebrating what God has done, and finding moments of reflection before the new year."

Holidays are all about happiness and positive emotions! So, the ultimate goal should be to spend this time doing things that warm your heart, bring a smile to your face, and fill you with excitement.

From now on, whenever you feel like you're missing the holiday spirit because you haven't checked off every item on the mainstream holiday checklist, don't feel bad! Only you can live your life, and your celebration is unique to you.

You've been unique in your experiences all year long, so, why not be unique during your holidays as well?



At Saint Leo University, one tradition that truly embodies the holiday spirit is the annual "Christmas Tree Lighting" event. (Photo was taken by Hadassa Ferreira)

## Newsroom

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We are located in the Student Activities Building

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# Making the holidays special through food

**Hannah Lynn**  
World News Editor

A huge part of what makes Christmas special for many people is the memories they make with friends and family. One popular way to create these memories is by sharing and cooking favorite holiday recipes.

Here are a few recipes from Saint Leo Students that bring fond memories and are perfect for any holiday dinner!

## Pineapple Stuffing

Emily Schute, a junior political science major, brings this holiday recipe. For this recipe, it requires:

- Five slices of white sandwich bread cut into one-inch squares
- Half a cup of softened butter
  - Four eggs
  - One cup of sugar
- 20 ounces of crushed pineapples

“With these ingredients, in a large mixing bowl, beat together the softened butter, sugar, and eggs until creamy, then add in drained crushed pineapples, then slowly add in the bread. Put in a pan at 350 [degrees] for about an hour” responded Schute.

This recipe brings many fond memories to Emily and her family. “When my aunt married my uncle, my mom was young...they started incorporating her recipes and favorite foods...and now we

make it every year...it's my favorite side [dish]. Our Thanksgiving dinner has a mix of all my aunts and uncles' recipes from their family,” relayed Schute.

## Eggs In a Basket

Colleen Kester, a junior political science major, brings this holiday recipe. For this recipe, it requires:

- Four eggs
- Four slices of bread
- Butter

“With these ingredients, you cut shapes into the slices of bread with the cookie cutter and keep both the slice and the cutout. Next, you would grease a frying pan with butter and heat, and lay the bread slices and the cutouts in the pan. Now you crack one egg into each slice of bread and fry for two minutes, flip it, and fry again for another two more,” relayed Kester.

For Kester, this recipe brings nostalgia and childhood memories. “My mom used to make this for me all the time as a kid, and it's nothing extremely special, but [she] always made this when we would ask for it. I just loved the name of it as a kid, now that I am on my own, I find myself making it whenever I miss home and her.”

## Tall House Pie

Salvatore Polizzi, a senior political science major, brings this holiday recipe. For this recipe, it requires:

- One unbaked 9-inch deep-dish pie shell
- Two eggs
- ½ cup of all-purpose flour
- ½ cup of granulated sugar
- ¾ cup (1 ½ Sticks) butter, softened
- Splash of vanilla extract
- 1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 325 degrees for 60 minutes or more
- Vanilla ice crème on top

This recipe brings fond childhood memories of time spent with family. “My mom got this recipe from my aunt years ago, and she has made it on special occasions ever since. This pie has always brought a

smile to my face. I especially loved the memories in the kitchen with my mom where she taught me how to make it.”

“This is not just a pie, but something that brings my family together. No matter where life brings me, this pie will always hold these special memories, and I hope to share them with my kids one day,” shared Polizzi.

The holidays, even though they may be stressful for some, always have a bright side to the chaos. Creating a deeper bond with family members and friends through sharing and teaching favorite recipes has the possibility of creating lifelong positive memories.



While cooking is half the fun, sharing the recipe with others and seeing joy as they dig into your favorite recipes helps to foster positive memories and a greater connection. (Photo by Hannah Lynn)



Another fun Christmas activity is to make and or buy cookies and to have a decorating contest. This will surely make unforgettable memories as many people's creative sides will show up! (Photo by Hannah Lynn)



Festive hot chocolate bombs are a fun way to get into the holiday spirit and make ever-lasting memories with friends and family. (photo taken by Hannah Lynn)





# Homesick for the holidays: Ways to brighten your break away from home

**Brooke Brinker**  
Staff Writer

The holidays are normally a joyful time for many people, but unfortunately, some students can't spend the holidays at home this year.

For students who are far from home or studying in different countries, returning home for winter break may not be possible. If you find yourself unable to go home for the holidays, please remember that you're not alone—many others share this experience, and together, we can make the season feel a little warmer.

Even in the most challenging situations, there is always a positive perspective to be found.

There are many Christmas events not too far from Saint Leo University, bringing back the nostalgic feeling of Christmas to students who attend.

For example, you could attend ZooTampa at Lowry Park's "Christmas in the Wild" event. This event at the zoo is open during the beginning of winter break, ending Dec. 23, creating a perfect way to get off campus for a while, drink hot chocolate, and look at the adorable animals.

There are other Christmas events such as Busch Gardens' "Christmas Town" and even a snow park called Snowcat Ridge.

The Busch Gardens "Christmas Town" in Tampa is filled with villages, Christmas lights, and live entertainment. The event has al-

ready started and ends Jan. 5.

Snowcat Ridge in Dade City has snow tubing, ice skating, holiday shops, and holiday characters all through December. This park offers snow, which is a rare sight for Florida residents to witness. Go get your tickets and enjoy all the amazing events for a fun Christmas evening.

While you are away from loved ones, you can make the most of the situation by adding these Christmas festivities to your bucket list this year.

