

On Base

☀ Breakfast with Santa:

from 8-10 a.m. at Community Rec Complex. Take a photo with Santa and enjoy pancakes, eggs, bacon and sausage. Adults: \$8; Kids under 12: \$5. Call 601-679-2651.

News Bytes

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Voting rights groups push for answers about Mississippi ballot shortages

~ Click here ~

Alabama residents to begin receiving \$150 tax rebates

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Naval Football players becoming Marines

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Defense bill would expand leave for veterans joining federal workforce

By Molly Weisner
Military Times

Lawmakers are looking to expand access to leave benefits for service members who transition to the federal workforce in the 2024 defense bill.

The latest version of the National Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to pass through the House and Senate this week, includes a provision that would recognize previous military service in calculating family and medical leave for veterans working in the federal government.

“By crediting time in uniform towards paid parental leave for the federal government, we will help retain the best and brightest America has to offer,” said Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa., in a statement Tuesday. Lawmakers have said family-friendly policies help ensure the public sector has competitive benefits to attract and retain employees amid workforce shortages in cyber and HR.

Other supporters of the policy include Reps. Don Beyer, D-Va., Don Bacon, R-Neb., Nancy Mace, R-S.C., and Chris Smith, R-N.J.

With the defense bill teed up for passage in Congress, President

Joe Biden has signaled he will sign the measure into law later this month. If it clears both steps with the provision, a federal employee with at least a year of active military service will have met requirements for the Family and Medical Leave Act.

The FMLA, which passed in 1993, provides up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave without pay for the birth, adoption or foster of a child, a serious health condition or caregiver leave. Health insurance coverage is also retained during that time. To access that benefit, federal workers have to be in their position for at least a year. Previously, service members were not eligible to credit their prior military time for FMLA if they had transitioned to the government. However, active duty service by members of the National Guard or Reserves is counted.

Federal agencies employ more than half a million veterans, which is to say about one in every four civil servants has prior or existing military experience, according to the government’s HR agency. In a memo to agency leaders in February, the Biden administration urged the creation and support of policies that would grant leave during employees’ first year of work, when they may not yet have accrued enough time to be eligible for other benefits.

Breathalyzer Training



Photo by MC2 Molly Crawford-Tice

Representatives from the Mississippi Forensics Laboratory were recently onboard Naval Air Station Meridian to recertify law enforcement officers in the operation of the breath alcohol testing instrument. Students include members of Naval Security Forces on the installation and our partners with Lauderdale County and the Mississippi Highway Patrol.

Officers whose nominations were blocked in Senate could get back pay

By Leo Shane III
Military Times

With hundreds of senior military officers finally headed into new leadership roles, a pair of senators is pushing for those newly confirmed officials to receive back pay and time-in-grade credit for their months spent waiting for advancement.

The proposal from Sens. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., would require approval from both the House and the Senate and could cost in excess of \$4 million, according to an analysis of the personnel involved by Military Times. Introduction of the Military Personnel Confirmation Restoration Act was first reported by Punchbowl News.

“The men and women who wear the uniform of the United States of America should not be negatively impacted by political squabbles,” Rounds said in a statement accompanying the bill release.

The Senate confirmed 422 senior officers early this week after a nearly 10-month blockade of nominations by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., based on his objection to the Defense Department’s abortion access policy.

Tuberville said the move was needed to highlight the “illegal” nature of the policy, put in place by administration officials without congressional consultation. The policy allows troops to receive leave time and travel stipends if they are forced to cross state lines for abortion services because of local restrictions on the procedures.

The blockade snarled hundreds of personnel moves across the top levels of the Defense Department, in some cases blocking promotions and pay raises for individual officers for nearly 10 months. By the end of October, the lost pay for the officers involved reached nearly \$700,000 a month.

With the confirmations now approved, Pentagon leaders said they are in the process of moving personnel into their new roles and finalizing promotions. That means most individuals involved will see their pay boosted later this month.

Welcome Home MA3!



