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**On the cover:** Maple pecan pie is the perfect holiday treat. (*Photo by Jon C. Lakey*)





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Above: Director Lisa Ewers; Accompanist Zoey Brouthers. Below: Remembering the Chorale's 50th Anniversary Celebration





# United in SONG

Stanly County Chorale marks 55 years

PHOTOS AND STORY BY JO GREY





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za Hudson believes singing in a choir is magical.

"One voice is beautiful, but singing in a group, whether in unison or in harmony, creates a special bond with people," said Hudson, a former director of the Stanly County Chorale and 2020 Stanly County Arts Person of the Year.

Nathan Sanges agrees.

"Choral singing is a unique experience," he said. "We come together with a common goal and have a strong connection because we're doing everything as one."

Sanges was a West Stanly High School teacher in 1968, along with Albert Rush, when the Chorale vice president Toby Burleson invited them to attend the Chorale's first rehearsal.

"I'd always enjoyed singing and was very excited to get involved then," said Sanges. "Albert Rush had a magnificent tenor voice. He was extremely talented — a special kind of person."

The two co-workers weren't far removed from college days and college choir tours back then. Both remember when a room full of musicians from all over Stanly County, representing a host of churches, first assembled in the basement of Albemarle's First Baptist Church so they could do what they all loved doing — making music in four-part harmony. That was 55 years ago.

The text on the record jacket of the Chorale's LP recording from its 1969 spring concert indicates the choristers came "...from all walks of life and all occupations from housewife to minister, mill worker to nurse, from teacher to office worker. All ages are present, and all degrees of talent are to be found."

William McGibney was minister of music at Albemarle's First Baptist Church when he became the first director of the Chorale.

"Bill was very talented, with a beautiful tenor voice," said Rush, who plans to join about 30 current members of the Chorale for the 2023 reprise of the Chorale's first concert — the Christmas portion of George Frideric Handel's "Messiah." The Anson Singers will appear with the Chorale in Albemarle at 7 p.m. Dec. 2 at First Presbyterian Church, and then host the combined group at 4 p.m. Dec. 3 at the First United Methodist Church in Wadesboro.



Melanie Mattox joined the Chorale in 2022; Albert Rush is a founding member from 1968 who is back for this year's 55th Anniversary.

## DIRECTORS AND ACCOMPANISTS

The Stanly County Chorale has been led by 16 directors since 1968, and supported by at least that many accompanists, plus a board of directors and loyal sponsors.

The Chorale's first pianist was Mary Hearne, now deceased, who served five seasons beginning in 1968. She graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music and studied at Juliard School of Music. Another acclaimed musician, Stanley Scheer, accompanied the Chorale from 1978-1980 and again from 2008-2012. Scheer taught at Pfeiffer for more than 20 years and was recognized across North America for his expertise in church music and organ design.

Lisa Ewers was invited to take the stage as director earlier this year following 30 years of involvement in the Stanly County education and arts communities. She first sang with the Chorale in 1995 at the invitation of Dr. Karl Wienand, her former Pfeiffer professor.

"Directing is a big commitment for a lot of work and little pay, but the director and accompanist do it for the love of music," said Ewers. "We teach the art and skill of singing so singers understand their voices and learn to use their "instruments."

"I love choral directing," added Hudson. "I enjoy planning and rehearsing with musicians."

Yet, even before Hudson directed the Chorale, when she was Aza Mabry, she served as accompanist from 1986-87.

"It has been an honor to accompany this group of talented singers and work with wonderful directors like Marvin Burke, Cindy Misenheimer and Carmella Hedrick. Each of these leaders knew how to challenge, inspire and teach the music to achieve a 'polished' performance," said Hudson.

Hudson remembers Misenheimer's skill of relating to each person and of getting them to sing their personal best. She also accompanied the Chorale for two seasons.

In addition to Burke, Misenheimer, and Hedrick, a rotation of directors in the 1980s and 1990s included Martha Chapman Cowan and Karl Wienand.

