



# INDEX-JOURNAL

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## It means a little bit more

### Traditions anchor Christmas holiday

By **RENEE ORTIZ**  
[rortiz@indexjournal.com](mailto:rortiz@indexjournal.com)

Dr. Seuss wrote that Christmas is a spirit, a state of mind, a joyous feeling. He wrote that Christmas doesn't come from a store. Christmas means a little bit more.

The weekend before Christmas, Bradford Russ and his extended family gather at his grandmother, Nane's, home in Greenwood.

“Her name is Jane Walker ... I tried to call her Jane when I was little, and the only thing that came out was Nane,” Russ said.

The beginning of the tradition begins with the hanging of the Christmas star over the fireplace.

“We made that star years ago. The star is probably 15 or 20 years old, and it's still taped up above her fireplace,” Russ said.

When they were children, Nane also made costumes for Russ, his sister and his cousins.

“All the grandkids and cousins, we would dress up in these costumes for the Christmas play,” Russ said.

These costumes included Mary, Joseph, the three wise men, angels and, at one point, baby Jesus.

“Most of the time we would have a baby doll. Way back when one of our youngest cousins was born, they played the part of baby Jesus. We would all sit in front of the fireplace, and we would all read our part of the Christmas story from Luke, chapter two in the Bible,” Russ said.

The annual play continued for years. But the tradition didn't end when the kids became adults. Russ, now 25, still



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

As a youngster, Bradford Russ dressed up in handmade costumes with his cousins and siblings for a Christmas play in handmade costumes.

participates with his cousins and siblings.

“Even though we're all grown adults now, we still do it to honor my grandmother, and she enjoys getting us dressed up still. We read the Christmas story and read also just a couple other prophecies from the Old Testament,” Russ said.

After the play, the family sings hymns to remember the true meaning of Christmas. Russ said it's something he looks forward to doing every year.

“It's a testament to the faith that she has kind of passed down to us and the model that she set. ... Even though we're adults, and it's a little cheesy, we choose to do that every year with her to celebrate Christmas,” Russ said.

Last we heard from Green-

wood County resident Connie Rentz, she described her traditions for Thanksgiving. But the start of her Christmas tradition begins at the Thanksgiving celebration.

Before the extended family leaves the Rentz home, Connie gives everyone their Christmas presents — she's usually the first one amongst their family.

“We won't see them at Christmas, I could bundle up their stuff and take it to them, or send it to them. But the fact that they're coming to Greenwood, it's kind of a long drive for them and I just want it to be so exciting,” Rentz said.

Other family traditions take place on Christmas morning. For Lacey Pileggi's family, it begins with a French toast

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Connie Rentz starts her Christmas tradition at the end of Thanksgiving. She gives her family members their Christmas gifts before they head back home.

## Abbeville officials seek input to develop strategic growth plan



By **ROBERT JORDAN**  
[rjordan@indexjournal.com](mailto:rjordan@indexjournal.com)

Officials seek input on the direction Abbeville County should take over the next 10 years.

Several interviews and meetings have been held to determine how to develop the Abbeville County

2035 Strategic Plan, said Austin Walker, Abbeville County economic development director. The previous strategic plan was an economic development plan formed by the Abbeville County Economic Development Partnership, not necessarily a countywide plan.

Work on the 2035 plan started

in October and is expected to continue through June 2025 with presentation of the final plan.

The current plan was only achieved to the extent it has been because of the partnerships with organizations that shared a vision, Walker said in an email. The Partnership couldn't complete all

of these in the same way that the county will not be able to complete strategic planning objectives in a vacuum.

In the previous plan, 13 projects were completed, five are ongoing and six were not accomplished.

A survey has been launched and will be open through Feb. 21. It

will help analyze sentiment on key areas as well as gauge the appetite for change, laying the groundwork for discussions during community engagement and think tank sessions, she said. To date, the office has received nearly 70 completed

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