

BRIGHT IDEA

Two lifelong residents share the story of how McAdenville's Christmas lights went from simple gesture to international attraction



WINTER WONDERLAND

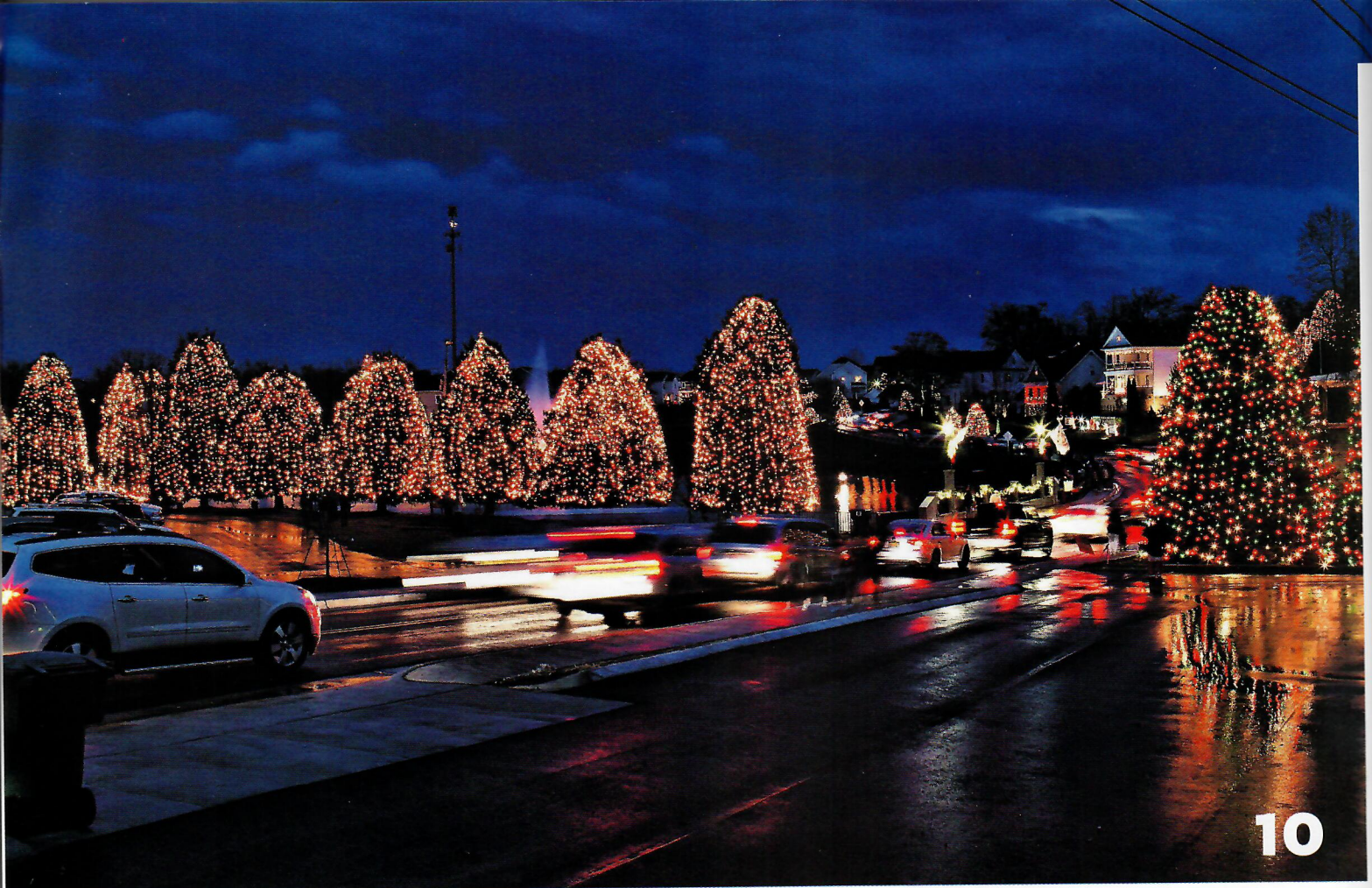
Explore the High Country, where winter and all its activities are just a short drive away.

GET CREATIVE

Follow your inspiration to these art studios, where you can create almost anything, from paintings to woodworking projects.

AT YOUR SERVICE

The Inn of the Patriots, run by a former White House chef and his wife, offers plenty of rest, food and stories.



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COMING UP

While the weather can sometimes be frightful, there's plenty of delightful things to do and see this time of year.

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STILL SHINING BRIGHT

McAdenville's Christmas lights, which attract more than 300,000 carloads of visitors annually, started from humble beginnings.

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WINTER WONDERLAND

Head to North Carolina's High Country, where you can enjoy the snow and all the wintry wonders that come with it.

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ON THE COVER

McAdenville shines bright during the Christmas season. Its more than 500,000 holiday lights attract visitors from around the world.

[PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE RANKIN]

AT YOUR SERVICE

Visiting The Inn of the Patriots in Grover, co-owned by a former White House and Camp David chef, offers more than a comfortable place to lay your head and delicious breakfast.