Wienand, who sometimes served as accompanist, was university organist and professor of music at Pfeiffer and was a Fulbright scholar in Germany. His wife Marilyn played the harp, organ and piano and accompanied the Chorale during most of her husband's 12 seasons as director.

Other accompanists during those decades were Becky Phillips, Bill Gouge, Christina Uden and Ellen Brewer, each with impressive resumes and noteworthy dedication.

Stephen Harrill is another musician who came to the Chorale at the invitation of a Pfeiffer professor, Dr. Marvin Burke. Harrill sang in a 1977 concert and eventually returned as the director from 1999-2001 and 2008-2012. In between Harrill's terms Cynthia Pribble served from 2001-2007.

"Her extensive background was evident as she successfully worked on the visual aspects of the Chorale's performances, while challenging the singers to explore a wide variety of musical styles," said longtime member Paul Hinkle.

Michelle Williams-Gonzales served as interim director, then Joseph Judge, director of choral activities at Pfeiffer, served several seasons after Harrill. Other directors were Angela Moore, Caroline Stephenson and Hunter Safrit. David Furr and Sue Lambert used their

musical talents at the piano through 2008, followed by Steven Mowery and Flora Lester.

The most recent accompanist — and the longest-running — is Zoey Brouthers with 14 seasons.

"I've always enjoyed accompanying, be it vocalists or instrumentalists, solo or ensemble," she said. "Following a conductor comes easily to me, which helps a lot. That I like to sightread also makes a difference, I'm sure."

Depending on the difficulty of the music, Brouthers spends from three to eight hours a week on Chorale music alone, not counting rehearsals.

### **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**

From the beginning, the Chorale was envisioned as a community-builder. That process begun 55 years ago has included too-many-to-count musicians linking arms and voices at weekly rehearsals where they work hard at producing excellent sound. Two hours of singing leaves them weary.

Music educators and professional musicians

have linked arms with church choir members, school bands, drama groups, family ensembles, and handbell choirs, confirming the strength and richness of the arts in Stanly County.

"For a county of our size and demographics, we have a tremendous arts community," said Ewers. "A special bond forms between artists during the process of creating, whether in a choir, ensemble, band, theater or vocal group — a musical family."

"A community choir brings people together that might not know each other, and they can enjoy making a joyful noise," Hudson added. "A choir provides great fellowship with a purpose that extends to the entire community."

Rush, who retired as a principal from Stanly County Schools, said he also experienced the bond of shared musicianship.

"The opportunity to join the chorale in Stanly County helped me bridge the gap and gain acceptance," he said. "It was a very pleasant experience to be in the chorale."

Sometimes connections extend beyond Stanly County. Because the founder of the Anson

Singers, Emily Litaker Privette, had been a student of Stephen Harrill's, the Anson County group first joined the Chorale for the 2012 performance of Mendelssohn's "Elijah." More than 50 musicians — singers, instrumentalists and special soloists — presented the oratorio in Albemarle and Wadesboro. The organ accompanist, Scheer, had been the consultant for the Casavant organ design at Wadesboro's First United Methodist Church.

#### MUSICAL SELECTION

The musical director chooses a theme in collaboration with the Board of Directors, according to Ewers. Two large scrapbooks of concert programs testify to the scope of the Chorale's twice-yearly performances.

"It's always important to think about the audience. We want to have something for everybody. Sometimes it's light or familiar like Broadway show tunes," said Harrill. "And singing music from other centuries requires us to educate people so they understand the context."

Harrill believes either way, "The Chorale



sings music of the ages in the context for today. Music speaks for itself. The Italians call it bel canto — beautiful singing."

"We had a very versatile staff of directors over the years who exposed us to a lot of things," Rush added. "I appreciate all kinds of music, and I enjoyed the 'Messiah' as much as anything we did."

According to available lists, the Christmas or the Easter portion of "Messiah" has been presented 11 times in 55 years by the Chorale.

Sanges remembers singing bass for the 2009 Christmas portion of "Messiah," and for many other performances.

"But life happens," he said. "Over the years, my wife Marlene and I sang as our schedules allowed, but will not be able to attend this year, so I'm sad to miss this."

