

# THE LAS CRUCES Bulletin

FRIDAY, NOV. 29, 2024

Volume 57, Number 48

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**UGLY CHRISTMAS SWEATER**



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If you've lived in New Mexico for any length of time, you no doubt already know that as the holiday season swings into prominence, so, too, does the tradition of lighting luminarias along walkways, roads and buildings. Throughout the month of December, luminarias (or farolitos, if you're so inclined) light up the night from Santa Fe to Mesilla and beyond, sparking joy and comfort wherever viewed. In Las Cruces, it begins with New Mexico State University's Noche de Luminarias, on December 1.

From there, every evening tree lighting ceremony, winter festival, fiesta, or holiday celebration employs the tradition, and we love them for it. All it takes is a stack of brown paper bags, a pile of sand, a passel of tea lights and a crew of conscripts to assemble and line them up. If you grew up here, you were most likely one of those conscripts and have the burn scars to prove it.

As ubiquitous as this tradition is, however, there are many who are unfamiliar with the history of the luminaria. How and when did the tradition get its start? There are many different speculations. The tradition of lighting luminarias is older than New Mexico itself, and to say it's steeped in cultural significance is an understatement. One thing we do know is that the Spanish brought it with them during their days of con-

# LUMINARIAS

## The warm glow of tradition

DAVID SALCIDO | Las Cruces Bulletin

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COURTESY PHOTO

Luminarias in Mesilla.

## LUMINARIAS

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quest and colonization.

Some believe it entered their ethnic vernacular in the Philippine Islands, where Chinese culture was prevalent and included the widespread use of paper lanterns. Catholicism, being what it has always been, syncretized the custom and brought it with them to the new world. Interestingly enough, paper bags weren't introduced until 1872, so the supposition isn't without its flaws.

Another belief is that the tradition dates back to 1590, when one Gaspar Castano de Sosa and his men lit small stacks of piñon bark and dry wood to guide scouts back to their camp. Apparently, the Pueblo people saw this and integrated it into their customs while performing traditional dances. Catholics just thought the little bonfires looked pretty and decided to use them in their religious ceremonies.

Interesting fact: It is this

viewpoint that explains the luminaria/farolito debate. In northern New Mexico, "farolito" is the word for the paper lantern, while "luminaria" is the word used to describe the small, paperless bonfires. Here in the south, they're all luminarias because they illuminate the night. There's no right or wrong way to say it, except that depending on where you live, it could brand you as an outsider.

The anthropological perspective on the history of the luminaria is that it had something to do with the winter solstice, which is celebrated throughout the world in different ways. This being the darkest time of the year, torches and lanterns were an integral part of many religious and cultural celebrations in lands where daylight was limited. Again, owing to syncretization, Catholic Spain brought those traditions with them, changing them to suit the situations as they arose.

Whatever the genesis,

the tradition spread like wildfire throughout the Spanish territories. In fact, these days, what started as a quaint custom with nebulous beginnings has become a symbol of hope in times of darkness. The American Cancer Society uses luminarias as a symbol of remembrance and hope to honor cancer survivors and those who have lost the battle to cancer. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention uses luminarias to memorialize those lost to suicide. And all across the nation, luminarias are used to light paths, line streets and delineate buildings, structures and even ships at sea.

As traditions go, this one doesn't appear to be winking out any time soon. For a full list of events making use of luminarias, check out our calendars in the Las Cruces Bulletin, Desert Exposure, both of their websites, and the regularly produced newsletters for both.

### SPONSORED CONTENT

## Burrell College Expert Tips From Your Student Doc: Combating Iron Deficiency

Welcome to "Expert Tips From Your Student Doc," where Burrell student doctors provide guidance to support your health and well-being. Iron deficiency anemia, a common condition caused by a lack of healthy red blood cells, can lead to symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, and pale skin. Here are some smart dietary tips to help combat this condition effectively.

### Tip #1: Increase Iron-Rich Foods in Your Diet

Consuming iron-rich foods such as dark leafy greens (spinach, kale, and collard greens), beans, dried fruits (apricots, raisins, and dates), and fortified cereals, bread, and pasta. Including a variety of these foods in your diet can help replenish your iron levels.

### Tip #2: Pair Iron with Vitamin C

Vitamin C enhances the absorption of iron, making it easier for your body to utilize this vital nutrient. To maximize your iron intake, pair iron-rich foods with Vitamin C sources. For instance, enjoy a spinach salad with strawberries, a steak with roasted bell peppers, or a bean dish with a squeeze of lemon. Even a glass of orange juice with your meal can make a big difference.

### Tip #3: Be Mindful with Iron Supplements

If diet alone isn't enough to address your anemia, iron supplements may be necessary. For best results, take iron supplements on an empty stomach with a glass of

juice rich in Vitamin C, like orange juice. Avoid taking iron with milk or coffee, as calcium and caffeine can interfere with absorption. If you experience stomach upset, consult your healthcare provider for tips on adjusting your supplement routine.

### Tip #4: Consult a Physician

If you experience new or worsening symptoms like fatigue, shortness of breath, pale or cold skin, or a fast or irregular heartbeat, consult your physician immediately. These symptoms may indicate that your anemia is affecting oxygen delivery to your body's organs, which can lead to serious health complications. A physician can guide you in managing anemia effectively and safely.

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