Williams

MA3 Natasha Williams returned to NAS Meridian from a 286-day individual augmentee deployment to Djibouti, Africa, in support of Operation Aqea Al Qaeda East Africa. She provided antiterrorism, force protection, law enforcement, and security services to Camp Lemmonier and tenant commands comprising a total population exceeding 4,000 personnel. She was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, and the Armed Forces Service Medal for her service while forward-deployed. Bravo Zulu Shipmate and Welcome Home!

Submitted photo

[Read more, click here](#)

Thirteen aviators earn ‘Wings of Gold’ in December pinning ceremony

There was a naval aviator designation ceremony Dec. 1 onboard Naval Air Station Meridian.

Thirteen aviators received their “Wings of Gold” during the ceremony. The naval aviator designation ceremony is not prescribed specifically by U.S. Navy regulations, but has emerged as an honored product of the rich heritage of naval tradition. It marks the culmination of nearly two years of specialized training, which has prepared these officers for the rigorous demands of aerial combat and carrier operations -- earning each the title of “Naval Aviator” and the right to wear the coveted “Wings of Gold.”



1STLT Scott Armfield



LTJG Charles Beauvais



LT Race Betancourt



ENS Esteban Braysse



LT Diego Cervantes



LT Steven Frazier Jr.



LT Travis Jackson



LT Jorge Montesino



LTJG Gregoire Mathez



1STLT Matthew Mobley



LTJG Aymeric Sannier



LTJG Alexander Speckin



LTJG Garrett Standard

Golden Stick



Photo by MC2 Molly Crawford-Tice

Bert Zeller, representing the Mississippi Council of the Navy League, left, presents the Golden Stick to Lt. j.g Alexander Speckin during a winging ceremony in the Chapel onboard NAS Meridian, Dec. 1. The Golden Stick is awarded to the student with the highest composite score during training.

No more late-night alcohol sales at AAFES stores starting Jan. 1

By Karen Jowers
Military Times

Exchange-run stores on Army and Air Force installations will stop late-night alcohol sales, effective Jan. 1, in a move designed to help prevent suicides.

Alcohol will no longer be sold at Army & Air Force Exchange Service outlets between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Shop hours vary by base and type of store.

The change will affect 161 shops worldwide, including Express stores, Class Six stores and main exchange stores. Those that sell booze overnight comprise about a quarter of AAFES stores that offer packaged alcohol and spirits, AAFES spokeswoman Marisa Conner said in an email.

Feedback about the decision has been “nominal,” Conner said. Alcohol sales between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. at those 161 stores accounted for less than 1% of total alcohol sales last year, she said.

The move aligns Army and Air Force stores with the policies of other military exchange systems, Conner said.

Navy and Marine Corps exchanges stopped selling alcohol in any of their exchange outlets after 10 p.m.

in 2013. Navy policy allows sales of alcohol in exchange outlets from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., while Marine Corps exchanges sell it from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. A limited number of military commissaries sell beer and wine, but commissaries are typically not open late.

The decision also follows the recommendations of a February report by the Department of Defense’s Suicide Prevention and Response Independent Review Committee.

The panel cited research that suggests that limiting when alcohol can be sold reduces heavy drinking and other adverse outcomes associated with alcohol misuse. Cutting those hours may also offer a strategy for reducing overall alcohol consumption, especially among younger personnel who live in military housing, the committee reported.

Nearly 500 troops died by suicide in 2022, according to the Pentagon’s latest annual suicide report released in October. While fewer people died, the active duty suicide rate rose by 3%, data showed.

Eighteen percent of service members who died by suicide had been diagnosed with an alcohol use disorder, the Pentagon found in 2021.

[Read more, click here](#)

The Skyline ~ Naval Air Station Meridian, Miss.