"Handel's 'Messiah' is among the world's most performed works," said Hudson. "It takes much preparation, but it is worth it. The melodies are beautiful, and this oratorio is based on scripture. It is truly a joy to sing."

As the organist in 1992, Hudson said she was in awe of how Misenheimer incorporated the history of the work as she taught each piece.

"It's important for our community to provide a way to hear 'Messiah.' A live performance is different from a recording, and in Stanly County it's free. You'd pay to hear it in Charlotte," said Kent Harkey, who has participated in numerous seasonal performances with his wife, Edna.

Harkey came to the Chorale in 1977, a high school junior drafted by his church choir director, Robert L. Kennedy, one of the Chorale's earliest directors.

#### **CONCERT MEMORIES**

Hinkle recalls Spring 2005.

"We presented 'A Backstage Cabaret' on the stage in the Agri-Civic Center," he said. " Members of the audience were seated at tables on the stage, where they enjoyed snacks and beverages while small groups of singers deftly moved around between the tables as they performed. Larger groups of singers performed from multiple, stationary locations around the edge of the stage. The audience loved it, and so did we."

Hudson took up the director's baton for the Chorale's 50th Anniversary Celebration in 2018. The concert stands out because the North Stanly High School Chorus and Handbell



Karen and Paul Hinkle Chorale members since 1985, are joined by Edna and Kent Harkey

Choir were invited to perform.

"My students and I were honored to accept this invitation, and we prepared Christmas selections by John Rutter," said Hudson.

The church choir loft overflowed with 85 singers.

A trip to New York City may be the most memorable for Suzie Martin and the 20 Stanly County Chorale members who made the trip in 1991. Dr. Marvin Burke was invited to conduct a 200-voice choir at the 100th Birthday celebration for the opening of Carnegie Hall, presenting "Faure: Requiem."

"Singing difficult music is a way of pushing yourself to a different level," Martin said.

"When we were on stage in a full auditorium, it was a 'pinch-me' moment," Martin added. "We also did the touristy things — a Broadway show, walking Fifth Avenue, a river cruise on the Hudson, the Russian Tea Room — we checked some boxes and had a great time."

### WHY DO WE SING?

Two of the Chorale's newest members are experienced singers, but hesitated at first to join the Chorale. Regan Eudy and Jean Kadela have been away from choirs for a while, yet after Eudy's first Chorale rehearsal she said, "The moment we started singing, I remembered why I loved it so much."

"I'm a music teacher full-time, so music has always been the biggest part of my life," said Eudy.

She is also a new mom.

"I want my daughter to grow up in a musical environment and see her mother making music, and I truly believe that music makes better people. Plus, it's nice to sing like a 'big girl' once a week instead of singing Kindergarten songs."

After a 10-year hiatus from singing, Kadela admits that if you don't use it, you lose it. But she met Ewers this year while participating in the Uwharrie Players' production of "Bright Star."

"Lisa was an immense help. She's an exceptional music director and vocal clinician, so when Lisa suggested I join Stanly County Chorale I jumped at the chance. I'm so glad I did."

For founding member Sanges, "Music transcends culture, time, experiences, race. It's one of the things that keeps the soul alive."

Come next spring, "The Chorale will present a musical scrapbook of favorites in acknowledgment of past conductors and accompanists," said Ewers. The community is invited to enjoy the journey.

*Jo Grey is a freelance writer.* S





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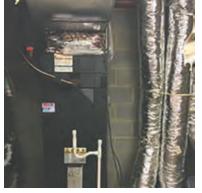














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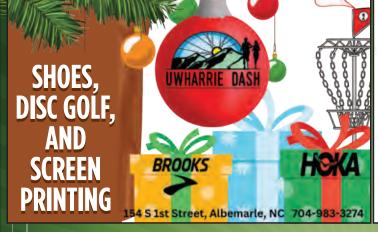
# Family traditions

Collection provides touch of Christmas magic

PHOTOS AND STORY BY JO GREY

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was the night before Christmas ... or maybe the weekend before Christmas. At least that's when Dan and Sue Dalton traditionally hold their family celebration of Jesus' birth.