It is important to make the time you have special in your own way. You can host a holiday gathering, take weekend trips to nearby cities or states, practice self-care, and bake holiday goodies. You can also try to connect with family virtually, even if you cannot be with them in-person.

Student Success Coach Audrea Maxwell said, "Being away from their family for the holidays could be an excellent opportunity for students to learn a new skill or pick up a hobby. It is difficult to be away from family during the holidays - it leaves the student with a lot of free time, so keeping busy could take their minds off their loneliness while they engage in new activities."

It is important to know that everything will be alright. The holiday season is extremely special, and if you are going to be on campus, there are still ways to make it memorable. It might not be home, but it can feel just as warm and fun if you make the most of it!



Visit nearby Christmas tree lightings and go for a drive to see beautiful Christmas lights. (Photo by Brooke Brinker)



Saint Leo decorates the campus for Dec., leaving the campus feeling festive and joyful for students. (Photo from @saintleouniv on Instagram)



As a fun Christmas activity, go visit the Bush Gardens' "Christmas Town", which has delicious holiday foods, Christmas lights, and a cute Christmas village. (Photo from @buschgardens on Instagram)



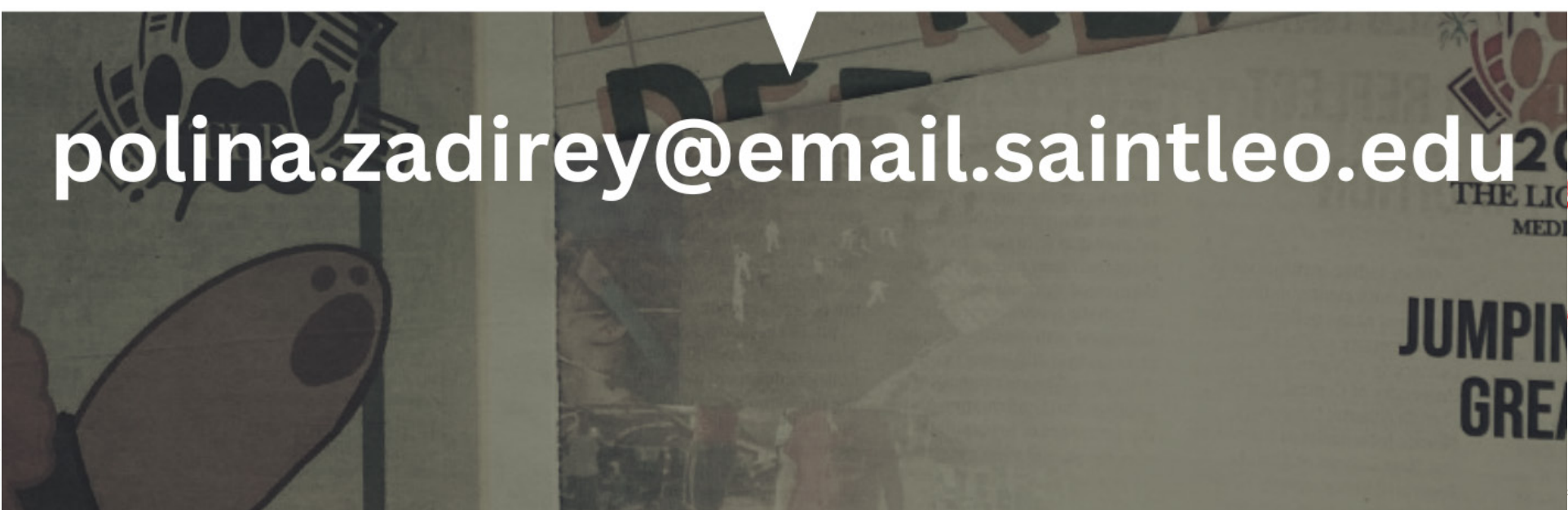




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# Unconventional

Christmas

Media



Books

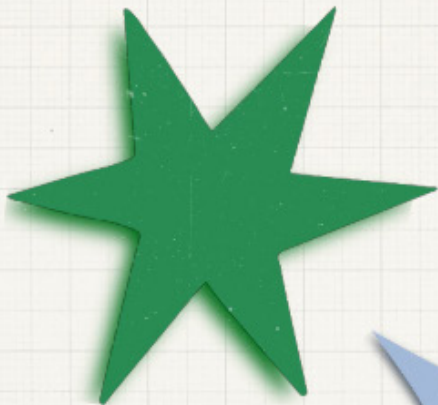
Little Women by Louisa May Alcott  
The Legacy by Elle Kennedy  
The Nutcracker and the Mouse King  
by E. T. A. Hoffmann  
The Harry Potter Series  
by J.K. Rowling  
The Lion, the Witch, and the  
Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

Movies

Gremlins  
Batman Returns  
Edward Scissorhands  
Violent Night  
Anastasia  
Rise of the Guardians  
Barbie and the Nutcracker

MUSIC

(no typical songs allowed!!)



fav song  
this season!





# Same traditions, new tree: Remembering the beloved Saint Leo Christmas tree

**Sophia Sullivan**  
Editor-in-Chief

The Saint Leo University Christmas Tree Lighting is an event that many have looked forward to every year. Students, faculty, staff, and community members alike join together in the name of Christmas for fellowship, but the crux of the evening has always been the lighting of the tree.

This year, however, looks a bit different. Earlier this year, when Hurricane Milton made landfall in Florida on Oct. 9, much of the Saint Leo campus suffered destruction in its wake. Students returned to find that the beloved tree used for the ceremony each year was another that fell victim.

