## **BEST BETS**

## The Out-of-Towner's Guide to the Tri-Cities

We asked our Facebook friends: "Where are your favorite places to go when out-of-town guests come here for a visit?" With more than 200 total recomendations, here are your top spots to check out, whether you're a local or a tourist.

#### **BAYS MOUNTAIN PARK AND PLANETARIUM**

Kingsport, Tennessee — 32 mentions

**Lisa Johnson:** Laurel Run Park (and) Bays Mountain. Both parks offer great hiking trails, with Bays Mountain offering several different trails with varying difficulty levels for any fitness levels of guests.

**Melissa Sturgill:** Bays Mountain. Love the planetarium show, the barge ride and the animals!

**Jamie Rhudy Henson:** My nieces and nephew love Bays Mountain.



Guests can celebrate autumn at Bays Mountain's Fall Fest in Kingsport from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on

#### 2. PAL'S SUDDEN SERVICE

Many locations — 25 mentions

**Suzanne Addington Heckman:** My son lives four hours away and he always has to eat at Pal's first thing. It's like coming home for him.

**Jana Woliver:** Pal's is always the first stop when we have guests come in town!

**Brandi Huerta:** Our family from out of state loves to get Pal's ... while they're here.

**Jeni Morelock:** This will always be home, but we live 12 hours away. Both of my daughters come home for Pal's. They literally go at least twice a day while we are here.



Isabelle Reese Carroll, 21 months, enjoying lunch at Pal's. She loves toasted cheese and Frenchie fries, and she called her water "Pal's tea."

#### 4. NATURAL TUNNEL STATE PARK

Duffield, Virginia — 5 mentions

#### RIVERFRONT SEAFOOD CO.

Kingsport, Tennessee − 5 mentions

#### **WARRIORS' PATH** STATE PARK

Kingsport, Tennessee − 5 mentions

#### **Angie Dyson Allman:**

Warriors' Path State Park for walks, playground, fishing, kayaking.

#### **Jamie Rhudy Henson:**

Their (nieces and nephew) favorite thing though is the playground at Warrior's.

### 3. RIDGEWOOD BBQ

Bluff City, Tennessee — 6 mentions



Tennessee Commissioner of Community and Economic Development Bill Hagerty cuts into a pork sandwich at Bluff City's Ridgewood Barbecue as owner Larry Proffitt watches. In 2014, Hagerty visited Ridgewood to award it the title of Tennessee's best barbecue restaurant, based on an online poll from the state agency's Facebook page.

#### BLACKBIRD BAKERY

Bristol, Virginia — 4 mentions

#### CARTER FAMILY FOLD

Hiltons, Virginia — 4 mentions

#### KINGSPORT GREENBELT

Kingsport, Tennessee — 4 mentions

**Angie Dyson Allman:** Greenbelt for

#### a nice walk.

**GYPSY CIRCUS CIDER CO.** Kingsport, Tennessee — 4 mentions

#### **HOB-NOB DRIVE-IN**

Gate City, Virginia — 4 mentions

#### STATE STREET Bristol, Virginia — 4 mentions

**Ambre Torbett:** State Street

restaurants - no chains

#### KINGSPORT CAROUSEL & PARK

Kingsport, Tennessee — 4 mentions

#### More mentions

#### **Lura Phillips Cummings:**

Bays Mountain, Asheville to Biltmore or Pigeon Forge to Dollywood. I guess now we can showcase the Casino.

#### **Deloris Carter Stacy:**

Bays Mountain, the Greenbelt, and Downtown Kingsport to visit my favorite place, Church Circle, and, of course, everyone has to visit a Pal's!!

**Daniel Darnell:** Last time I had a friend visit out of the area, we went to Asheville and stayed the weekend.

Larry Jessee: Teddy's Restaurant and Heritage Square across the street in Nickelsville (Virginia) and Bush Mill on Twin Springs Road.

**Andrew Carlton:** We love to tell guests that Bagel Exchange (Kingsport, Tennessee) for breakfast is a must, and Main Street Pizza (Kingsport, Tennessee) for dinner. If they're around for a few days, we always include Pal's, a trip to Bays Mountain, and explore the

Tri-Cities.

