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Even Better



Holiday

Executive Holidays: Mimi Crume Sterling, Al Montoya, Kit Sawers, and More

Area CEOs share their favorite memories, wish-list items, and New Year's resolutions.

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Building on last year's Executive Holiday series, we continue with more memories, wish lists, and New Year's resolutions from North Texas C-Suiters. Read on to find out which business

leaders say their all-time favorite gift was a Rossi Ranch Hand rifle, a Cabbage Patch doll, a Schwinn Stingray, a Planet of the Apes tree house, a Robot 2XL, and more.

Arun Agarwal

Chief Executive Officer, Nexxt



Arun Agarwal celebrates the holiday with his family.

Holiday traditions: “Holidays are about family and friends. Family first, friends second. With our daughter going to college, we try our best to spend this time together.”

Favorite gift: “Many years back, my grandmother gave me a silver coin, which has now become an annual tradition for me to carry on with others.”

On this year's wish list: "I'd like to bring the Indian consulate to Dallas."

Down time tips: "I'm still trying to find the answer. I hope things slow down, but they haven't, which I feel fortunate for also. I have a hard time shutting down; maybe meditation will help."

Memorable moment from 2022: "Introducing our Mayor Eric Johnson during the State of City and seeing his love for parks made me super happy."

My New Year's resolution: "My life has three parts: My family, my work, and my public service. I have a resolution for each."

Tony Fay

Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Tony Fay Public Relations



A young Tony fay unwraps gifts over Christmas.

Holiday traditions: “My favorite treat is the tin of popcorn many people send. I love them. I eat the caramel first, then the regular, and finally the cheddar. It’s normally gone by New Year’s. It’s the only time of the year I have popcorn like that around the house, and I’m all in. As far as traditions, every Christmas Eve morning, my daughter and I go out and buy a snow globe. We’ve been doing this since she was 4, and she is now 20, so we have quite the collection.

“It’s harder than you’d think to find snow globes on Christmas Eve. The selection in most stores is depleted and in some cases the shop is already starting to take down holiday items by that time. One store we went to last year was even starting to transition from the Holidays to Valentine’s Day—on Christmas Eve! The tradition is the tradition, though, so the snow globe must be procured on Christmas Eve to make it into the collection.”

Favorite gift: “The 1974 *Planet of the Apes* Tree House play set by Mego, complete with Cornelius, Dr. Zaius, and Urko. Need I say more?”

On this year’s wish list: “I’ll happily accept Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band tickets for any destination on their 2023 World Tour. Note: I already have Dallas tickets, so no need there, but I plan an extensive tour of my own in support of the world’s greatest rock show, so tickets anywhere else are appreciated.”

Down time tips: “Work smartly and efficiently. But let your inner kid out and spend as much time as possible with family and friends. Time goes too fast.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “Working with Troy Aikman, Darren Lesley, and my wonderful team to make the Highway to Henryetta music festival such a once-in-a-lifetime event. It was a remarkable day, and I think it brought a lot of joy to a lot of people who deserve it.

My New Year’s resolution: “To learn how to flawlessly play Born to Run on the guitar. There is at least a chance that Steve Van Zandt becomes down ill one night, and The Boss looks into the audience and says, ‘We are down a guitar player; is there anyone in the audience who can fill in tonight?’”

Jeff Fehlis

Executive Vice President, American Cancer Society



As a child, Jeff Fehlis enjoyed Christmases at his grandfather's ranch in Austin, where the family held an annual German feast.

Holiday traditions: “Growing up, we spent Christmas in Austin with our family. My aunt and uncle built one of the first homes in Westlake Hills, with a stunning view of downtown. I remember waking up with the excitement of Christmas Day and that view was always the first thing I saw. Later, we would head to my grandfather’s ranch outside of Luling and enjoy a traditional German feast, including homemade Christmas Stollen and Lebkuchen (gingerbread cookies).”

Favorite gift: “A Schwinn Stingray Orange Krate 5 speed with the gear shift on the bar. It was the coolest bike ever!”

On this year’s wishlist: “A new Callaway Rouge ST Max Driver, and Jimmy Johnson’s new book, *Swagger*.”

Down time tips: “Have the discipline to disconnect both physically (phone) and mentally. I travel so much throughout the year; this is the time to reconnect with family and friends. Be spontaneous, be adventurous, read more, and, most important, be in the moment with those you love. And always find your beach!”

Memorable moment from 2022: “Walking into the Gene & Jerry Jones Family Hope Lodge in early January shortly after we opened and spending time with our guests and caregivers. They were so thankful to be part of such a caring and wonderful community, surrounded by others on similar journeys. Many would have had not the ability to travel to Dallas for treatment without having lodging. Removing that barrier is so beneficial to them and their families. I’m so proud of this community for its support.

