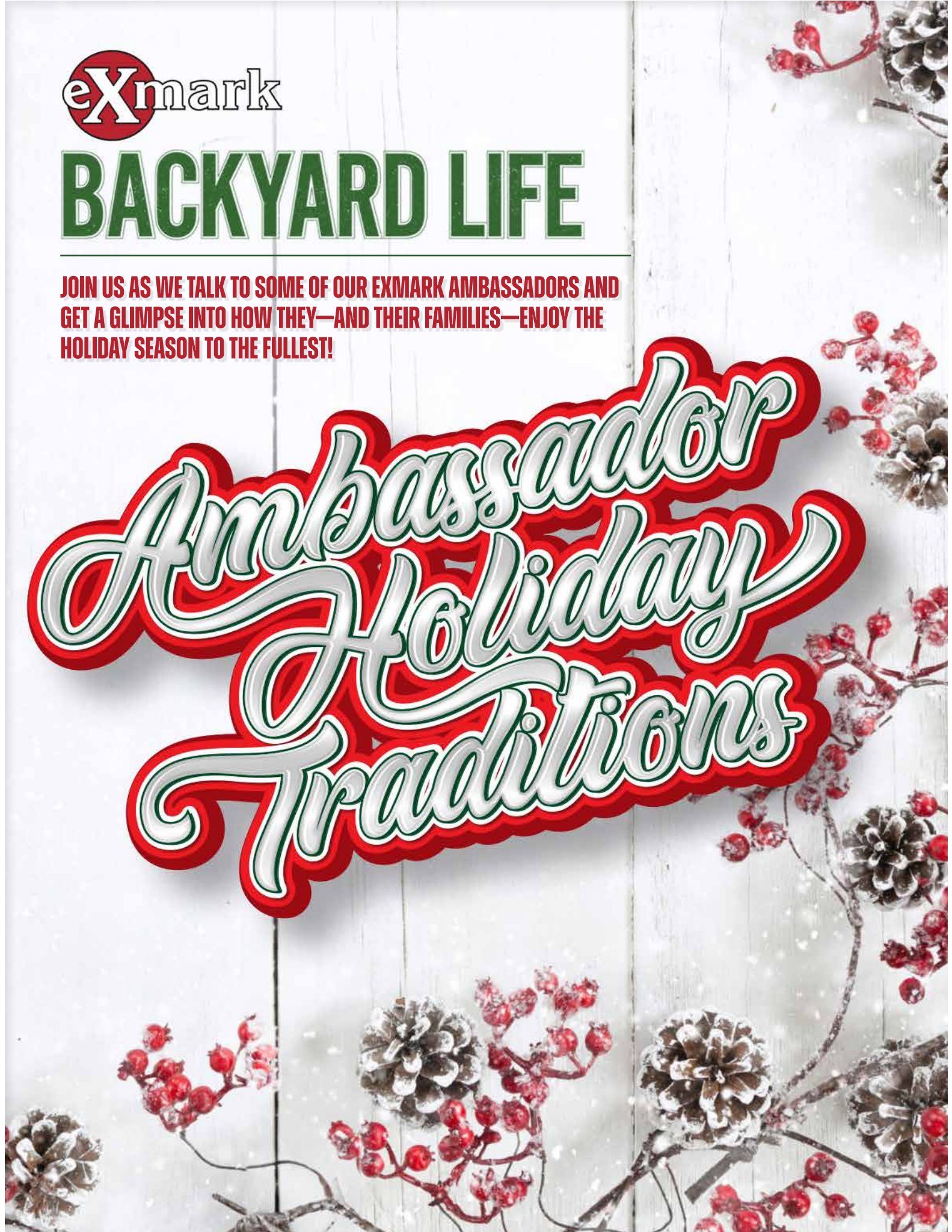




# BACKYARD LIFE

JOIN US AS WE TALK TO SOME OF OUR EXMARK AMBASSADORS AND GET A GLIMPSE INTO HOW THEY—AND THEIR FAMILIES—ENJOY THE HOLIDAY SEASON TO THE FULLEST!

# Ambassador Holiday Traditions



## GREG MRVICH — A VERY MRVICH CHRISTMAS

We have a small family, and, unfortunately, over the past few years it has become even smaller due to the loss of our son's grandparents.

We used to have two Christmas celebrations, one at my in-laws' home on Christmas Eve and then my wife and I would host Christmas day at our home. My wife's mother was originally from Switzerland and her father immigrated to the US from Germany, so their celebration followed many of the German and Swiss traditions—including the food—while ours was more American.

After the passing of my wife's parents, we accepted an invitation to celebrate Christmas with my sister and brother-in-law, who live in Northern California, which is about an eight-hour drive for us. John and Jen are very into the holiday decorations. My sister decks out the inside of the home, while John goes full on "Clark Griswold" of National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation fame outside. Every year their décor grew and grew to a point where cars would stop and take photos. It was crazy, but we all looked forward to seeing what would come next.