**Deborah McConnell Tipton:** Barter Theatre, Creeper Trail, Bays Mountain, Hob-Nob, Natural Tunnel State Park

**Stacie Jane:** My family that lives in the city loves to just ride around the back roads & take pics. They do love Pal's. Also the local antique stores & flea markets are a draw for them.

#### **Karen Davidson:** In VA: Flag Rock to see the

Woodbooger statue, then the Woodbooger Grill in Norton, Natural Tunnel State Park, Bush Mill, Hob -Nob (to name a few). TN: the Carousel, Mayan Kickback, Bays Mt., the Farmer's Market, Lots to do!

#### **Jamie Wood Larkins: We** went and walked the Mendota Trail (Virginia)

**Sophie Phipps Blevins:** Price's Too Restaurant off 421 - They have a great homemade breakfast,

especially their pumpkin

pancakes in the Fall!

#### **Claire Jackson Kilgore:**

Pal's, downtown to Tap House or High Voltage, Gypsy Circus Cider, Bays Mountain, Betty's Stockyard Cafe

### **Jeff-Angi Gibson:** Hale Springs Inn and its history -

their menu WILL NEVER DISAPPOINT! And the new museum on Hasson Street, Price Public in Rogersville. With all the great places downtown to choose to eat you can't go wrong

**Cris Griffin:** Amis Mills Eatery. Lots of history, beautiful scenery, great atmosphere and food.

#### **Rebecca Brock-Wesson:**

Evelyn's for brunch. Lunch or dinner downtown at Macado's. If I'm stayin gin the area I recommend Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott. It's the brand new hotel behind Burger King on John B Dennis. Afternoon walks along Bays Mountain.

Jane Woliver: Pal's is

always the first stop when we have guests come in town! Bays Mountain is always on the list, and I always take our guests to my family's land (Sensabaugh Tunnel)!

#### **Sarah Brazee:** Axe

throwing at King's Sport Axe House! It's a fun atmosphere and environment, and they always have great food trucks.

#### **Harold and Brenda Leonard:** South Holston

Lake picnic. Just a beautiful view, it's like you're in a different world.

#### **Jonathan Harrington:**

Delta Blues for some excellent BBQ or just down the street (to) The Corner for a beverage or appetizers.

#### Papa Squatch band:

Lumac, Weir & South Holston Dam, Laurel Marina, downtown Bristol/State Street everything, Birthplace of Country Music Museum, Cootie Browns, Pinnacle, now... Casino... Blackbird Bakery and I also tell

everyone about the Rhythm & Roots Festival and to come in September!

#### **Heather N. Harwood:** Red Pepper Indian Cuisine

#### **Sheila Stamper:** Rush Street (no longer in

operation). Bays Mountain. Bristol Racetrack. Allandale. Exchange Place. Our beautiful Lakes

**Misty Burke:** Ridgewood, Stir Fry, Nick's, Pal's, Green Tomato, the Farmer's Daughter

#### **Sandra Rose Jones:** In

Bristol - Steele Creek Park, Blackbird Bakery, State Street, South Holston Dam, the Weird Dam, so many wonderful places!

#### Frances Russell: I'm from Sullivan county living in Indiana now but when (I) visit the Tri-Cities my first two places to eat is always

Pal's and Blue Circle **Brianna Bishop** 

**Tomlinson:** Creation

Kingdom Zoo

#### **Neesha Nalina Shah:**

Warriors Path (Duck Island) and Pop's Restaurant

#### **Bonnie Rogers Kistner:**

Hiking - Bays Mountain, The Channels, Devil's Bathtub, Laurel Run, Margarette Falls, Carver's Gap

#### **Kathi Hinkle Boyd:** Boutiques downtown

Rick Milhorn: Big Dan's for BBQ

#### **LeAnn Lane Overbay:** The Beauty Spot

**Terry Belote:** Bays Mt., Ridgewood, Pal's, Barter, Riverfront, Giuseppe's and Carter Fold

**Jeff Broyles:** A tour of historic Bluff City

**Angela Smith:** Backwoods Burger Bar

Elijah H. Hankins: Off the Grid Mountain Adventures!!!

If You Go:

'The Nutcracker"

When: Friday, Dec. 9, at

at 12 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

State St., Bristol, Tenn.

