An Individual Touch in Downtown West Chester

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A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT CHRISTMAS IN WEST CHESTER

WHAT MAKES THE HOLIDAYS SO ANTICIPATED?
Treasured traditions, seasonal fun, the special charm that fills our local towns. There are plenty of distinctive towns to choose from this holiday season. But you’ll understand why I’d like to share some of the reasons you should consider including West Chester in your holiday outings.

For unique shopping, a spectacular Christmas parade and holiday events to fill the month to the brim with activity and fun, West Chester should be on your holiday calendar.

UNIQUE HOLIDAY SHOPPING
This year, the holiday shopping season boasts new shops in downtown West Chester that reflect the individual touch that only local, family owned businesses can create—a hallmark of small-town America. That spirit is alive and well in the heart of the Brandywine Valley.

By popular demand, the Chester County Historical Society (CCHS) revived one of its finest traditions. The Holiday and Greens Sale offers an array of beautiful and affordable handcrafted wreaths, floral arrangements, ornaments, garlands and more, all made by talented CCHS volunteers and with proceeds benefiting the museum and library. DIYers will find bags of dried and fresh greens so they can do what they love and create their own decorations. Mark your calendar for Friday and Saturday, December 9 & 10, from 9:30 to 4:30 at 225 N. High St.

While you’re there, drop into the CCHS Gift Shop, where you’ll find books on local history—great stocking stuffers. Some new releases with local connections: “West Chester: Images of Modern America” by Bruce and Melissa A. Mowday. And by the late CCHS President Rob Lukens and wife Rebecca, “Man With a Backpack,” a chronicle of Rob’s journey from diagnosis to finding a visionary, spiritual guide to help him through his fatal illness.

NEW SHOPS TO VISIT

Ladies, is there a man in your life who’s prone to regrettable fashion statements? You’ll find the cure at Phineas Gage, a new men’s store offering stylish yet casual menswear, at 29 S. High St.

Originally, the store was to be named “Phinehas Eachus,” after the bartender who opened a tavern in 1762 in what became West Chester. But unbeknownst to owner Jaime Weisbrot, Wikipedia (usually such a reliable source) incorrectly led her to believe that Phineas Gage opened the first tavern. Gage was a young man with a much higher historical distinction than Wikipedia credits him for.

In fact, Phineas Gage is known for surviving an 1848 accident in which a large iron rod was driven completely through his head. “It’s a great story of a handsome man experiencing an unfortunate turn in his life with style and class,” says Jaime. And so “Phineas Gage” became the name. Stop in for “a wide selection of popular styles from an array of American designers.”

In the floors above Phineas Gage, women will find Emily Alice Salon, which relocated from a few doors down the block. “We tie together all the components that contribute to making you look and feel like your best self,” says owner Emily Alice Ryan. Besides hair styling there are organic enzyme peels, makeup lessons, custom hair painting, lashes, image consulting, Pilates and more.

Both stores would make great “Girl’s Night Out” adventures. Here’s to looking good at every turn in your life.

For unique design, head for Tesoro, Italian for “treasure,” located a few doors away. This custom-only leather company was started in 2013 by Brit Reed, who later teamed up with Emily Pisano. The two entrepreneurs have grown Tesoro into what it is today.

“We’re a handcrafted, ready-to-wear, leather goods company that combines our respective fashion backgrounds into a perfect collaboration of creativity,” says Brit. Their “all-girl factory” is behind the building at 21 S. High St., sporting what has to be the coolest
entryway anywhere: a 50-foot tunnel leading from High Street. Tesoro products are manufactured in West Chester and sold at several locations downtown.

One location selling Tesoro leather goods is The Brow Bar, which will also give you a new holiday look at Tara Giorgio’s salon, at 131 W. Gay St. You’ll find both a retail component, where you can pick up locally made products, and beauty services. Stop by for specialized services for a well-groomed lady, including brow consultation, mapping, waxing, tweezing and styling, plus waxing services with cool names like “The Fresh Peach.”

Another downtown clothing designer who makes and sells her own styles is Rachel Godwin Becker, proprietor of H. Rose Boutique, 141 W. Gay St. Rachel describes the shop as a “Mom-Mom, Mommy and Me Boutique with sizes from newborn–6 months, 6 months–6 years, tween sizes 7–16, and women’s sizes small–3x.” Perfect for moms and grandmothers who like their kids to dress in style.

For a more formal style, remember December is a huge wedding month. Now you can find formal wear at Sabrina Ann Couture, West Chester’s spot for brides-to-be and other special occasion formal wear, at 128 N. High St. They’ve quickly become a welcome part of the downtown community with finely curated samples and never-worn bridal and evening gowns.

This is the second location for owner Sabrina Sigler, who opened in Ardmore in 2004. West Chester store manager Rachel Kooperstein shares her knowledge of the bridal business, as well as her strong fashion sense with clients. You’ll also find stylish accessories—jewelry, wedding veils and hair accessories.

**SHOPS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

Get a jump on New Year’s resolutions with help from two new shops with health and beauty products to change your life.

When Jacque Maldonado opened The Prana House, 109 N. Church St., she committed to creating a warm and inviting space offering products and information for preventative care and wellness. Prana, Sanskrit for “life force,” is a Hindu philosophy that includes yoga and Indian medicine.