"When I came back to campus and realized that the tree we light every year for Christmas had fallen down, it honestly broke my heart," said Arianna Rodriguez, a senior majoring in political science. "This is such a nostalgic point of the Christmas celebration here at Saint Leo."

Planted across from the

Student Activities Building in 2007, the tree stood tall and watched over the main walkway of Saint Leo, right next to the Clock Tower. Because of its grandeur, it was truly hard not to notice.

However, what many may not know is that the tree was not originally planted for the ceremony.

"The university used to purchase a Christmas tree to celebrate our traditional tree lighting ceremony," said Associate Vice President of Facilities Jose Caban at Saint Leo.

To prevent the continued purchase and disposal of the trees, the decision was made in 2016 to begin decorating the existing tree in front of the Clock Tower.

"Hence, a new tradition was born," said Caban.

Whispers around campus have expressed concerns for the future of the event that so many members of the Saint Leo community have come to love. Caban has good news.

"[I am] happy to report we have purchased a 6-foot tree that will be planted in the vicinity where



Cutline 2: You may even catch a glimpse of Fritz the Lion at this event! (Photo courtesy of Wren Chretien)

the original tree was planted back in 2007," said Caban. "We will dress this tree up for the tree lighting ceremony on Dec. 5, and we will continue to nurture the tree for future generations." The tree was purchased from Ergle Tree Farm in Dade City.

Although this year the event is being rebranded as the Christmas Celebration, the tree, along with the rest of the campus, will still be lit.

"I always found the palm trees with lights as a way of showing off our Floridian Christmas

festivities," noted Dr. Edward Dadez, president of Saint Leo.

This annual event is a highlight of the year for the Saint Leo community, as it embodies the Christmas spirit, bringing everyone together for music, vendors, and fun before they set off their separate ways for the break. As the new tree grows, so will the richness and vibrance of the Saint Leo community.

"It truly sets the tone for the holiday season, not just for the facility folks, but for faculty, staff, students, and visitors," said Caban.

**Help Name**  
*our new tree*

**Do you have the perfect name in mind for Saint Leo's new Christmas tree? Let us know!**



**Visit us on Instagram**  
**@lionspridemedi**

**Check our pinned post**

**Comment the name you think best fits the new tree!**



# HOLIDAY

# QUIZ

5) What's the name of your girlfriend in the movie *Nosed Reindeer*?

- A. Brittny
- C. Sophie

1) What country do Christmas trees originate from?

- A. Switzerland
- B. England
- C. Germany
- D. Austria

3) Who wrote "A Christmas Carol"?

- A. William Wordsworth
- B. Charles Dickens
- C. George Eliot
- D. Robert Browning



2) What does the word "Hanukkah" mean?

- A. Happiness
- B. Peace
- C. Dedication
- D. Gratitude

4) What day does the Winter Solstice fall on?

- A. December 16th
- B. December 24th
- C. December 21st
- D. December 8th

- 7) \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Cal
  - C. Ma



What is the name of Rudolph's  
the "Rudolph the Red-  
Nosed Reindeer" television special?

- A. Clarice
- B. Clarice
- C. Ruby
- D. Ruby

8) Who was the first to  
visit baby Jesus,  
according to the Bible?

- A. The Three Wise Men
- B. The shepherds
- C. The angels
- D. Mary and Joseph

9) What is the most  
popular Christmas song?

- A. Rudolph the Red-  
Nosed Reindeer
- B. White Christmas
- C. Silent Night
- D. All I Want For  
Christmas

9) What large brand helped  
form the image of Santa  
Clause?

- A. Coca-Cola
- B. McDonald's
- C. Pepsi
- D. Macy's

10) What state was  
Kwanzaa first  
celebrated in?

- A. California
- B. Illinois
- C. Maryland
- D. Washington

How did  
you do?



Answers:

- 1) C
- 2) C
- 3) B
- 4) C
- 5) B
- 6) D
- 7) A
- 8) B
- 9) A



# Hallmark Christmas movies: A comforting escape or a holiday formula?

**Emily Hernandez**

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*Managing Editor*

**Brenna Schauer**

*Copyeditor & Contributing Writer*

The beginning of the Christmas season can be marked by many things: cooler weather, stores starting to sell Christmas items, and, for many, the arrival of Hallmark Christmas movies.

The Hallmark Channel is a 24-hour cable network known for its family-friendly programming, including its original movies. These films are often cheesy, their plots predictable, and their storylines remarkably similar. Yet, there is a captivating element that keeps viewers coming back for more.

Despite some viewers' distaste for the formulaic movies, Hallmark's productions—typically low-budget—perform surprisingly well. The highest-rated Hallmark movie premiere was *Christmas Under Wraps*, which aired in 2014 and drew 5.8 million viewers.

The phenomenon didn't begin until relatively recently. The first-ever Hallmark movie, "Amahl and the Night Visitors," aired on Dec. 24, 1951, marking the start of what would become an iconic holiday tradition.

Written by composer Gian Carlo Menotti, the opera tells the story of a young boy's encounter with the Magi, the three kings who visited the infant Jesus. Menotti, who grew up in Italy, was inspired by the tradition of the Magi bringing gifts to children, a custom that replaced the figure of Santa Claus in his childhood.

It wasn't until the 1990s that Hallmark began to solidify the formulas and tropes that would define its Christmas movies. Films like "A Season for Miracles" and "A Holiday to Remember" introduced the story structures that would become the blueprint for most modern Hallmark holiday films.