Admission: \$8-\$30

Info: (423) 274-8920

If You Go:

**Fundraiser** 

What: Bristol Ballet Jingle Mingle

When: Thursday, Dec. 15, at

Where: The Bristol Hotel, 115

Admission: \$75 general

admission, \$125 couples

**Info:** (276) 669-6051

Country Music Way, Bristol, Va.

**Web:** www.bristolballet.org

What: Bristol Ballet presents

7:30 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 10,

Where: Paramount Bristol, 518

**Ballet** 

## **BEST BETS**

## Bristol Ballet delivers Christmas classic 'The Nutcracker'

By TOM NETHERLAND FOR BRISTOL NOW

BRISTOL, Tenn. — A few steps away from the historic Bristol sign, the building that houses Bristol Ballet teems with activity.

December means Christmastime, and Christmastime means "The Nutcracker" time in Bristol. Bristol Ballet presents "The Nutcracker" on Friday, Dec. 9, and Saturday, Dec. 10, at Paramount Bristol in Bristol, Tennessee.

"You can expect to see a lot of familiar choreography, sets and characters," said Amanda Hairston, Bristol Ballet's artistic and development director. "It's magical."

Hairston's excitement about the upcoming show, now deep into preparations, stems from several sources. For one, she's about to produce her first "Nutcracker." For another, her history with Bristol Ballet extends into her childhood, where she danced until her high school sophomore year in 2001.

"I then went off to Virginia School of the Arts for my junior and senior year and danced with Richmond Ballet as a trainee for two years," Hairston said. "My first Bristol Ballet role was a yellow parrot in the Arabian dance, and my last roles were Sugar Plum Fairy, Dew Drop and Snow Queen (all 'Nutcracker' characters)."

The excitement now is pal-

Recently, inside an office of Bristol Ballet just a few steps from its rehearsal space, Hairston sat behind her desk to the left. Moira Frazier Ostrander, Bristol Ballet's artistic and school of ballet director, sat behind her desk to the right. In the middle sat Michele Plescia, Bristol Ballet's longtime and former artistic director. She now serves as artistic director emer-



The Bristol Ballet company rehearses for 'The Nutcracker,' a Christmas tradition that comes to the Paramount Bristol stage on Dec. 9 and 10.

itus — and show participant. "Michele has been gracious

enough to let us use her choreography," Hairston said.

Do not misread that. Cast changes and role alterations always keep "The Nutcracker" varied from year to year. Sometimes, even night to night, attendees will spy subtle changes afoot within the Christmas perennial.

"There's always something different every year of 'The Nutcracker," said Ostrander, who will produce Bristol Ballet's spring production of "Sleeping

For now, Bristol Ballet is wrapped up in "The Nutcracker" - and has been since August. Accoutrements of Christmas a Christmas tree here, red bows

there — occupy nooks and crannies within Bristol Ballet. It's quite majestic, Bristol

Ballet's "The Nutcracker." "Absolutely!" Hairston said.

Charming?

"Yes!" said Plescia. Memorable?

"Always!" Ostrander said. Longtime Bristol Ballet student and dancer Callie Baker

stars as Clara. "Callie's very strong as Clara," Plescia said.

In the story, Clara gets a nutcracker doll for Christmas. She then dreams that he comes to life. From that point on, "The Nutcracker" is quite akin to Lewis Carroll's dreamlike world of wonder, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." It's a wild

"Callie blossoms onstage," Hairston said. "She's a wonderful kid."

about 40. They perform numerous roles within the production, all of which flourish amid Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky's timeless score.

"You're engulfed by the music," Hairston said. "It's a pretty magical score."

Then again, "The Nutcracker" projects majesty. For generations of fans, it's an annual tradition. For others, the music turns up in grocery stores and movies and has for generations.

"It's nice when people get absorbed into the experience," Plescia said. "We want them to feel something magical."

Be sure to also note the first

Callie Baker leads a cast of

Bristol Ballet Jingle Mingle fundraiser. Set for Thursday, Dec. 15, at 7 p.m., the benefit will occur at The Bristol Hotel in Bristol, Virginia.

"This is the first time Bristol Ballet has done this type of fundraiser," Hairston said. "It features all sorts of goods and services donated that people can bid on. It's a fun way to raise some money.'