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Channel your creative muses at these make your own art studios, where projects and materials run the gamut.

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A TEACHER OF DOGS

This Lincoln County man left a life of stability to chase his dreams.

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At your service

Visiting The Inn of the Patriots in Grover includes more than a good meal and night of restful sleep.

By **PETE M. ANDERSON**

Marti Mongiello's love for everything food started in childhood, when at age 4 he provided the entertainment at family gatherings. He didn't sing, dance or recite poetry, instead sharing his knowledge of which piece of silverware was used for and how wines — in this case grape and apple juices — are paired with meals and courses. And he presented his best dish — white bread spread with ketchup and covered with grated cheese. “That was my way of making pizza,” he said. It was clear to relatives that he was destined to be a chef.

Mongiello, a Navy retiree and former Camp David and White House chef, operates The Inn of The Patriots in Grover with his wife, Stormy, who also is a Navy veteran. In addition to five themed rooms and well-appointed kitchen, it's home to a museum and hosts regularly scheduled live performances. Now in its 11th year, the Inn has received much attention. Numerous news outlets from around the world have reported on it, and a stay has been a featured prize on “Wheel of Fortune” several times.

The Inn of the Patriots in Grover is more than a place to lay your head and enjoy a delicious six-course breakfast. It's home to the U.S. Presidential Culinary Museum, local artifacts from the colonial period, a cooking school and live performances. [Photos courtesy of The Inn of the Patriots]



Marti Mongiello spent time cooking for five presidents at Camp David and the White House, mostly during the two Clinton administrations.

You don't have to stay at the Inn to take advantage of its offerings.

Mongiello said daily guided tours through the museum start at 9:30 a.m. There also is a Sunday afternoon cooking school, which has graduated almost 5,000 students since opening in 2010.

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SALAD DRESSINGS FIT FOR A PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY

Marti Mongiello, who served as a Camp David and White House chef, created these recipes for President and Mrs. Clinton. They use their favorite fruits – bananas and mangoes, respectively – adding a tropical feel to wintertime meals.

HILLARY CLINTON'S MANGO SALAD DRESSING

Ingredients

- A few mangoes, peeled and sliced
- Half of a 15-ounce bottle of mango juice
- About 3 T warmed honey
- A few drops of hot sauce
- 1 cup of Herb de Provence olive oil or Chipotle olive oil or a combination of both, depending on taste
- Mirin, rice wine or salad vinegar to taste
- White pepper to taste
- Garlic powder to taste
- Salt to taste

Directions

Combine ingredients using an immersion blender. Depending on the ripeness and size of the mangoes, you may need more or fewer of them.

BILL CLINTON'S BANANA SALAD DRESSING

Ingredients

- Two or three bananas, depending on size
- About 3 T warmed honey
- Cara Cara Orange Vanilla White Balsamic Vinegar to taste
- 1 cup blond miso paste stock made with warm water to thin
- White pepper to taste
- Salt to taste
- Dried garlic to taste

Directions

Combine ingredients using an immersion blender. Depending on the ripeness and size of the bananas, you may need more or fewer of them.

– Recipes courtesy of Marti Mongiello

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OPENING AN INN

After retiring from the Navy, Mongiello and his wife wanted to settle down, pursue degrees and start a family. While discussing where, Stormy, a Bessemer City High School graduate, suggested looking near where she was raised.

The option had possibility. Mongiello knew he wanted to open an inn that featured a museum. Grover, named after the country's 22nd and 24th president, was a possibility, especially since it was near Kings Mountain National Military Park, which attracted more than 250,000 people in 2015. So, in 2007 the couple purchased a 5,700-square-foot home in the small Cleveland County community and started work.

The Inn offers all that's expected by frequent travelers: free daily newspapers, comfortable beds, a business center, Wi-Fi, more than 400 television stations and private baths, all provided in a casual and fun-filled atmosphere. But the luxuries here go beyond fluffy towels and six-course breakfast prepared by a former White House chef.

The Inn also is home to the U.S. Presidential Culinary Museum, which displays Mongiello's collection of more than 20 china designs commissioned by first ladies, White House Christmas cards, presidential items and local artifacts, many connected to the Colonial period. He said it's the only place he knows where luxury accommodations are provided inside a museum. "We call this place 'A Night at The Museum,'" he said, referencing the popular movie franchise.

You don't have to stay at the Inn to take advantage of its offerings. Mongiello said daily guided tours through the museum start at 9:30 a.m. There also is a Sunday afternoon cooking school, which has graduated almost 5,000 students since opening in 2010. He said the class focused on Scotland this year, with students, most of whom travel from as far as Asheville and Charlotte, preparing cottage pie and cock-a-leekie soup, which is made with leeks, chicken and prunes. He said each class is split between hands-on kitchen work and studying the culture and ingredients that make up the dishes.

From time-to-time, the Inn plays host to live entertainment, most often in the form of historical re-enactors. Mongiello said recent guests have been treated to "visits" from Helen Keller, President Cleveland's wife, Frances, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on The Inn of the Patriots and the U.S. Presidential Museum:

- Visit theinnofthepatriots.com
- Call 704-937-2940
- Text or call 704-490-3947