My New Year’s resolution: “Personally, it is to improve my Spanish, play more golf, and be more active. For ACS, it is to continue our quest to end cancer as we know it, for everyone, improving the lives of cancer patients and their families through advocacy, research, and patient support. We must ensure that everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer.”

Jonathan Grammar

Chief Executive Officer, US Carbon Capture



Jonathan Grammer and his family gather for their annual Christmas card photo.

Holiday traditions: “My favorite holiday tradition from over the years is the large Grammer family Christmas gathering. All my cousins, and now their children, gather in Dallas.”

Favorite gift: “Ten years ago, my wife Claire got me a Rossi Ranch Hand .45 Caliber lever action rifle for Christmas. It’s also referred to as a Mare’s Leg and was carried by Steve McQueen in the television series *Wanted: Dead or Alive*.”

On this year’s wish list: “We are big hunters in our family and the deer season has been unseasonably warm, so we haven’t seen much. My son took his first buck two years ago, and I’d like one of my three daughters to do that this year before the season is over. The opportunity to be with the kids outdoors is the greatest gift of the holidays.”

Down time tips: “The holidays must be done in moderation. I am a creature of habit and don’t do very well caged up inside for more than a day. I must stay working to stay mentally fit. I’ll watch *A Christmas Story* once and eat a big meal once, but we don’t settle in for days off work and sit around. We plan a lot of outdoor activities and try to get out of the hustle. After about a week though, I need to be back at work and love to have the kids join me at the family business while they are off from school.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “Being the first speaker to kick the inaugural Texas Tech School of Law Energy Symposium”

My New Year’s resolution: “Reading more books in print and less news on the internet”

Edgar Guevara

President and CEO, M Crowd Restaurant Group



Each year, M Crowd CEO Edgar Guevara celebrates Christmas Day with a meal at a Chinese restaurant.

Holiday traditions: “We dine at a Chinese restaurant for lunch every year on Christmas Day with my childhood best friend, our families, and an amazing bottle of cabernet.”

On this year’s wishlist: “I wish somebody could buy me an excellent putting stroke. I’d be dangerous if I could figure out how to putt better.”

Down time tips: “You can’t make it to everything with everyone during the holidays, so make sure you dedicate the time to what is most important with family and friends.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “I have two: After dating her childhood sweetheart for 10 years, my oldest daughter, Ashton, got engaged, and my youngest daughter, Addy, graduated from TCU.”

My New Year’s resolution: “I prefer to think about annual goals rather than resolutions. In 2023, I’d like to continue to focus on personal wellness and work with my team to open and grow Mi Cocina in Houston as successfully as we have in Dallas.”

Luke Hejl

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Timely MD



Luke Hejl celebrates Christmas with loved ones.

Holiday traditions: “One of my favorite traditions is going to the Austin Hyatt with our family and eating fajitas the night before Christmas Eve. After that, we go back to my parents’ house and enjoy some of my mom’s amazing toffee. It’s so good!”

Favorite gift: “I am passionate about my physical fitness as part of my overall wellbeing. Last year, my wife, Sara, gave me Tonal. I love how its adaptive technology compliments my other workouts and makes resistance training at home more challenging and fun.”

On this year’s wish list: “At the risk of sounding cliché, I love to give gifts way more than I enjoy receiving them. I would much rather talk about the presents I’ve chosen to give my wife and kids, but, in continuation of the fitness theme, I’m hoping there’s a new Oura ring in my stocking.”

Down time tips: “It’s important to allocate time in life to slow down and put work aside. Over the holidays is a perfect time to do so, when much of the world is shut down—or at least on pause. Instead of allocating that time to do the thing you’ve been putting off or can never seem to tackle, my advice is to use that time to relax and recharge. Our family likes to take an annual ski trip, and while I have been known to take an interview from the top of a mountain before, I really do try to unplug when we are hitting the slopes. It can be hard for CEOs, executives, and other Type A personalities to not feel productive every moment, but true quality time with loved ones is really important.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “Our family enjoyed a vacation this year that included time in the French Riviera. As we were headed back from Saint-Tropez to Cap Ferrat, there were dolphins jumping all around the boat, and it was the coolest thing ever. It was this singular moment that our whole family enjoyed, and we were going nuts. I’ll never forget it.

Professionally, TimelyMD passed the milestone of caring for more than 1 million students across the country this summer, and just a few months later, we were trusted to serve 1.5 million students.”