The Hallmark movies of the 2000s were very similar to those of the 1990s, but over time, the main story conflicts began to focus more

on the adults in romantic relationships. In the last 24 years, Hallmark movies have increasingly depicted an idealized version of America. They are designed to feel like a metaphorical warm blanket, allowing viewers to relax and escape the stresses of the holiday season.

They achieve this by appealing to as broad an audience as possible. With runtimes averaging between 90 and 120 minutes, the characters don't overstay their welcome. The typical story features two love interests: one who is the right match, and one who isn't. Mr. Wrong isn't usually a "bad guy"—he's just not the right fit. The central conflict often revolves around choosing between the two. Unlike the Hallmark Hall of Fame movies of the '80s, every Hallmark Channel original Christmas movie ends with a happy conclusion.

The reason the films feel so similar is that Hallmark has its own production company, giving each movie a standard look and feel.

For many viewers, this predictability is comforting. Knowing how the story will unfold can be a relaxing experience, making these movies perfect for background viewing during the holidays.

"I love Hallmark movies because they are perfect to watch during the holidays and have romantic storylines," states Nadia Lusco, a sophomore majoring in Criminal Justice.

As the network prepares for its peak holiday season, its programming is expected to dominate TV ratings once again, often surpassing even the most popular cable sports and news broadcasts. The Hallmark Channel ranked third among all cable networks, trailing only Fox News and ESPN.

The Hallmark Channel has kicked off its annual Countdown to Christmas and already has nine films lined up as part of its slate of 32 new holiday movies. The Hallmark Channel is available on:

- DIRECTV: Channel 312 HD
- Hulu + Live TV: Includes the Hallmark Channel and on-demand movies and shows



Lindsay Lohan stars in "Falling for Christmas", a Hallmark film that follows the familiar, predictable formula fans have come to expect. (Photo by Brenna Schauer)

- OTT streaming providers: Select Hallmark Channel offerings are available on major platforms

While many find joy in Hallmark movies during the holiday season, valuing their comforting predictability, others view the cookie-cutter films as repetitive and uninspired. For these individuals, the monotonous narratives of Hallmark movies fail to engage them, leaving little room for surprise or interest.

Faith Skierkowski, a junior majoring in English, captures this sentiment perfectly.

"I only like Hallmark movies when I watch one at the beginning of the holiday season. After that, I feel like all the storylines are fairly similar and follow the same plot. They're predictable."

For viewers like Skierkowski, the charm of Hallmark's holiday formula wears out quickly, making the films less enjoyable over time.

While Hallmark's success lies in its comforting nature, its reliance on a tried-and-true formula can sometimes create a sense of monotony. The network's focus on producing low-budget, formulaic films limits the potential for diversity in storytelling. Each movie may follow a similar arc, and this structure, while soothing for some, leaves

little room for the more dynamic and engaging storytelling that today's audiences increasingly crave.

Modern audiences have shown that they require a more dynamic form of storytelling, as seen in the success of franchises like Marvel, at its peak. Since 2019, however, Marvel, under Disney, has attempted to replicate its record-breaking profits, often to diminishing returns. Many fans have criticized the studio for prioritizing profit over compelling stories, leading to declining box office performance and waning interest.

This serves as a cautionary tale for content creators who lean too heavily on formulaic storytelling, which can ultimately result in audience disengagement.

In a world where entertainment can be found at the fingertips of many, Hallmark's unwavering commitment to the same formulaic stories may eventually fail to capture the attention of those who are seeking something fresh.

With audiences increasingly craving unpredictability and content that pushes boundaries, Hallmark may need to reconsider its approach if it hopes to continue captivating viewers beyond the predictable joy of the holiday season.