“What we offer respects and honors the offerings given by Mother Earth for mind, body and soul,” says Jacque. “We strive to be a sustainable business while lifting up our community.”

Not too long ago, Tavish Steele and fiancée, Faith Daniels found themselves looking for a new place to settle and discovered the vibrancy of downtown West Chester. “We loved the hometown feel the downtown gave us,” says Faith. “It reminded me of where I grew up.”

Faith and Tavish, both advocates of fitness and body building, decided to follow their passion and open Steele House Nutrition, at 237 E. Gay St. They provide everything you need to get lean and fit, featuring delicious fla-
vors like vanilla ice cream and strawberry milk shake.

Most products are from local businesses with many being exclusive to Steele House. Inside tip: when you visit, make sure you say “hi” to their four-legged friend Rhea.

SPECTACULAR CHRISTMAS PARADE

Another reason to visit, West Chester’s Christmas Celebration has everything to make the season bright and ring in the holidays. The centerpiece of the celebration is the 37th Annual QVC West Chester Christmas Parade that kicks off this holiday season on Friday, December 2nd.

Once again, the Greater West Chester Chamber of Commerce hosts this beloved tradition that attracts bigger crowds each year. Come see spectacular floats, giant inflatable character balloons, dozens of marching bands, dance troupes and antique cars that make up the holiday merriment, all orchestrated by Under the Sun Productions. And listen for Santa’s silver bells as he flies through the streets in his sleigh.

Before the parade, join the 8th Annual Jingle Elf Run for children’s races, one-mile walks and two-mile runs. Register early online at RunCCRS.com and get a jingle elf hat to wear!

Pick your spot to watch the fun as Friday’s parade starts from New and Market Street, travels east on Market past the Christmas tree at the Historic Courthouse then north on Matlack, west on Gay Street, before circling back to New Street.

Thousands come from near and far to celebrate this tradition and welcome Santa Claus. QVC will broadcast live from the parade and rebroadcast Christmas Day on QVC so you can recapture the spirit.

Join in as the entire weekend is filled with events from holiday open houses hosted by local businesses before the parade to Saturday breakfast with Santa.

Downtown West Chester will have everybody in the holiday spirit. Learn more at GreaterWestChester.com. ♦
HOLIDAY FUN IN West Chester

THROUGH DECEMBER 24
18th Annual Miniature Show. See 26 local artists display miniature artworks. Sunset Hill Gallery, 23 N. High St. Mon. 9:30 to 5:30; Tues, Thurs, Fri, 9:30 to 7; Wed, until 8; Sat, 10 to 6. 610-692-0374; SunsetHillGallery.com.

DECEMBER 2–3

DECEMBER 3
West Chester Library Holiday Home Tour. See House Tours page in this issue.

DECEMBER 3–4
West Chester Railroad’s Santa’s Express. Join Santa for singing holiday songs on the train ride. Plenty of photo ops with Santa. Trains depart Market St. Station, 230 E. Market St., 11 am, 1, 3 & 5 pm, $7–$23; under 2, free. 610-430-2233; WestChesterRR.com.

DECEMBER 4
Holiday Festival at Oakbourne Mansion. The mansion is decked out for the holidays. Enjoy holiday crafts, games, music and refreshments. 1014 S. Concord Rd. 10 am to 1 pm. Free. 610-692-1930; WesttownPA.org.

DECEMBER 9–11, 15–18
Brandywine Ballet Presents The Nutcracker. A beloved holiday classic that’s still fresh. Emilie K. Asplundh Concert Hall, West Chester Univ., 700 S. High St. Dec. 9, 15, 10 am; Dec. 10, 17, noon & 4 pm; Dec. 11, 2 pm; Dec. 18, 6 pm. $18–$45. BrandywineBallet.org.

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DECEMBER 10
SantaFest at American Helicopter Museum. The Celebration of the Century will showcase the restoration of the historic Armory building for use as a theater, now The Knauer Theater for the Performing Arts. 226 N. High St. This event has SOLD OUT, but check the website for other exciting happenings at Uptown! UptownWestChester.org. *

DECEMBER 11
SantaFest at American Helicopter Museum. See Santa arrive by helicopter. 1220 American Blvd. 10 am to 1 pm; Santa arrives at 11, helicopter rides after. Admission, $10pp for holiday activities and snacks. Helicopter rides $60pp. 610-436-9600; AmericanHelicopterMuseum.org.

DECEMBER 15
Uptown! West Chester—Lori Fulton. It’s a Jazz Cocktail Hour with vocalist Lori Fulton and her “Love Lori Orchestra.” Sprout Music Collective, 130 E. Prescott Alley, 6:30 pm. $15. 484-639-9004; UptownWestChester.org.

DECEMBER 31
New Year’s Eve Gala Opening at Uptown! Entertainment. The Celebration of the Century will showcase the restoration of the historic Armory building for use as a theater, now The Knauer Theater for the Performing Arts. 226 N. High St. This event has SOLD OUT, but check the website for other exciting happenings at Uptown! UptownWestChester.org. *

For more events see DowntownWestChester.com.