The family assembles at the couple's retirement home in Badin, which is outfitted with bunkbeds for their five grandchildren and enough sleeping space for six adults. Some years, a dog or two have been in the mix. Even the clock on the wall adds holiday cheer as it plays a tune from Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker." Addie, the youngest and only granddaughter, must be lifted up to push the button to start the music.

Sue's heritage is on display for Friday's "Italian" night, featuring Grandmother Choppa's recipe for spaghetti and meatballs. Sausage, homemade sourdough bread and Grandmother Choppa's special salad of iceberg lettuce with olive oil, red wine vinegar and Parmesan cheese dressing rounds out the menu.

The Christmas tree and other decorations are out of the boxes by early December, about the time of oldest grandson Jack's birthday. A collection of folk-art plates, figurines and tree ornaments designed by South Carolina artist Jim Shore adds rich seasonal color to a snow-white background. If the grandchildren are visiting at the time, they "help" set the Santa figurines on the alcove shelves in the dining room — very carefully.

When Dan and Sue were married in 2005, they talked about starting a collection that could be passed down to children and grandchildren. Sue already had a few of Jim Shore's collectibles so they agreed to start with Shore's annual series of decorative plates.

"Beginning with our first plate, they all hang on the sunroom wall year-round," said Dan, "so Sue won't forget the year we were married."

Shore replaced the wall plate series in 2015 with smaller tree ornaments which the Daltons have since purchased. They've also added other Santa figures to Sue's original collection.

The Santa and angel figurines always attract attention from the grandchildren.

"The children are excited. They stop and look when they pass by the shelves," said Sue.

Visitors to the Daltons' home also pause for

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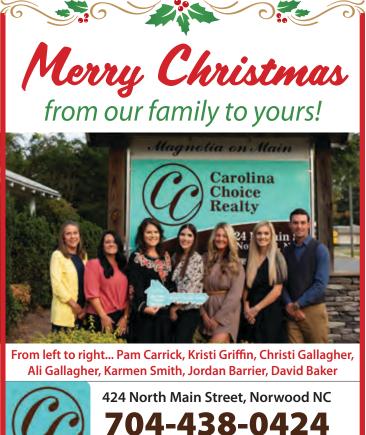
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closer inspection of quilt patterns, rosemaling and tole painting on the figures.

"The beautiful, intricate artwork is magical," added Sue.

Such copious detail and array of designs draws admiration from anyone who pays attention.

Each hand-painted, stone-resin figure evokes familiar memories by its design and its name. A Santa from 2005 with a creamy curled beard, named "My True Love Gave to Me," recalls the music of the "12 Days of Christmas" in minute detail. His full-skirted garment serves as a canvas depicting each of the 12 days, from the partridge in a pear tree, to five gold rings, all the way to 12 drummers drumming. A characteristic quilt pattern shows up on the back of Santa's long burgundy cloak.

The 2005 Christmas angel, "A Star Shall Guide Us," presents the Nativity scene of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, with the gift-bearing Wise Men in warm pastels of blue, pink and green. A soft brown watchful donkey minds the manger. And the Dalton household settles down to sleep.

The family's nostalgic Friday night dinner is followed by Saturday morning's traditional presentation of stockings and gifts.

"With 11 people, it's kind of chaotic," says Sue.

Even so, they find space in the day for fun and laughter and a generational photography session in front of the house or down by Badin Lake.

Their traditional "Christmas" meal begins with each couple's favorite charcuterie selections followed by prime rib with horseradish sauce, mashed potatoes and wedge salad with gorgonzola.

"We use the Christmas china," said Sue, "and Dan washes the dishes."

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Christmas cookies and homemade desserts top off the family's feast.

On Sunday morning the Daltons and the two younger generations fill up a pew at their church like the joy of Christmas fills their hearts. They may even sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Sue thinks of their first Christmas plate from 18 years ago.

"It depicts a peaceful village with its guardian angel, and it reminds me of our little village of Badin."