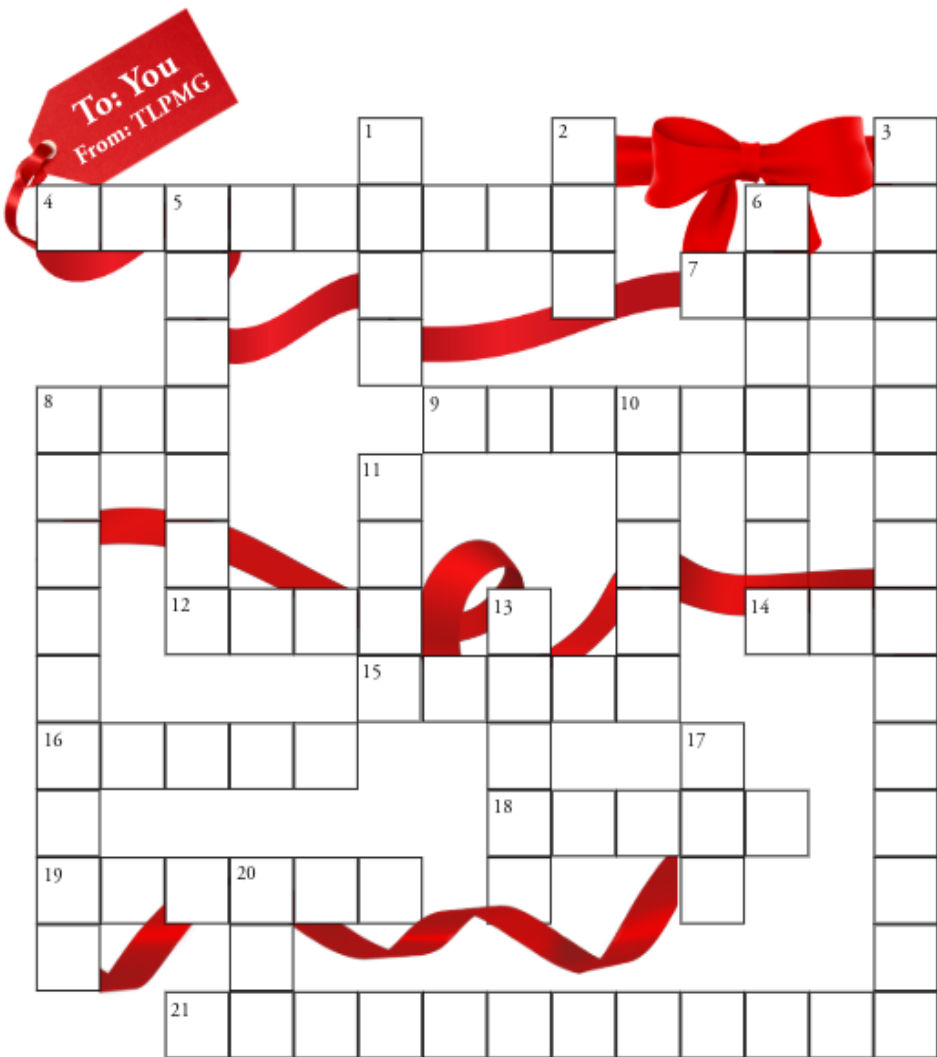


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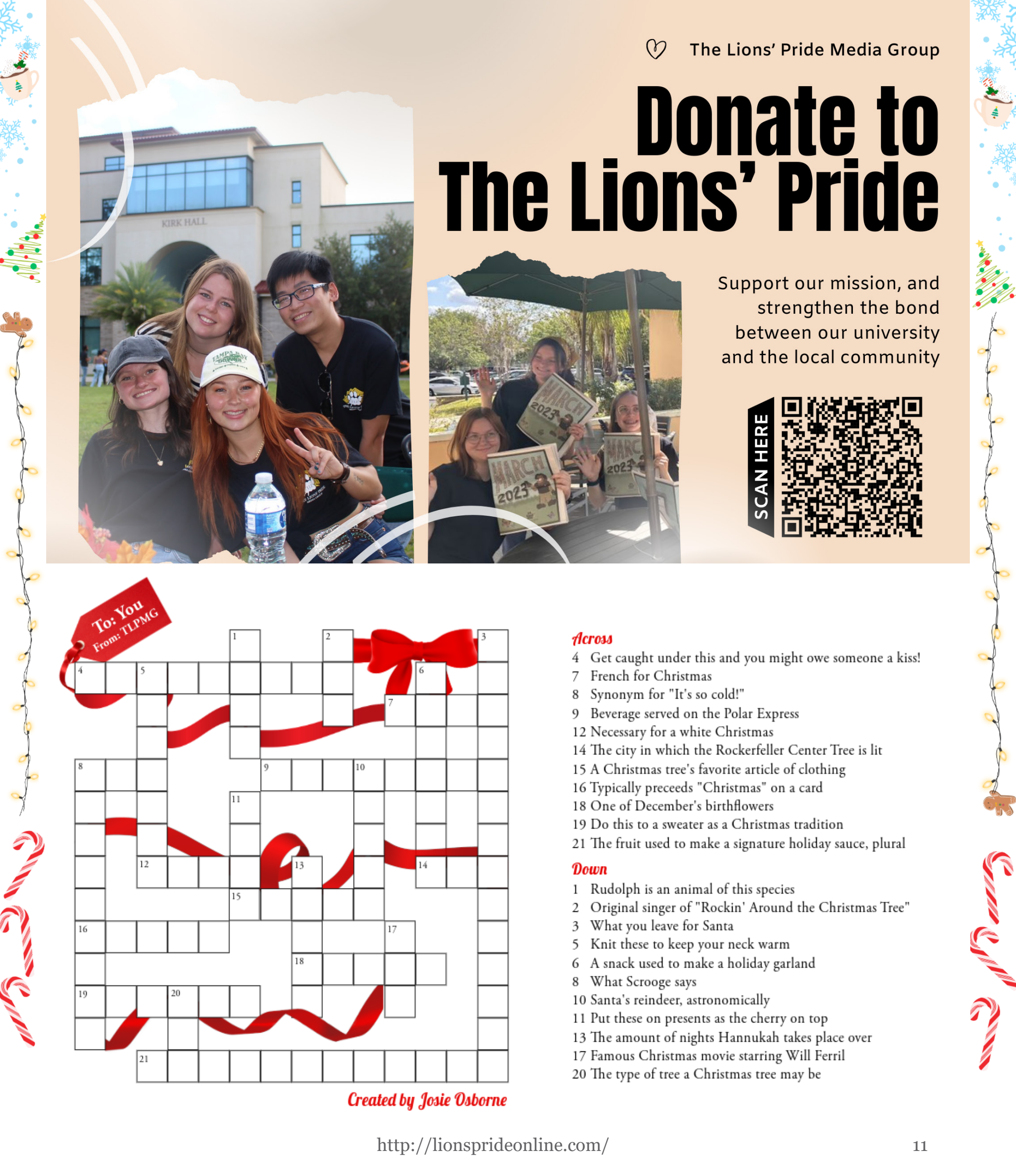
**Across**

- 4 Get caught under this and you might owe someone a kiss!
- 7 French for Christmas
- 8 Synonym for "It's so cold!"
- 9 Beverage served on the Polar Express
- 12 Necessary for a white Christmas
- 14 The city in which the Rockefeller Center Tree is lit
- 15 A Christmas tree's favorite article of clothing
- 16 Typically precedes "Christmas" on a card
- 18 One of December's birthflowers
- 19 Do this to a sweater as a Christmas tradition
- 21 The fruit used to make a signature holiday sauce, plural