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Hotlines & Helpful Numbers

SAPR Victim Assistance: 601-604-3037
SAPR Civilian Victim Assistance: 601-486-3122
SARC: 601-481-4274
SAFE Helpline: 877-995-5247
Suicide Hotline: 800-273-8255
Military OneSource: 800-342-9647
CEAP (DoN Civilian): 844-366-2327
EAP (NAF Civilian): 800-932-0034
FFSC Meridian: 601-679-2360
Chaplain: 601-604-2015
NMCRS Duty Cell: 601-604-2206
EEO (NAF): 866-295-0328
EEO (GS): 904-542-2802

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Local Happenings

DECEMBER

17: The Sonny Rush Run 5K Starting at 8 a.m. in downtown Meridian, 601 23rd Ave. Presented by: Ochsner Rush Health Benefitting Dr. G.A "Sonny Rush" Scholarship Fund Race Day Registration 6:30 a.m. to 8 a.m. 1 mile fun run 8:15 a.m. 5k run and 5k Walk 8:30 a.m. Visit <https://time2run.raceentry.com/the-sonny-rush-run-5k/race-information>

17: The Polar Express at noon and 3 p.m. at the Temple Theater. Call 601-693-5353..

19: Christmas Yoga at Merrehope from 5-7:30 p.m. at Merrehope, 905 Martin Luther King Jr. Dr., Meridian. For information, call 601-483-8439. Tickets are \$15 (includes yoga/meditation practice and tour).

JANUARY

27: Meridian Symphony Orchestra at 8 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. Join the Meridian Symphony Orchestra and opera's preeminent voices as they transport you through history stepping into Mozart's Figaro, Puccini's La Bohème, Bernstein's Garden, and so much more! Call 601-696-2200.

Area Happenings

DECEMBER

17: Pentatonix: The Most Wonderful Tour Of The Year from 7-11 p.m. at the Legacy Arena, 1898 9th Ave N, Birmingham, AL. For information, visit <https://www.bjcc.org/upcoming-events/pentatonix-holiday-show/>

JANUARY

6: Great American Memphis Gun Show from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Memphis Music Room., 5770 Shelby Oaks Dr, Memphis, TN. Visit <https://midwestoutdoors.com/event/great-american-memphis-gun-show-4/2024-01-06/>

28: Disney's Aladdin (Touring) from 1-5 p.m. at the BJCC East Exhibition Hall, 2100 Richard Arrington Boulevard North, Birmingham, AL. Discover a whole new world at Disney's ALADDIN, the hit Broadway musical. Visit https://www.cbs42.com/community-calendar/?_escaped_fragment_=/show/?start=2023-11-13#!/details/Disney-s-Aladdin/12364841/2024-01-28T13

Pacific Partnership 24-1 kicks off third stop in Micronesia

Pacific Partnership 24-1 has kicked off its third mission stop in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, Dec. 12.

This mission stop will host a fly-in only team of 76 Pacific Partnership 24-1 (PP 24-1) personnel. Due to the size of USNS Mercy (T-AH 19), the ship was unable to anchor off the coast of Pohnpei. The fly-in team will have PP24-1 medical, U.S. Pacific Fleet band, and Humanitarian and Disaster Relief members serving in Pohnpei. The arrival of the team marks the next phase of the PP 24-1 mission that will enable participants, including U.S. and Pohnpei, to work together to enhance disaster response capabilities and foster new and

enduring friendships.

Pacific Partnership was last in Pohnpei in 2015 aboard Military Sealift Command's Joint High Speed Vessel, USNS Millinocket (JHSV 3).

"I would like to thank the government of Micronesia for inviting Pacific Partnership to your country," said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Mark A. Melson, Commander, Task Force 73 and executive agent for this year's mission. "It is a true testament of our enduring bonds of friendship and shared vision of a stronger Indo-Pacific. We at the Pacific Partnership team are honored to work alongside you in making that vision a reality."

-- From Ensign Lacy Burkett

[Read more, click here](#)

Japan, U.S. Navies conduct bilateral maritime exercise

The U.S. Navy conducted a maritime exercise with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) in the South China Sea demonstrating the combined capabilities to counter regional threats, participating ships included the Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Gabrielle Giffords (LCS 10) and the Murasame-class general-purpose destroyer JS Ikazuchi (DD 107) of the JMSDF.

The exercise provided an opportunity to build on decades of regional cooperation allowing the maritime forces to sail together, conduct enhanced planning and advanced maritime communication operations.