My New Year's resolution: "In 2023, I will focus on the connection between my mental health and my overall wellbeing. Whole-person health is a passion point of ours at TimelyMD, and it's important that I model what we aspire to for our students and our team. I've recently gotten a jumpstart on this resolution by beginning to see a therapist who specializes in providing care to CEOs and other executives."

Jessica Latham

Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, Social Studies



Jessica Latham and her family during their annual themed costume party on Christmas Eve.

Holiday traditions: “For more than 20 years, my family has ordered Joe’s Stone Crab from Miami. They ship overnight, and we always have a long, leisurely late lunch. It’s different than most Christmas day lunches, but I absolutely love it! We also always have a costume party on Christmas Eve, and every year there is a different theme. Everyone always goes all-out, which is great.”

Favorite gift: “The first year my now husband flew in to spend Christmas with my family, it started snowing Christmas morning. His was the last flight that was able to land. It continued to snow for almost 48 hours and was just magical. Thank you to the airline gods for cooperating—that’s the best Christmas gift!”

On this year’s wish list: “I’m hoping someone will get me a set of our Blue Secret Garden plates. This is the collaboration Social Studies did with Goop, and I think they are absolutely gorgeous.”

Down time tips: “Take your relaxation as seriously as you do your work. Don’t half-ass it. When it’s time to check out, put the devices down, tee up an OOO message, and really focus on relaxing and spending quality time with your family. These moments are so important to soak in.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “The moment we unpacked our last box at our new Dallas warehouse was memorable. We moved more than 100,000 pieces of inventory from Brooklyn, so it was a major accomplishment to finally get that last box finished.”

My New Year’s resolution: “It’s so cliché, but to get into shape. It’s been an incredibly busy year with a lot of travel, and I haven’t prioritized working out the way that I should.”

Miguel Molina

Chief Financial Officer, Avocados From Mexico



A young Miguel Molina and his siblings pose with their father, who dressed up as Santa.

Holiday traditions: “I always enjoy watching *The Nutcracker* at the Dallas Symphony with the family. It’s a classic.”

Favorite gift: “I loved receiving a Robot 2XL, which was a classic toy in the ’80s. The robot could talk and answer basic yes or no questions—a dream toy for an 8-year-old boy.”

On my wishlist this year: “My son and daughter are back from college. Having dinner with my family is the best gift.”

Down time tips: “Tell your family that you love them and give grace to others.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “I am trying to decide between Will Smith slapping Chris Rock at the Oscars ceremony and the return of Maverick in Top Gun II.”

My New Year’s resolution: “I want to be a better husband, father, and friend.”

Al Montoya

Director of Community Outreach, Dallas Stars



Al Montoya has always loved celebrating Christmas Eve with his family.

Holiday traditions: “Celebrating Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) with my family, seeing Christmas productions, brunch with Santa, and enjoying lechon, rice and beans, platanos (bananas), ham, flan, and masitas de lechon.”

Favorite gift: “My favorite gift would have to be a golf pushcart that I received from my madrina (godmother) to help carry my hockey bag. I never used it, but the love and intent behind it was such a beautiful gift.”

Down time tips: “My best advice would be to enjoy each day. Work comes and goes, as does time. The more we appreciate why we work, the better our work will be. For me, my reason for working is my family.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “When Garth Brooks asked me to speak alongside him to students at UTA.”

My New Year’s resolution: “I want to eat less sugar. Since retirement from professional hockey, I must be much more aware of what I put in my body.”

Kit Sawers

President, Klyde Warren Park



Kit Sawers enjoys holiday events at Klyde Warren Park.

Holiday traditions: “The Klyde Warren Park Tree Lighting Celebration is my favorite tradition, of course! We also have a fun Christmas Eve party we attend each year, an annual dinner with family friends, and a white elephant party with our Supper Club. Christmas is really the only time we stick to the same traditions, and I love it.”

Favorite gift: “My favorite gifts are experiences. One year my husband gave me a trip to NYC, along with tickets to Hamilton and the Billy Joel concert at Madison Square Garden. It was a combined birthday/Christmas present and a lifetime of memories.”

On this year’s wishlist: “Sleep”

Down time tips: “My New Year’s resolutions are always to get more organized, to work out more, and to sleep more. One of these days ...”

Craig Scheef

Founder, Chairman, and CEO, Texas Security Bank



Each year, Craig Scheef and his wife give themselves a Maui vacation for Christmas.

Holiday traditions: “I have a couple of favorite holiday traditions. The first is being around the people in my family who we don’t get to see often. Another is eating with Santa and worshipping with my family at church. Pumpkin and pecan pie and red wine are my favorite holiday treats.”