**Down**

- 1 Rudolph is an animal of this species
- 2 Original singer of "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree"
- 3 What you leave for Santa
- 5 Knit these to keep your neck warm
- 6 A snack used to make a holiday garland
- 8 What Scrooge says
- 10 Santa's reindeer, astronomically
- 11 Put these on presents as the cherry on top
- 13 The amount of nights Hannukah takes place over
- 17 Famous Christmas movie starring Will Ferril
- 20 The type of tree a Christmas tree may be

Created by Josie Osborne





# Tied with tradition: Unique holiday gift customs from every corner of the globe

**Caitlyn McGregor**  
Staff Writer

Christmas is all about giving, but how people exchange gifts varies widely depending on where you are in the world. Whether it's a small, meaningful gesture or a big, flashy gift, the way people celebrate the season can differ. From the lively celebrations in Mexico to the warm family gatherings in Austria, Christmas gift-giving is shaped by each country's unique culture and traditions.

To explore how these traditions play out, students from Saint Leo University, hailing from around the globe, shared how they celebrate Christmas and exchange gifts. Their stories offer fascinating insights into the global art of gift-giving, highlighting both the shared joys and cultural nuances that make this tradition so special.

## **Mexico: A focus on family and faith**

For Tamar Olguin Alzate, a junior clinical psychology major from Hidalgo, Mexico, Christmas is a time for family togetherness and religious observance.

"In Mexico, gift-giving during the Christmas season is a big part of the celebrations," Olguin Alzate explains. "Traditionally, gifts are exchanged on Christmas Eve. While gift-giving is important, the emphasis is often on family togetherness and remembering the religious aspects of Jesus being born."

Christmas Eve is the main event in Mexico, with families gathering for festive meals, attending midnight Mass, and sharing the joy of the season. "The act of giving itself holds great significance, but the thought and care put into the gift are also valued," Olguin Alzate says, reflecting Mexico's deep-rooted traditions of faith and family.

## **Vietnam: A low-key celebration focused on family and food**

Cecilia Pham, a junior criminal justice major with Vietnamese roots who grew up in Canada, says Christmas in her family has always centered more on family than on gifts.

"In Vietnam, gift-giving isn't as common," Pham shares. "Feasts are a big thing, like Christmas parties. Vietnamese families are huge, so we do play card games, eat Vietnamese candies, and socialize with the family."

In Vietnam, Christmas focuses on gathering with loved ones to share meals, laughter, and moments of religious reflection. While the commercial side of Christmas has started to creep in, Pham noted that for her family, the holiday remains about the joy of being together rather than what's under the tree.

## **Austria: Traditions rooted in religion and family time**

In Austria, Christmas Eve takes center stage in holiday celebrations, as Pia Perthen, a senior cybersecurity major, explains. Advent

traditions play a significant role in the lead-up to the day, with families lighting candles on the Adventskranz, or advent wreath, each Sunday and marking the season with advent calendars to build excitement.

Christmas isn't as focused on gift-giving, according to Perthen. "We don't really get specific gifts for Christmas, but we celebrate with church, family meals, and the joy of being together," she explains.

In Austria, gift-giving is often simple and thoughtful rather than extravagant. Perthen's family emphasizes the spirit of the season, with presents serving as a small complement to the deeper focus on religious observances and the warmth of spending time with loved ones.

## **Cuba: A simple tradition of Christmas Eve gift-giving**

For Ali Hernandez, a sophomore criminal justice major from Cuba, the Christmas gift exchange tradition is straightforward.

"The only tradition Cubans really have is opening presents the night before," Hernandez shares.

While Cuba's Christmas celebrations have evolved over the years, with gift-giving becoming more common in some areas, the focus remains on family and religious observance. The tradition of opening gifts on Christmas Eve highlights the Cuban emphasis on spending quality time with loved ones, making the evening itself the heart of the celebration.

"It's really about being together," Hernandez says. "Gifts are just a part of that."

## **Canada: A familiar blend of global practices**

In Canada, the holiday season reflects many American customs, including the exchange of gifts on Christmas Day. However, as Cecilia Pham points out, Christmas in Canada has a distinctly North American flavor.

"In Canada, it's similar to the U.S.," Pham explains. "People exchange gifts on Christmas Day. It's considered important, but not a priority. The focus is still on family time, church, and sharing meals."

Canadian Christmas celebrations feature a large family dinner, with emphasis placed on connecting with loved ones and attending church services to honor the religious significance of the holiday.

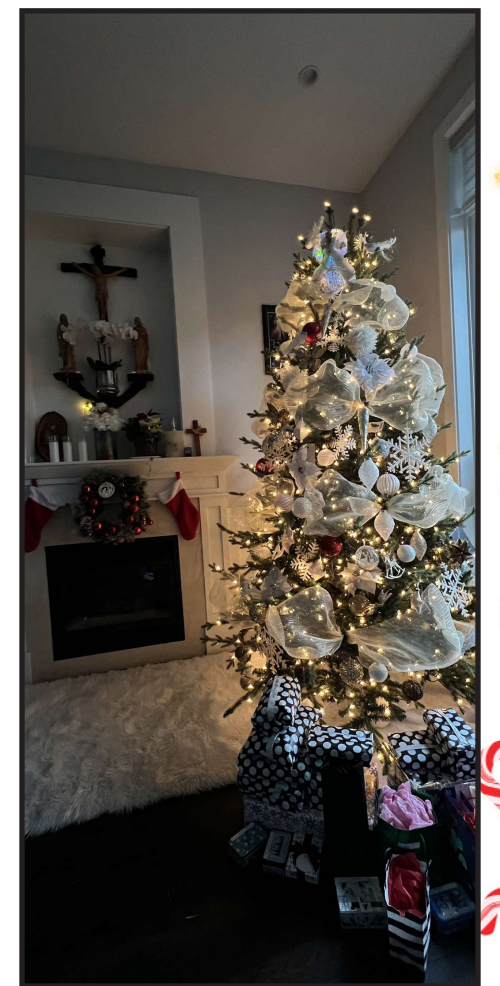
## **A universal celebration, yet uniquely personal**