Fun provides the key. Charm, as readily evident as the red on Santa's suit, drips from "The Nutcracker." The story, the characters, the music and the feel ooze Christmastime.

"We want to reach kids and adults, for them to see their first 'Nutcracker,'" Hairston said. "It can become a 'Nutcracker' tradition for them. That's huge.'

#### **FILM REVIEW**

## Pinnochio retains his charm in new film



The little puppet Pinocchio (Gregory Mann) comes to life after being empowered by a pair of guardian angels in the new stop-motion film.

By TOM NETHERLAND FOR BRISTOL NOW

BRISTOL, Va. — Timeworn tales oftentimes provide the most profound challenges for filmmakers. As with Disney's "Sleeping Beauty," people know the stories.

So it's incumbent upon writers and directors to treat such stories with added imagination and creativity.

Visionary director Guillermo del Toro does exactly that with "Pinocchio," which he co-directs with Mark Gustafson. Del Toro, the Oscar-winning director of 2017's "The Shape of Water," provides moviegoers with yet another big screen slice of wonderment in his profoundly deep exploration of "Pinocchio."

Italian writer Carlo Collodi wrote the original tale as "The Adventures of Pinocchio." Published as a children's novel in 1883, the book follows the character of Pinocchio, a living puppet carved from wood by Geppetto in a quaint Tuscan village. In the story, Pinocchio dreams of becoming a real boy.

Pinocchio is best known for his long and pointed nose, which grows in length whenever he tells a lie.

Disney produced an animated film version, "Pinocchio," in 1940. By then, the story was quite popular with children in America and worldwide. Many film versions followed. Most recently, an Italian film was made in 2019, and a straight-tostreaming live action remake of Disney's version was released earlier this

Now playing at Legacy Theaters Bristol 14 in Bristol, Virginia, del Toro's "Pinocchio" was made as a stop-motion film. Stop motion is a popular form of animation wherein objects are physically manipulated, sort of like puppets. Which makes del Toro's "Pinocchio" all the more interesting, becoming an ode to the art of puppetry itself.

In del Toro's "Pinocchio," the little boy Pinocchio (Gregory Mann) comes to life after being empowered by a pair of guardian angels of sorts. One of them looks like a spectral angel; the other is a bug named Sebastian J.

Cricket (Ewan McGregor). Lonely Geppetto (David Bradley) mourns the death of his young son, Carlo (Alfie Tempest), which precipitated his desire to make Pinocchio.

From a pinecone found by Carlo grows a tree. From that pine tree, the deeply grieving and quite down with drink and sorrow Geppetto carves the wooden Pinocchio. The talking cricket, who had found a home in the pine tree, eventually relocates to live literally in wooden Pinocchio.

Geppetto warms slowly to his creation. Even though he can walk and talk, the gangly Pinocchio isn't viewed as being a real boy. Consequently, he encounters scorn and ridicule from villagers during the time of 1940s fascism and Mussolini in Italy. People were expected to get in line — or else. Demands for conformity and nationalism were high, and any individualism was deemed unacceptable and even treasonous. Pinocchio, a bit of a rebel, embodies

nonconformity. Given the story, the latest "Pinocchio" speaks to the oft-tempestuous times in

which we live. With nationalism on the rise and differences in people not quite so championed in certain circles, "Pinocchio" could be more relevant today than during its 19th-cen-

tury beginnings. Given his unusual status as being wholly different than anyone else, Pinocchio becomes an alluring target for monetary gain by Count Volpe (Christoph Waltz). The Count operates a traveling circuslike show of puppets. Naturally, none of puppets are alive. In Pinocchio, he sees a goldmine to fuel his greed.

Adventures mount. Drama erupts. Panoramic expressions of love permeate even as widespread obstacles of danger and intrigue mount for

Pinocchio and Geppetto. Ultimately, love conquers all. That's one of many messages within the brilliant "Pinocchio." Without providing additional details, the film mesmerizes in ways that translate to children and adults. Simply apply an imagination. A bit of love would

not hurt, either. Rating: Four and a half stars out of five

## Piney Flats First Baptist once again presents its popular 'The Journey'

**BRISTOL NOW** 

PINEY FLATS, Tenn. -With the coming of the Christmas season, Pinev Flats First Baptist Church, 100 Cherry St., will once again present "The Journey," which has been performed during the first part of December for many

While "The Journey" has a spectacular manger scene, complete with live actors, recorded messages, live sheep, donkeys and even a live camel, it is much more.

