

— FOLLOWING —

Yonder Star

ADAMS COUNTY BUSINESS, YONDER STAR, SHARES THE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

BY KAREN HENDRICKS | PHOTOS COURTESY OF YONDER STAR





Visit Yonder Star's online storefront and you'll find detailed scenes of nativity traditions from around the globe.



For many families, the true spirit of Christmas means displaying a nativity scene—figures representing baby Jesus in a manger, with Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, wise men, and animals such as sheep and camels. A nativity scene brings the story of Jesus' birth to life.

Yonder Star, an Adams County business, has cultivated relationships with artisans and manufacturers of nativity scenes located around the world for 17 years. Yet, many Adams Countians may consider Yonder Star to be a well-kept secret. Why? Even though they are based in Arendtsville, Yonder Star does not have a brick-and-mortar storefront; instead, the family-owned and operated business has built a loyal customer base via their online store. Yonder Star, owned by husband and wife Brett and Cindy Snyder, is keeping the Christmas tradition of the nativity alive—using today's online technology.

A TRADITION THAT BEGAN IN ITALY

"The tradition of the nativity began with St. Francis of Assisi in Italy. He wanted a physical way of reminding people of the birth of Jesus and it began with real people and real animals," says Cindy. "That is why I believe some of the longest traditions of nativity pieces come from Italy."

The rich history of the nativity is intertwined with world history. "Nativity traditions began in certain

countries during times in history when people weren't allowed to have public expressions of their faith. During the French Revolution, for example, terracotta figures were produced—and are still produced by hand—by French nativity maker Santons," she says.

Peruse Yonder Star's website and you'll find detailed stories of nativity traditions from around the globe; Yonder Star currently offers nativities from about 70 artisans located in 52 countries. Some of the highlights include Fontanini nativities from Italy—one of the oldest and biggest manufacturers; paper mache nativity figures from Germany; soapstone figures from Zimbabwe; an alabaster nativity from Peru; and more.

"There are craftsmen around the world who have been plying their trade for centuries," says Brett. "Once you understand what goes into the making of nativities, you understand the value. For example, we carry wooden, hand-carved nativities from Italy that are gilded in 24-carat gold—they take hours to create."

Although some nativity sets are expensive, heirloom-quality, the couple is quick to point out that many of Yonder Star's nativities are also very affordable. And they come in all sizes: Customers may order large nativities to be displayed outdoors or small nativity scenes to be cherished on a fireplace or featured location inside the home. One, from Peru, even fits inside a matchbox!



FINDING THEIR NICHE

Yonder Star was founded by the Snyders in 2000. The Delaware County natives attended Temple University together and always knew they would start a business together. “We both love Christmas, and we decided a niche market was the way to go, so pretty quickly we decided to specialize in nativity sets,” Cindy says. The business was born in their Delaware County apartment; they moved to Adams County in 2004—first operating the business from a Biglerville farmhouse, then locating the business office and warehouses to its current home along Queen Street in Arendtsville.

Brett says the timing was perfect. “We got into the market just as the internet was taking flight.” Keeping up with search engines and algorithms can be challenging, the couple agrees; however, they also enjoy the challenge of helping customers search their website in innovative ways. For example, customers can search for nativities by clicking on a variety of international flags representing countries; they can scroll through and click on names of well-known manufacturers, or they can simply enter search terms into a bar to hone their search for the perfect nativity set.

“AN INTERNATIONAL BOND”

“Setting up my family’s nativity scene is one of my favorite childhood memories,” says Cindy. “It’s fascinating to learn, over the years, about nativities in other countries. We share an international bond.”

Yonder Star customers hail from around the globe, including repeat customers, collectors, and churches. One customer sent photos of a stable he custom-built to house his outdoor nativity set. A church in the Bronx recently called Yonder Star “to let us know how amazing their outdoor stone and resin pieces are,” says Cindy. One of Yonder Star’s regular customers is an actor on Broadway; he sends photos of his displays from residencies at different theatres.

“We have a priest who recently purchased his fifth outdoor nativity scene from us—every time he is transferred to another church, he buys a nativity set for his new church,” Cindy says with a laugh.

“When people bring their nativity scenes out every year, it’s a fresh experience, a tradition [that is renewed] every year,” Cindy says. “We get so many lovely emails and calls from people who thank us. It helps me continue to feel energized every year to know in this very small way we are helping people with a joyful experience and joyful tradition celebrating the birth of Jesus.”

GIVING BACK

Just as Christmas involves gifts, Yonder Star “gives back” to others in several ways.

Some of the most unique nativity sets from Yonder Star hail from fair trade artists using natural or available resources. Purchases of those products help support artisans in developing countries. A nativity scene made in Ecuador fits inside a cocoa pod; a nativity set from Uganda is carved from Jacaranda wood, while a metal wall art nativity made in Haiti is cut and hand-painted from recycled 55-gallon drums.

“We have also tried to be a conscientious company from the beginning by donating 10 percent of all profits to charity. That way, people benefit down the line,” says Brett. He adds that many customers often purchase Christmas items through Yonder Star because of this policy.

The Nature Conservancy and Food for the Poor are the two organizations the couple chose as recipients of 10 percent of their business. Cindy says, “That way, we are benefitting people who need assistance and the natural world as well.” 🌱

Did You Know...

Where does the phrase “Yonder Star” come from?
The first verse of the Christmas tune “We Three Kings” includes the lyrics:

WE THREE KINGS OF ORIENT ARE;
BEARING GIFTS WE TRAVERSE AFAR,
FIELD AND FOUNTAIN, MOOR AND MOUNTAIN,
FOLLOWING YONDER STAR.

DISCOVER CHRISTMAS CHEER THROUGHOUT ADAMS COUNTY AND SOUTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

The Christmas Haus

110 Lincoln Way West, New Oxford
13 Baltimore St., Gettysburg
www.thechristmashaonline.com

An iconic Route 30 destination, The Christmas Haus features authentic German ornaments, nutcrackers, and much more. Located in New Oxford since 2002, The Christmas Haus recently expanded to a Gettysburg location as well.

Christmas Tree Hill

The Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg
1863 Gettysburg Village Drive,
Gettysburg
www.christmastreehill.com

Central Pennsylvania has been home to Christmas-themed shops for more than 40 years thanks to Christmas Tree Hill. Adams County's location at The Outlet Shoppes at Gettysburg is one of 10 Christmas Tree Hill shops in Central Pennsylvania; others are located primarily in York and Lancaster Counties; there is also a Christmas Tree Hill in Rehoboth Beach, Del.

The Pennsylvania Christmas & Gift Show

PA Farm Show Complex
& Expo Center
2300 N. Cameron St., Harrisburg
www.pachristmasshow.com

The 34th annual Pennsylvania Christmas & Gift Show is set for Nov. 29-Dec. 3, 2017 at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center, Harrisburg. Featuring 750 vendor booths, this traditional weekend event showcases a wide variety of Christmas décor and gifts, and attracts attendees from the entire Mid-Atlantic region.