What becomes clear through these interviews is that, while Christmas gift-giving traditions may vary from country to country, the core values of love, family, and generosity remain universal. Whether it's the grand celebrations of Christmas Eve in Mexico and Austria, the quieter observance of family and food in Vietnam, or the simplicity of Cuban gift exchanges, each tradition carries its own special significance.

In the end, no matter where you are in the world, Christmas is about more than just the gifts under the tree—it's about connecting with others and celebrating the joy of the season together.



An Adventskranz, or advent wreath, is a traditional German decoration used to mark the four weeks of Advent leading up to Christmas. Made from evergreen branches, symbolizing eternal life, the wreath holds four candles, each representing hope, peace, love, and joy. (Photo was generated by Gemini)



According to the National Christmas Tree Association, approximately 25 to 30 million real Christmas trees are sold in the United States each year, with many families keeping the tradition alive by picking out and decorating a tree together. (Photo courtesy of Cecilia Pham)



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# The magic of the holidays in fables: Winter folklore and fairytales

**Josie Osborne**  
Campus News Editor

Among the pretty lights and evergreens, people come together each winter season to celebrate the holidays. Whether it's Hannukah, Kwanza, or Christmas, everyone gathers around warm food and family, ready to share stories from years past. People bake cookies, decorate gingerbread houses, and hang their stockings, happy to continue their traditions. But among these traditions lies another right beneath your noses: winter myths.

Often overlooked due to Santa and his elves being so deeply ingrained in American Christmas culture, Santa Claus is, at his core, a perfect example of a winter myth. His origins trace back to the Greek bishop Saint Nicholas, who was said to have gifted impoverished families with bags of gold, dropping them down chimneys where they landed in stockings. People began dressing up in red bishop costumes as Saint Nicholas, or Sinterklaas, to attend winter markets and spread joy.

Krampus, the Alpine inverse of Santa Claus, is another popular myth associated with the winter season. While Santa is known for bringing presents and joy to children during the Christmas season, Krampus — whose name derives from the

German word "Krampen," meaning "claw"—is said to torment the naughty children, which can get darker depending on the version of the myth. Similar to those who would dress up as Saint Nick, people on Krampus Night, celebrated on Dec. 5, don costumes of the half-goat, half-demon figure to spook passersby.

While Santa Claus and his accompaniments comprise some of the most popular winter myths, there are a variety of other, lesser-known figures. Hans Christian Anderson is the Danish author attributed to many of the modern century's most famous tales, such as *The Little Mermaid*, *The Ugly Duckling*, and *The Princess and the Pea*. Anderson also wrote stories about the winter, capturing the elements of cold and snow so important to the winter aesthetic.

Pamela DeCius, associate chair of English, music, and the arts, as well as a humanities instructor, discussed some of her favorite winter fairytales, reminiscing on the IDS 210 class she used to teach, *Once Upon a Time: Readings in Folklore & Culture*.

Describing *The Snow Queen* by H.C. Anderson, DeCius says, "My favorite winter fairytale involves the love between two friends, Kai and Gerda, and the evil Snow Queen who tried to come between them."

She went on to explain how, like other myths and folklores, elements of *The Snow Queen* can be seen in other modern media, such as in Walt Disney Pictures' *Frozen* and C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

DeCius also talked about the Nisse of Scandinavian folklore, which are most similar to what we think of as elves. From her time in Denmark, she recalled their traditions involving the Danish folklore creatures.

"They had a program on every day in December, from the first to the 25th, where children (and those with childlike love for the season) could watch what their Nisse (elves) are up to."

This Nisse tradition is reminiscent of the ever-so-popular Elf on the Shelf, which has taken both the Christmas myth-world and the

corporate market by storm since its release in 2005.