"I always look forward to opportunities to work with our friends in the Ja-

pan Maritime Self-Defense Force. The thing that makes us such a capable multinational force is our consistent collaboration at sea, on land, and in the air," said Cdr. Philip Herndl, commanding officer of Gabrielle Giffords. "This bilateral exercise is an example of many that we participate in together throughout the year. Each evolution makes us stronger as a united force and strengthens our ability to maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

This year marks over 70 years of partnership with Japan since the 1951 Security Treaty between the U.S. and Japan. The U.S. Navy regularly conducts exercises like these to strengthen ties among allied countries.

-- From Command, Destroyer Squadron SEVEN Public Affairs

[Read more, click here](#)

USS Arleigh Burke arrives in Souda Bay

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51), currently assigned to the Gerald R. Ford Carrier Strike Group (GRFCSG), arrived in Souda Bay, Crete, for a regularly scheduled port visit December 10, 2023.

The port visit provides a chance to further strengthen the United States' partnership with its NATO ally, Greece, and demonstrates the U.S.' commitment to a stable, secure, and prosperous Europe, while allowing Arleigh Burke's Sailors to experience the rich history

and culture of Greece.

"Opportunities for port visits in Souda Bay are always enjoyed by the hard working sailors of Arleigh Burke," said Cdr. Tyrchra Bowman, Arleigh Burke's commanding officer. "Greece has played a crucial role in the NATO alliance since 1952 in maintaining collective security throughout the region. My team and I look forward to opportunities to train and continue to strengthen our maritime partnership together."

-- From U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa Public Affairs

[Read more, click here](#)

Sale... Or

BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

New Price 21 foot - 2021 Jayco Travel Camper. Like new; beige & walnut interior and mattress kept in original plastic. Selling to upgrade to larger size - Price is \$15,000 some accessories included. To view or request pics please contact: Gary 601-575-5062.

2018 Mallard M185 Travel Trailer. Sleeps 4 with 1 queen bed/2 bunks. Easy to tow at 3,575 lbs; only selling because military member is moving overseas. Great living

quarters with lake view. Hooked up and ready to live in, including cables, hoses, plus the \$500 towing kit. Asking \$17,000. Call 360-434-3035.

AUTOMOBILES, ETC.

2018 Subaru Outback 2.5 limited, 12k miles; Subaru safety features and warranties included. Asking \$29k. Call 601-480-5100.

2017 Dodge Challenger, grey with racing stripe. \$24k. Call 601-880-3237.

HOMES/APARTMENTS

For Rent: 3 BD/1.5 BA with another room used

as a gym. All kitchen appliances included. Large backyard. Address 145 Skyland Drive, Meridian. About 25 minutes to Navy Base. \$900 per month, with \$900 deposit. Available Aug. 1. No pets. Call 601-490-0849

For Rent: 3BD/2BD home near Causeyville Road. Furnished in quiet neighborhood. \$900 per month. 954-895-5485, 601-692-4048 or 606-571-0820.

For Rent: Water front home in Dalewood. Spacious two-story home facing the Lake; great for fishing and relaxing.

Remodeled kitchen and new appliances. Rent is \$1,800; please call 813-406-9687.

For Sale: 3BD/2BA Home with 2,560 sq. ft. Sits on 1 & 1/2 lots on dead end with privacy woods on 3 sides. Asking \$180,000. Contact: lucindawnichols@gmail.com, call 601-527-7829 or 601-917-6145.

For Rent: 2BD/1.5BA Home at 3702 Rollins Dr, Lauderdale in Dalewood. 2136 sq ft on a .29 acres lot. Beautiful newly renovated single family home. Call 973-876-5006.

For Rent: 2BD/1.5BA

single family home in Dalewood - fully renovated. Fenced in back yard with boat slip & pier. Pets allowed. Pet deposit \$300. \$1,300 rent per month. Call 973-876-5006.

For Sale By Owner: 3BD/3BA brick home with sunroom, large fenced in yard. Convenient to shopping and base. \$139K. Call 601-513-3395 or 601-227-1870.