Favorite gift: “My wife and I gift each other the same thing every year—a vacation to Maui.”

On this year’s wishlist: “I wish for good health for my family!”

Down time tips: “Schedule the most important things on your calendar first. As you get older, you get a better perspective on what really matters. Make sure family time is first and everything else comes second.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “We had more than 100 old and new friends from high school, college, and work celebrate my 60th birthday party with us. We had two bands perform, and there was a lot of laughter and fun. We had the party to say thank you to all our friends.”

My New Year’s resolution: “My New Year’s resolution would be continued health. They say wealth without health is not wealth!”

Kellie Sirna

Co-founder and Principal, Studio 11 Design



Kellie Sirna loves making 'reindeer food' with her two boys every Christmas.

Holiday traditions: “Every year, I love spending time making ‘reindeer food’ with my boys on Christmas Eve. It’s the perfect chance for us to spend time together in our favorite part of our home—the kitchen.”

Favorite gift: “I have cherished receiving handprint ornaments from both of my boys over the years. It warms my heart that as they grow up, they continue to gift me such a personalized memento to cherish forever.”

On this year’s wish list: “I really would love to take a much-needed vacation. Travel is always my favorite way to relax and gather inspiration.”

Down time tips: “I find it essential to have blocks on my calendar that give me the opportunity to prioritize spending time with the family and enjoying the season.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “I would definitely choose winning Design Firm of the Year from *Boutique Design Magazine*. It is truly an honor to be recognized by industry leaders and a great opportunity for our team, who have continued to work so hard to make this the best year yet.”

My New Year’s resolution: “I’m excited with the direction that the firm is going as we start this new year with so much growth and opportunity on the horizon. Additionally, it’s a goal of mine to continue to build my philanthropic efforts inside and outside of the office.”

Mimi Crume Sterling

Chief Executive Officer, The Family Place



Mimi Crume Sterling and her two brothers, T.J. (left) and Barry, pose with Santa in 1979.

Holiday traditions: “Growing up, I looked forward to making and decorating Christmas cookies with my godmother and nextdoor neighbor, Sarajane. We’d make everything from scratch, roll the dough, cut the shape, bake, and decorate. I try to do that with my kids now each holiday, but we may only get to the decorating part. It’s a great way to keep those awesome memories with my godmother alive and make new ones!”

Favorite gift: “My favorite gift growing up was a Cabbage Patch World Traveler-edition doll. She was from Spain and had a pink flamenco dress with a black lace veil. I was naturally curious

about cultures outside the U.S. and was drawn to the vibrant colors and the story of the doll from Spain. My curiosity got the best of me though, because I found the doll before Christmas tucked into the back of my parents' closet. Even though I knew what my gift was before I opened it on Christmas morning, the doll was my absolute favorite.”

On this year's wish list: “This year, I'm excited to give our oldest child an unforgettable gift. I'm thrilled to give her the gift of travel: a trip to Paris. It will be just the two of us venturing out and seeing a part of the world together. I love giving the gift of memories, and I'm so excited that we'll travel to a place I called home for a few months in my earlier years. I get to watch her experience a new culture and see what life is like outside our world here in Texas. Exposure to different places and experiences is so important to my husband and me. While it's a gift for her, it's also a gift to me. Gifting time with your kids, truly uninterrupted time together to explore and meander together, is priceless.”

Down time tips: “Because my schedule is always a balancing act, I love blocking out time on my calendar for the most important moments, experiences, and activities. Every year, our family celebrates the holiday by going to the Dallas Arboretum, visiting the Fort Worth Mint, and even taking time at home to slow down by the fireplace with tea and read Christmas books. Setting aside time to schedule and enjoy these moments ensures that, amidst the busyness of the season, we are spending quality moments with family and creating new memories that we'll treasure forever.”

Memorable moment from 2022: “2022 has been a tremendous year for me, personally and professionally. I recently celebrated my first anniversary with The Family Place with the grand opening of our organization's new FLP & BIPP center for our clients. I took that moment during the ribbon-cutting to look back and reflect on all the incredible successes we've had as a team to get to that point and realize what more we will do for our clients in the future with the support of the Dallas community.”

My New Year's resolution: "Almost every year, I resolve to travel more. Over the past few years, our family hasn't been able to travel as much as we've wanted to. As I look to 2023, with the world opening back up, I see nothing but opportunities ahead for the Sterling family. I look forward to traveling with Rich, my husband, taking a family summer vacation to a new destination, and taking my oldest to wherever she wants to travel outside the U.S. Traveling feeds my soul and inspire me."