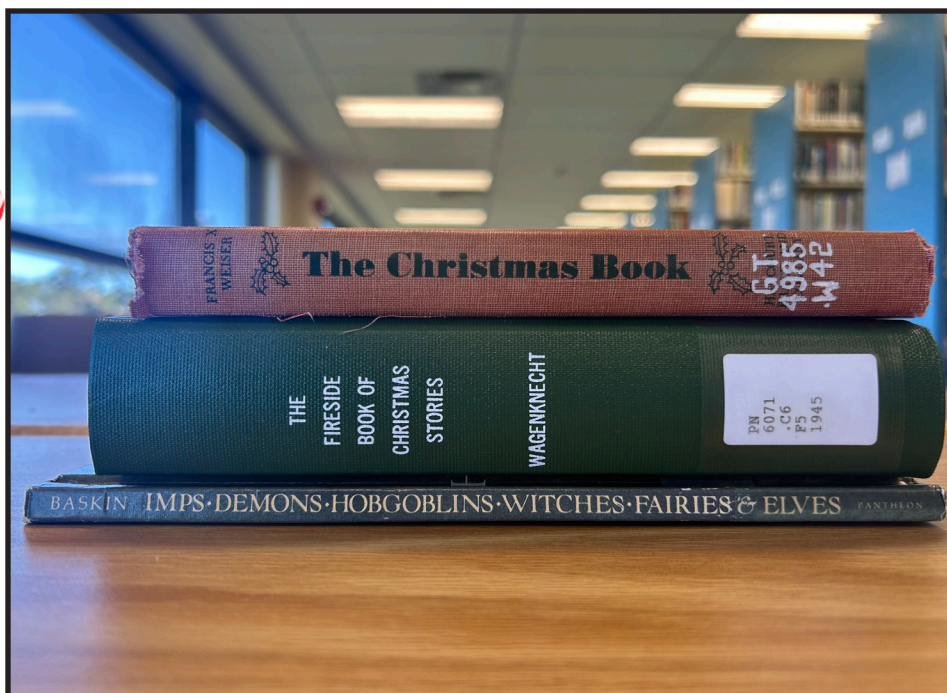
Fairytales and folklore, DeCius describes, encapsulates the spirit of the holidays, evoking the feelings she couldn't quite put a finger on.

"There is something about winter, something magic," DeCius says.

It is during this season, the time when the year has met its end and loved ones gather, that stories are told more than any other. It is primitive, instinctual to tell stories.

"It is how humans communicate with each other," says DeCius.

It is through these shared memories and traditions—the leaving of milk for the mythical Santa Claus and the placing of shoes on the windowsill (an Icelandic tradition)—that the holiday spirit is found, in laughter, excitement, and surprise.



If you want to learn more about Christmas elves, fairies, and other winter mythological figures, there are plenty of books on the subject at Saint Leo University's Daniel A. Cannon Memorial Library. (Photo was taken by Josie Osborne)



In the anthology section of the library, you can also find more books on folklore from around the world, ready to be checked out at any time. (Photo was taken by Josie Osborne)





# The gift that keeps on giving: How to give back during the holidays

**Maeve Kiley**  
Contributing Writer

For most college students, money is tight, and sometimes it can feel that you cannot make a difference without it. However, quite the opposite is true.

Communities can thrive, and the holiday season can be jolly for everyone if people are willing to give back just a little. Even an overworked student struggling to stay afloat can change someone's life for the better with only a tiny bit of extra effort.

Before any break can begin, you need to first pack up your belongings. When sorting through the mountains of clothes, spare a second thought to question how frequently you wear each article of clothing. Whether it's a pair of too-small sneakers that have been taking up space or an old shirt that has not been worn since high school, someone else can make good use of it.

If the piece of clothing is in decent condition, you can drop it off in the THORN clothing donation box located inside Saint Jude's Chapel at Saint Leo University before heading home for the holidays.

THORN volunteers will then transport the goods for distribution to those in need. This small act is an effective way to spread holiday cheer and clear your closet, just in case Hollister has a sale during the break.

Speaking of donations, your old school supplies can be gifted to students in need as well. It is easy to get overzealous in the back-to-school shopping sprees, and a few notebooks or unopened pen packages might still be lying around at the end of the fall semester.

Instead of adding to the garbage pile or letting those supplies gather dust, you can drop them off at the Salvation Army, Goodwill, or even a local thrift store. Local elementary and middle schools may set up designated donation areas as well, so keep your eyes peeled for a quick stop to get rid of that five-pack of tape that your biomedical class ended up not needing.

If you have a free day and a

full tank of gas during the break, a fun and rewarding activity you can partake in is local volunteering. Volunteer apps, such as Idealist or Volunteermatch.com, can be downloaded with ease.

Browse dozens of local volunteer opportunities ranging from holiday themed excursions, such as Tampa's "Jingle Bell Jog" for the Arthritis Foundation, or a day spent caring for furry friends at your local animal humane society.

Pick the one that's right for you and invite a friend to tag along. You can spend an entire day giving back or even just a few hours. These opportunities can be a great way to bond with loved ones and care for your community during the holiday season.

When the holiday season is over and you are rummaging through your pile of presents, you may come across a funky sweater that hurts to look at, or maybe one of your friends gave you a box of candy full of ingredients you can't eat.

Instead of tossing those unwanted gifts in the trash, do a quick online search and see if they can be donated. That strange sweater can be dropped off at Goodwill, and that

candy box can be delivered to a local homeless shelter or food pantry.

This is a resourceful way to make sure that the gift does not go to waste, as well as ensuring the gift giver's efforts go towards a person's happiness instead of straight to your garbage bin.

Whether it is in the snowy mountains of Colorado or the sandy beaches of Miami, there are always people in need and ways to help them. If people are willing to give an inch, it can go a mile, even with the smallest amount of effort. Even if it's an afternoon spent caring for cats or a box of unwanted clothes, good work can be done on even the coldest winter nights.



The winter weather may be cold, but our hearts don't need to be as well. Find ways to contribute to your community and foster cheer this holiday season! (Picture taken by Maeve Kiley)



Inside the Saint Jude Chapel on the Saint Leo University campus, THORN Ministry is actively collecting clothing donations for the homeless in Tampa. (Picture taken by Maeve Kiley)

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— P O S T C A R D —

From all of us at The Lions' Pride Media Group,

We wish you a restful and happy holiday season. May your break be filled with cheer, laughter, and time spent with loved ones. Whether you're traveling home, staying on campus, or going somewhere new, we hope you experience the joy and peace this time of year has to offer. We can't wait to see you all back on campus ready for the new year ahead.

Happy Holidays, Lions!