Brian Wilson, the church's minister of music, said "The

the church parking lot, with scenes from the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, to the highlights of the life of Christ, going past his death to the scene of the empty tomb and the Resurrection.

Journey" takes the audi-

Wilson said there are 60 people in the series of tableaux, which are designed to appeal to all age levels.

"The Journey" is free and will be presented Dec. 9-11 from 6-9 each evening. Dr. Allen Davis is pastor of the church. For information, call 538-8304



The manger scene from 'The Journey,' featuring live donkeys and a live camel, is one of several tableau scenes presented at Piney Flats First Baptist's Christmas show.

### Gym to host second annual holiday 5K in Rogersville

By TESSA WORLEY

ROGERSVILLE, Tenn. — Mindful Body Fitness in Rogersville will host its second annual Holiday Hustle 5K run on Dec. 17.

The race will take place through downtown Rogersville and will start at 8 a.m. Runners will gather at the gym for the start of the race.

All proceeds from the race will go to Holston Home, which is a home for children in

Greeneville, Tennessee. Funds from the race will go toward the home's needs and the needs of its young residents.

Race registration will cost \$25 and can be paid in advance at the gym, over the phone or at the event. Medals will be given to the first-, secondand third-place finishers.

For more information about the race or to register, visit Mindful Body Fitness or call (423) 963-

## **BEST BETS**

# **GIANTS AMONG US**

## Dinosaur park that began as passion project has become popular destination for families

By ISAIAH QUAINTANCE

BLUFF CITY, Tenn. — Chris Kastner is one of

He is an avid science fiction fan, taking an interest in anything "big and reptilian," as he puts. He is particularly passionate about the "Jurassic Park" franchise, both the movies and the books. He credits much of this passion to his mother, who bought him his first dinosaur when he was a child. However, even she likely did not see what would develop out of this passion.

Kastner is the owner and operator of the Backyard Terrors Dinosaur Park, located in Bluff City. The location is a trail filled with statues and models of over 50 different types of dinosaurs. Some are as long as 67 feet and 15 feet tall. He has many statues and even a few animatronic figures as well. Theme music plays throughout the park, as well as the sounds of dinosaur roars. There's even a small shop set up on the property.

The park is a marvel. However, it had humble beginnings back in 2007.

"I wanted one life-size dinosaur," laughed Kastner. "Things snowballed a little after that one."

Kastner originally didn't plan to establish his nonprofit park. However, it caught his attention when people stopped by his property and asked for his permission to take a photo with the velociraptor statue sitting in his front yard. The park has grown ever since.

Running the park is mostly a one-man job, though Kastner says his friends help him with certain things on occasion, such as paperwork or bui dinosaurs. He also consults his scienceminded contacts to maintain accuracy when it comes to the prehistoric



A velociraptor and one of its young roam the Backyard Terrors Dinosaur Park. Kastner decided to establish the park after receiving requests from people who wanted to take pictures with a velociraptor statue he had on display in his front yard. The park has grown ever since, with new dinosaur builds and lots of research to ensure accuracy.

figures placed along the property.

"A whole lot of research first," said Kastner. "I have to find skeletal designs and not just side views. I

look at overhead stuff"

Kastner's park is run as a nonprofit. At the door of the park is a box where people can make donations. Donations are not required,

so the how is merely a rec- ment for the items ommendation if visitors have the means to do so. In addition, the shop featuring different dinosaur collectibles does not require pay-

However, Kastner does put recommended prices on each object, and the funds go toward maintaining the dinosaur park.

"I wanted one *life-size* dinosaur. Things snowballed a little after that one."

- Chris Kastner, owner and operator of Backyard Terrors Dinosaur Park

ISAIAH QUAINTANCE/BRISTOL NOW

A T-Rex statue stands on the trail of Backyard Terrors Dinosaur Park in Bluff City, Tennessee, that features over 50 life-size dinosaur statues. Owner and operator Chris Kastner said he can hear when kids find the T-Rex statue from anywhere on his property.