One night in December, my wife, son and I were at home watching *The Office* on TV. This was a Christmas episode and one of the characters (Dwight) was in charge of the office party and decided to share his families Germanic traditions, bringing "Belsnickel" into the mix. Belsnickel is a very gruff and angry form of Santa Claus. To get the full picture you really need to Google him. Anyway, he rewards good children with sensible gifts like mason jar lids and punishes bad children with a swat from a bundle of twigs. I decided that I would surprise my Jen and John with a visit from good old Belsnickel. Wearing animal furs and wielding a trusty bundle of swatting-twigs, I now have the honor of judging family members. I decide if they have been "impish or admirable" during the year. Those who were good receive a sensible gift, such as a cleaning product. Those who were impish? Yup! A swat! (It's all in fun and no one gets hurt.)

Every year my sister calls to make sure Belsnickel makes an appearance, so he honors this request. We have also added some of my wife's family traditions, like hiding a pickle ornament in the tree for my son to find, as well as walnut shells with money inside.

Oh yeah, we bought John and Jen a snow machine last year as a contribution to the outside décor. We don't get real snow in many parts of Cali, but this adds a bit of that Norman Rockwell feel to our celebration.

Merry Christmas!

*The Mrvich Family*



## JOE THOMAS — A THOMAS FAMILY CHRISTMAS

Like most families, Thanksgiving and Christmas are big events in our family. We have had some amazing times with our children and parents on our rural property over the years. Our place has been the host destination for many years. Until recently, the main focus of these get-togethers—particularly Christmas—has been on the children.

As the kids have grown and now moved away for college and careers, and our parents who are now in their mid 80's have begun to have health issues, our focus has shifted to seeing that they enjoy each holiday to its fullest! Our parents look so forward to these Thanksgiving and Christmas events and talk about them for weeks and even months after.

It's funny how things go full circle. I can honestly say that seeing the joy on our elderly parents' faces these days is almost like a flashback to the days of watching our children open gifts on Christmas morning. We truly love the holidays here at the Thomas farm!

Merry Christmas!

*The Thomas Family*



## GRAE BUCK — A HOLIDAY FEAST TO REMEMBER

As a fun and tasty new hobby during the pandemic, my wife and I got a Traeger smoker and began to learn the hobby of smoking meat. Now for the holidays, we enjoy smoking different cuts of meat for family and friends! From a 14-hour smoked brisket for Christmas, to pulled pork for summer BBQs, and turkey for Thanksgiving, we've had great success and pleased guests! We even put the smoker to the test last Christmas, during an arctic blast, with a successful overnight brisket when the windchill dipped below zero.

Merry Christmas!

*Grae Buck*



## BRIAN LATIMER — A MERRY MOTOCROSS CHRISTMAS

Wow! It's amazing to reflect over the years and see how things have evolved in my family. Each year around the holidays I like to ruminate on what I want to give to my children. I also think about what the most valuable thing would be that I can provide as a father. It's easy to wrap this idea into the thought of buying another item, but I truly believe that only brings temporary happiness. My terms have now revolved around simply taking my family places to experience things.

My childhood holidays were usually time together at the dinner table with cousins, aunts and uncles. We've turned the corner now. Holiday seasons consist of us going places and experiencing things we never have before. Over the last few years, we've been spending time at the coast saltwater fishing during Christmas weekend. This year will be vastly different. We're actually spending our holidays at a motocross race! I never thought I'd be that parent, but I am. I think sports are a good way to teach children life lessons. Through a sequence of life events our path has been using motorcycles for those lessons. It's a great way to teach kids about grit, passion, determination and how to solve problems.

My oldest son spent his entire year working on his bike skill to become a motocross racer. I promised him if he put in the work, I would take our family to one of the most acclaimed amateur races in the world. So, this Thanksgiving week we'll load up our camper and spend 10 days in Florida at the Thor Mini Olympics. I'm sure we'll create memories and experiences that will be forever etched in our memories. This could be the experience that ultimately changes the trajectory for Latimers for ages. I'm honored to be the chaperone of this. Honestly, it's possible that I'm more excited than my kids are to take this on!

Merry Christmas!

*The Latimer Family*



## MICHAEL WADDELL — A CHEERFUL, CHAOTIC CHRISTMAS

With a family of 5 kids the holidays are always something we look forward to. My kids' ages are from 7 to 23, so this makes it challenging and fun at the same time when we can get everyone together.

The biggest changes have been the responsibilities of my oldest kids. Mason has a full-time job and lives in Charleston, SC. Meyer is a freshman in college. So, getting everybody under the same roof takes some scheduling.

But man, it's controlled chaos when we all get together for the holidays. Laughing, overeating, football games in the yard and typically we all go hunting.

My wife Christie is an amazing cook, and so there is always good eating. Sometimes we eat traditional... Ya know, turkey and dressing, ham, etc. But we have been known to change it up and just thrown some ribeyes on the grill. Nothing wrong with a big steak night for the holidays, right?

Christmas is the best. With Waylon being 7, Christie and I take a trip to the North Pole to visit Santa to go over the good and bad list and bring Santa Waylon's wish list. Waylon is a huge believer, and with his brothers, and still having a brother and sister in high school—Addie (16) and Macoy (16)—it makes it very fun and over the top.

The biggest change for me has been to learn to just slow down, relax and take it all in. Family is very important to me, always has been; however, as you get a little older it really becomes special in a way that is hard to explain.

Life can stretch you out and push and pull at you in a way that knocks you down. The holidays are a time to get back up and to realize the most special things in life are simple and lives in love. Family and the holidays are the perfect reminder of this!

Merry Christmas!

*The Waddell Family*