Jo Grey is a freelance writer.

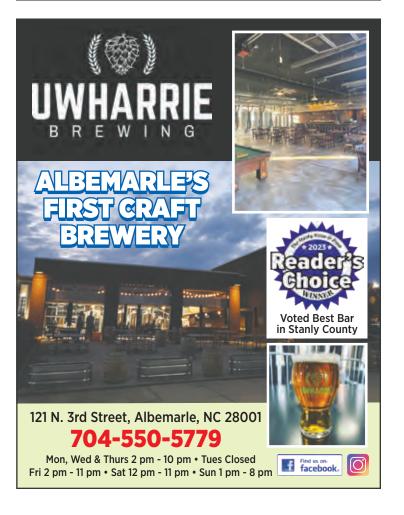
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# Sweet, nutty Ctart

Pies and a crisp warm the holiday soul

STORY BY DEIRDRE PARKER SMITH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JON C. LAKEY

ou've enjoyed your holiday meal, probably had too much to eat, and now it's time for dessert.

Pumpkin pie is the expected finish, but these are worthy alternatives that won't ruffle any traditionalist's feathers.

One speaks to an old Southern tradition, and the others use classic fall and winter flavors.

The chess or chest pie goes back at least to the 1920s, the days of the party line. That's when folks shared a phone line and you sometimes had to wait for another person on your line to hang up before making your call. You could hear the other conversations by just picking up your phone.

My husband's grandmother, Nolie Zimmerman (who lived to be 106), picked up her chess pie recipe by listening in one day when she heard a mother giving the recipes to her daughter, a neighbor.

"I had made chest pies, but not like that, and not good like that 'cause I didn't know how to make chest pies. I went and made me some crusties while it was fresh on my mind, and I baked me a chest pie."

Chess pie is nostalgia in a pie plate.

The pecan pie is adapted from a recipe in the 1984 edition of the wonderful Fannie Farmer Cookbook, which has been my cookbook bible ever since I got it. It answers hundreds of simple cooking questions, and its recipes are generally foolproof. It's one way I learned to cook. My adaptation is to substitute real maple syrup for the corn syrup. No pancake syrup. REAL maple syrup. I use light brown sugar instead of white and add an extra half cup of pecans to the pie. If it's pecan pie, it should be full of nuts, right?

A nice, rich cup of coffee is the perfect accompaniment to the chess or chest pie and the pecan pie. It balances out the sweetness.

The Cranberry Apple Raisin Crisp is an adaptation, too, from a 1980s era country inns cookbook (missing somewhere in my collection of cookbooks), that made a huge crisp—enough to fill a 9-by-13 pan. This 8-by-8-inch is plenty for smaller gatherings. It will easily

feed 6-8, depending on the serving size. Add a scoop of vanilla ice cream, and you can stretch it even further.

The nice thing about the crisp is it's quite tart from the fresh cranberries, and cuts through the richness of turkey and dressing and gravy. I always buy an extra bag or two of cranberries to freeze for recipes later in the year. There tart brightness is always a welcome note.

#### CHESS PIE

- 2 unbaked 9-inch pie crusts
- 3 eggs
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) butter, softened
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 3 ½ Tablespoons cream or milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine the filling ingredients and blend well. Divide the mixture evenly between the prepared crusts. Bake for 10 minutes. Turn the oven down





to 325 degrees and bake for 20 to 25 minutes more, or until done.

Why two pies? Well, that much filling in one pie is just too sweet and too rich. The thinner filling makes the piece of pie portable on a napkin, no fork needed.

### MAPLE PECAN PIE

- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 cup maple syrup
- 3/4 cup light brown sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 11/2 cups chopped pecans
- Pastry for single crust pie
- A few pecan halves (for garnish)

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Place prepared pastry crust in a standard pie plate, with a little flour sprinkled in bottom of plate.