MISCELLANEOUS

Nanny or caregiver services. Call Alice at 601-934-1866 or 601-679-8112. Has installation access; can take children

to school and pick up and available days, nights and weekends.

Event Space for Rent: Deer Creek Banquet Hall. 6000 sq. ft. indoor with 1600 sq. ft. outdoor spaces for rent for gatherings and events. Call Reginald at 251-455-1559.

To submit an item to the "Sale...Or" column, e-mail adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil. Deadline is the Wednesday prior to publication.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free for anyone who works at NAS Meridian. To include your announcement, email adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil

Maybeth Pinning



Photo by Adam Prince

CAPT Luke Davis, right, commanding officer of NAS Meridian, renders the oath of office to LCDR Lier Maybeth during a promotion ceremony in Air Operations onboard NAS Meridian, Dec. 8.

Williams Reenlistment



Photo by Adam Prince

LT Lier Maybeth, right, Air Traffic Control Officer, presents a reenlistment certificate to AC1 Darren Williams during a reenlistment ceremony in Air Operations onboard NAS Meridian, Dec. 8.



School Supply Drive for Northeast Elementary

Members of NAS Meridian Security forces Department collected over 650 items for a school supply drive and delivered them to Northeast Elementary School recently.

Photo by MC2 Molly Crawford-Tice

Nearly half of Naval Academy football players become Marines

By Irene Loewenson

Military Times

Capt. Adam West already had plenty of reasons to become a Marine.

He had a family legacy of service in the Marine Corps, including an uncle and a cousin who were killed in action. He had grown up seeing the iconic images of the wars in the Middle East, with Marines bearing rifles, doing tough work.

But for the former U.S. Naval Academy football team offensive guard, there also was the yearning for a challenge. The sense that he could use his experience in a combative sport for a greater purpose.

“The Marine Corps brand is not welcoming, which is perhaps the most charming thing about it,” said West, who is currently stationed at Marine Barracks Washington. “They’re not interested in you. It’s, ‘Can you keep up?’”

Each year, a strikingly large portion of the Naval Academy’s football team decides to answer that question and pursue the Marine officer route.

Since 2014, 46% of the players have become Marines, according to academy spokesman Scott Strasemeier. That’s compared to only 25% to 30% of Naval Academy midshipmen overall.

In November, 10 out of the 25 football players in the Class of 2024 received Marine Corps assignments, according to Strasemeier.

Football’s high-contact nature has something in common with the Marine ethos, West said — in particular the infantry, where several of his teammates ended up.

“I don’t want to compare football to real-life combat operations, but if you’re a football player who’s trained to think that way and use your skills in that way, it turns out a lot of the Marine Corps’ mission is hands-on, imposing your will on someone directly,” West said.

The message then-Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo had for his players also aligned with Marine Corps culture, according to West: Be disciplined, be detail-oriented, and find a way to win.

In West’s view, the team’s legacy of Marine Corps service is another reason many of the players are inspired to trade in their cleats for eagle, globe and anchor pins.

There was 1st Lt. Ronald Winchester, who was killed in Iraq in September 2004. There was 2nd Lt. J.P. Blecksmith, killed in Iraq in November 2004.

There was Brian Stann, who earned the Silver Star Medal for the valor he showed as a second lieutenant in Iraq in May 2005.

[Read more, click here](#)

The Abominable Shopping Season strikes again

Like most military families struggling to climb the never-ending series of financial peaks along life’s path, we’ve always been uneasy about money. Mortgages, car loans, school tuition, music lessons, credit card payments, repair bills, sports fees, application fees, grocery bills, insurance bills, and all the other costs that encumber the typical military family, pile up into a seemingly overwhelming mountain of expenses to climb.

We trudge up each treacherous peak, wondering if we’ll ever get out of debt, save enough for college, and make it to retirement. We kept at it, believing that one day, we’ll finally reach the summit and plant a flag signaling that our personal financial goals have been achieved. It will be all downhill from there.