Kastner works on the park each day. He handcrafts the dinosaurs, installs them and maintains the grounds, among other things. This has been his primary occupation since he left high school.

The work can be taxing at times, but Kastner said he finds it extremely rewarding when children react to the dinosaurs.

"You can hear the kids when they get to their favorite ones," said Kastner. "Mommy, Daddy, it's a T-Rex!' you'll hear them scream all across the whole park. I'm down there working, and I'll hear it. I'm like, 'They found him.'

Kastner welcomes any and all to the park. If you stop by, you may run into Kastner as he is working on the dinosaurs or the property, or you may see what he calls his "park security," a small chihuahua named Peanut.

The park is located at 1065 Walnut Grove, Bluff City Tennessee, and is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Admission is free. For more information, go to https://backyardterrors. com/.







WE ROCK THE SPECTRUM

We Rock the Spectrum is a gym franchise that focuses on making play and exercise environments that are accessible to neurodivergent children, who may need quiet areas or equipment to help develop balance or motor skills. The gym accommodates all children and sells unique toys. A new location has opened at 1241 Volunteer Parkway, Suite 420, in Bristol, Tennessee.

## New sensory-friendly gym is a 'place for all children'

By ISAIAH QUAINTANCE iguaintance@bristolnow.news

BRISTOL, Tenn. — We Rock the Spectrum may appear as a typical gym for kids. But for Sarah Phillips, who owns the gym with her husband, John, this establishment is more than just a business. It's a calling.

The couple was inspired to bring the gym to Bristol, Tennessee, after visiting a franchise with John's family in Dallas, Texas, earlier this year.

We Rock the Spectrum (WRTS) Kid's Gym for All Kids is a group of gyms that was founded in 2010 in California by Dina Kimmel. Since the first location was founded 12

years ago, WRTS has expanded into franchises across the globe. Last month, We Rock the Spectrum opened in Bristol.

For Phillips, the gym was created as an inclusive environment for all children, including her son, who was diagnosed as neurodivergent in 2019. For him, she said, inclusivity has not always been available.

"I was searching for purpose and ways to help other parents with children on the spectrum and other parents that don't have children on the spectrum to just educate them that it's cool to be kind," she said. "Inclusion is really important. We

learned that the hard way. "When I walked in the

door there, it was an immediate knowing that I had to bring it to the Tri-Cities.'

The gym has an array of items that children can play with. Each piece of equipment is carefully designed and installed with accessibility in mind. For example, the gym uses suspended equipment with swings. These items can help improve a child's balance and any vestibular difficulties they may have. There are also sensorybased toys in the gym that can help a child develop auditory processing and fine motor skills. In addition, the gym has a calming room to help

reduce negative sensory

The gym also has the capacity to host events such as field trips or

birthday parties. Not only does the location serve as a play area, but there is a miniature toy shop with toys that are difficult to find at many retailers, Phillips said. The toys sold are primarily from a few brands like Melissa & Doug Toys and Fat Brain Toys. The owners said WRTS aims to

sell the toys at a fair price. While WRTS is designed as a play area for children, Phillips said the interactions among parents is a critical function of the establishment as well. This is an aspect of the gym

Phillips said she is especially thankful for.

"I have so enjoyed meeting other parents who are on a similar journey as my husband and I," said Phillips, "and then parents who aren't on our journey but are so eager to teach their children how to be kind. It's been really cool."

The gym is still new to Bristol, having only been open since Nov. 5, but the owners have been very pleased with the commu-

nity engagement so far. We Rock the Spectrum has seen visitors from as far as Kentucky and West Virginia. Even at this early stage for the gym, she says business has been steady. They are booked up for events for the entire month of December. The location also finished top 10 in the franchise for the month of November.

Above all, Phillips said it's been great to see the children's reaction of when they enter, both for the first time and when they return.

However, she wants the community to understand the overarching goal of WRTS.

"This is a place for all children," Phillips said, "not just children with a neurodivergent diagnosis."

WRTS is located in Bristol, Tennessee, at 1241 Volunteer Parkway, Suite 420. For more information, call (423) 573-7625 or go to www. werockthespectrumbristol.com.