Mix eggs, syrup and brown sugar with a whisk until no lumps remain. Add salt, vanilla and pecans and stir with a spoon or spatula to

Pour into prepared pie shell and garnish with whole pecan halves, if desired. Place in oven and bake for 10 minutes, then reduce temperature to 350 degrees and bake 35 more minutes. If crust should begin to brown too much, make a foil collar to protect the edges. Pie is done when it has puffed up and browned slightly.

## CRANBERRY APPLE RAISIN CRISP

- 2 apples, cut into bite-size pieces (a sweet
- 1 12-ounce bag cranberries, fresh or frozen
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 Tablespoons flour
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- Zest of one orange
- ½ cup orange juice (about 1 orange)
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- Pinch of salt

For the topping



- ½ cup flour
- 1/2 cup rolled oats (not instant)
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 5 1/2 Tablespoons cold butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Prepare the apples; rinse cranberries if frozen. Combine fruits with 2 Tbsp. flour, 3/4 cup sugar, orange zest and juice, spices and pinch of salt. Stir well to combine.

Meanwhile, cut cold butter into cubes. Using a pastry cutter, two knives or your fingers, blend flour, oats, sugar and butter until it forms a crumbly mixture.

Place fruit mixture in an 8-by-8-inch baking dish. Crumble topping over fruit.

Bake for 45 minutes, or until top is nicely browned and fruit has softened.

A small glass of port would complement this dish. S



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# Christmas Activities

### NORWOOD CHRISTMAS **PARADE**

The Norwood Christmas Parade will be at 5 p.m. Nov. 29 on Main Street.

## OAKBORO CHRISTMAS **PARADE**

The Oakboro Christmas Parade will be at 7 p.m. Nov. 30. A Christmas tree lighting ceremony will begin at 6:30 p.m. at Oakboro Memorial Park.

## "AN ALBEMARLE **DOWNTOWN** CHRISTMAS"

"An Albemarle Downtown Christmas" will be 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Dec. 1. At 5:30 p.m., the Christmas tree at City Hall will be turned on. Children will enjoy activities including bounce houses, hayrides, face painting, power wheels rides, a craft activity and a visit with Santa at Courthouse Square Park. There will also be food trucks and street vendors and downtown businesses will have special extended hours.

### FESTIVAL OF TREES

Tillery Compassionate Care will host the annual Festival of Trees Dec. 1-31 at the Stanly County Commons. The event is free and open to the public any time the Stanly Commons is open (business hours Monday through Friday).

The Festival of Trees is a highlight of the holiday season with the volunteers of Tillery Compassionate Care designing an array of Christmas trees each year - ranging from whimsical to elegant. Santa and Mrs. Claus will visit on Dec. 4 beginning at 5:30 p.m. for an Open House. Businesses or community groups who would like to sponsor a tree this season are invited to call 704-983-4216.

#### Y CHRISTMAS SHOP

The YMCA Children's Christmas Shop will be open 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Dec. 2 at CB Crook Pavilion, 115 CB Crook Dr., Albemarle. There is a \$1 entry fee and no item is over \$10.

### LOCUST CHRISTMAS **PARADE**

The Locust Christmas Parade

will be at 1 p.m. Dec. 2.

#### WINTERFEST IN BADIN

Better Badin will present Winterfest noon to 8 p.m. Dec. 2 on Falls Road in Badin. There will be food and craft vendors, live music, handbells, a tree lighting and San-

### CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Stanly County Concert Band will perform its Christmas concert at 7 p.m. Dec. 7 at Central United Methodist Church in downtown Albemarle.

### NORWOOD CHRISTMAS

Norwood Christmas On The

Square will begin at 4 p.m. Dec. 9 at Main Street Market Square.

## ALBEMARLE **CHRISTMAS PARADE**

The Albemarle Christmas Parade will be at 4 p.m. Dec. 9 in downtown Albemarle.

## PARTNERSHIP TO **AUCTION CAKES**

Stanly County Partnership For Children will have the 4th Annual Holiday Cake Auction. Bidding begins at noon Dec. 14 on the Partnership's Facebook page and ends at noon Dec. 15.

We thank you for allowing us to serve you for 62 years and we look forward to serving you in the future



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