After more than 30 years of marriage, we still haven’t planted that flag. Every

pay raise my husband received over the years seemed accompanied by more expenses, so that our uncomfortable debt-income ratio never seemed to improve. As our household income increased, our lifestyle absorbed it without much notice, and we trudged on, never really finding that windfall of profit we’d been looking for all our lives.

We keep climbing from one crumbling financial ledge to the next, in an unending quest for the pinnacle of financial stability and freedom. Sometimes we think we’ve found a foothold, but something always seems to come along and knock us into another crevasse of debt. Our saboteurs aren’t polar bears, mountain goats, or the Abominable Snowman. The monetary enemies we’ve faced were surprise roof leaks, transmission failures, tax assessments, and college tuition bills.

And now, in December, we must take on the monster that visits its fiscal devastation upon us annually — the Holiday Shopping Season.

“Now, kids, your father and I are NOT going to buy a lot of Christmas presents this year,” I’ve told our three children every December since they were in middle school. Despite their “we’ve heard this before” eye-rolling, I’ve sincerely meant

it every time. The problem: Once I get out into the frenzy of holiday shoppers, I lose my way. Despite careful budgeting and planning, I am bombarded by a blizzard of twinkle lights, eye-catching displays, irresistible sales, fuzzy slippers, cheese log samples, ingenious gadgets, two-for-one deals, and unsolicited perfume spritzes.

I’ve never been a savvy customer — but rather, a “misfit shopper” — so, like the preacher’s daughter at the frat party, I sometimes don’t know when to stop and find myself easily manipulated into doing very bad things.

I show up at the mall armed with good intentions, a budgeted list of specific items, and a plan to go home and cook an economical dinner. The next thing I know, I’ve overdosed on department store fragrances and Harry & David samples. My husband and kids have called numerous times, wondering why I haven’t come home yet. My automobile is stuffed to the moon roof with shopping bags, half of which contain items I bought for myself.

Woozy and confused, I chew the remnants of peppermint bark I vaguely recall buying from a female elf at Macy’s, run through a drive through to pick up a bucket of chicken for the family, make

the humiliating “drive of shame” back home, and wonder when the avalanche of credit card bills will roll in.

What happened? Will I ever learn financial self-control and stay on course? Why am I always blinded by the blizzard of holiday shopping temptations? Am I destined to be financially adrift forever?

With predicted increasing inflation, a mortgage the size of Montana, and three demanding twenty-somethings coming home for the holidays, I will, once again, try to resist the abominable evils of the holiday shopping season. I will not try on boots, agree to an exfoliating hand massage, sample gourmet mustards, or take the tiniest whiff of perfume being spritzed my way. I must stick to my list, pay in cash, avoid anyone dressed up like an elf, and save some singles for the Salvation Army bucket.

I may not have Rudolph to guide me, but there’s no need to cancel Christmas. This misfit shopper will make it through the holiday spending blizzard of 2023, and keep on climbing. Onward and upward.

Lisa Smith Molinari’s self syndicated columns appear on her blog, www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and she recently co-authored *Stories Around the Table: Laughter, Wisdom, and Strength in Military Life* Follow Lisa@MolinariWrites.com.

COLUMN



Molinari



CAPTAIN'S CUP SOFTBALL

**REGISTRATION:
DECEMBER 20-JANUARY 25**

**TEAM MEETING:
JANUARY 25TH AT 1500**

**GAMES BEGIN:
JANUARY 30TH AT 1730**

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**DRIVING RANGE
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CHILDREN 12 & UNDER: \$5
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Long Winters Nap
Wear your coziest sleepwear!
- DECEMBER 19TH**
Favorite Holiday Character Day!
Dress up like your favorite holiday character!
- DECEMBER 20TH**
Tacky Holiday Gear!
Wear an ugly Christmas Sweater!
- DECEMBER 21ST**
Flannel Day
- DECEMBER 22ND**
Festive Friday!
Wear holiday colors!



NAVYMWRMERII

HOLIDAY CARD STORY TIME

DECEMBER 20 • 1000 • LIBRARY




HOLIDAY MOVIE MARATHON

DEC 23 & 24 • LSCC LIBERTY CENTER

DECEMBER 23:
[Movie thumbnails]

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