

From decadent desserts to island getaways, these five Valley families share how each celebrates the season.



The Powers Family

For this star football player, the holiday season brings together family, food and much fairer temperatures. For Cardinals cornerback, Jeraud Powers, the holidays are rooted in the excitement of waking up to a Christmas morning filled with love and surrounded by family. The joy and anticipation of gift opening is followed by a big breakfast with his entire family, including wife, Leah, and their young son, Camden Jett. And what holiday season would be complete without the Grinch? Powers admits that the pressures of the NFL—teamed with the usual holiday hustle and bustle—often brings out his inner Dr. Seuss character. “It would not be the holiday season without someone in my family being the Grinch, and that usually is me! But as soon as I see my family and all the decorations, I instantly warm up.” Holiday wear and tear aside, Powers hopes his son will carry on their tradition of making sure that cherished time with loved ones is at the top of his wish list each year. That, of course, along with an ample serving of warm weather and sunshine. As the star athlete gets ready to celebrate his first Christmas in the Valley, Powers says, “The weather has been incredible. You can’t beat it. I love it out here.”



The Willert Family

From traditional holiday sweets and songs to cherished times around the table, this Phoenix family serves their holiday style with a warm side of “aloha.” Mixing traditions both old and new—from Granny’s chocolate fudge to Will Ferrell’s modern holiday classic “Elf”—helps to strike the season’s tone in the Willert household. Like many families, some of the Willerts’ fondest holiday memories have been created around their dining table, adorned with a delicious meal that all four of their children—Matthew, Kevin, Annie and Laura (Future Face of Foothills 2013 winner)—have helped to prepare. “We all chip in,” says mom, Lisa, of the planning. “We feel truly blessed each and every day, but this day is magical; we sit at the Christmas table for hours.” After years of journeying to celebrate Christmas Day with extended family (following a visit from Santa, of course), the Willerts added a new destination and some tropical flair to their holiday travel plans. “We now pack up and head to our home in Hawaii.” But whether it’s celebrated by the sea or under a desert sunset, you get the sense it doesn’t matter where the family spends Christmas. “We just love being together. My kids are truly our best friends.”



The Wright-Keiper Family

A visit to Radio City Music Hall to see the famed Rockettes Christmas Spectacular ensures that this Phoenix family starts the season off on the right step. For many Arizonans, beating the heat is a top priority at some point each year. For Pamala Wright-Keiper and her family of four, visiting the desert southwest was at the top of their holiday wish list for more than 20 years. “When the children were small, we lived in New York City and would come to Arizona for Christmas,” says Pamala. “Now, we live here and visit New York City the week before Christmas.”



The Phoenix holidays are celebrated with husband, William (he is chairman and CEO FirstGlobal Partners, LLC); daughter, MacKenzie; son, Austin; and an array of extended family and friends. Decadent holiday delights—like red velvet cake with a side of Champagne—and traditional songs help ring in the season. But it’s perhaps the family’s collection of wooden toy soldiers that creates that special, signature touch each year. “We have over 100—some antique, some new, from all over the world,” Pamala says of her vast nutcracker collection. “Whenever we visit a city or country for the first time, we scout for nutcrackers.” The family’s love of Arizona winters promises that no matter where their travels take them, they’ll be home for Christmas. “Seventy and sunny—that’s how we like our holiday season!”



The Hormel Family

Creative ornaments and yuletide cocktails are just a glimpse into this Valley family’s fun, fresh holiday style. Christmas is a time to share with family and, for many, that time is spent in the kitchen. For Jamie Hormel, who owns the Wrigley Mansion, and her three children, it’s no different. “We love to bake around the holidays,” she says. “It’s a great way to spend time together, staying in the kitchen, making a mess, listening to holiday music.” John Lennon’s “Happy Christmas (War is Over)” is a favorite. “One year, I decided to force my kids to learn every lyric. Since then, we all sing it as loud as possible every time it comes on the radio.” Jamie’s style is an effortless mix of modern fun and classic tradition, served with a side of “super strong eggnog!” Even the family’s Christmas Eve reading of “Twas the Night Before Christmas” has a fresh twist thanks to their “pass-around game,” during which guests pass a gift every time the word “the” is read. The ornament party is another nod to their special brand of tradition; guests fashion ornaments from clay, hanging their creations on a designated tree. But it’s simple pleasures like lounging with her kids and dogs and wrapping presents that have the most meaning. “Before I had a family, I didn’t really have any holiday traditions...now, we have an endless amount.” And that just may be the best gift of all.



The Lane Family

For the Lanes, including mom Wendy Lane of Sexy Chef Wendy, the holidays are more about hitting the surf and soaking up the sun than opening gifts.

How do you plan to celebrate the holidays this year?

Wendy: We will be waiting for the arrival of Santa Claus over Christmas, and spending the New Year in Maui, where my parents live, sinking our toes in the sand, and soaking in the rays!

What is your favorite holiday memory?

Wendy: Christmas in Maui always brings me the most joy. We don't focus on gifts. Instead, we spend our time on the beach, feeling gratitude, playing, surfing, cooking and enjoying the beautiful ocean. Our time together as a family is our gift.

Kaeley: Going to Maui to be with my grandparents and watching the whales swim around us

Brett: One year at Christmas I met some new friends in Maui and was invited to a party where Luke Perry opened my bottle of water!

What is the greatest gift you have ever received?

Wendy: When I discovered all 18 of my chef knives were sharp.

Lane: Hockey pads.

Kaeley: iPad 3.

Christy: My dog, Ginger.

Brett: My siblings.

Given?

Wendy: Taking my little Chihuahua, Piglet, to a senior living center, and letting her share her love and good will to the residents over the holidays.

Kaeley: Donated my clothes and toys to a women's and children's shelter, Soul Sanctuary.

What is on your holiday wish list?

Wendy: I would like to cook with Emeril Lagasse, and dare him not to say "Bam!"

Kaeley: Clothes from Wildfox.

Lane: New hockey skates.

Christy: For my family to move to Los Angeles so they can be closer to me.

Brett: A trip somewhere warm.

In what ways do you give back to the community during the holiday season?

Wendy: The kids and I love to be secret Santa to another family! It's wonderful to watch the kids get so excited about helping out a family in need.

Kaeley: Had a farmers' market to raise money and collected food cans for St Mary's Food Bank.

Favorite holiday song?

Wendy: "Santa, Baby" by Eartha Kitt.

Kaeley: "Let it Snow."

Favorite holiday food?

Wendy: Triple cream cheese on a ginger snap with a strawberry and mint slice.

Christy: Whatever my mom makes—it's always amazing.

Brett: My mom's apple sausage stuffing. I live for it.

People

Kaeley: My mom's kale salad.

Lane: Baby back ribs.

Favorite holiday movie?

Wendy: "The Grinch who Stole Christmas" with my favorite quote: "Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before! What if Christmas doesn't come from a store? What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more?"

Kaeley: "Elf."

Christy: It's a toss-up between "The Grinch" and "Elf."

Brett: "Home Alone" (original). Puts me in hysterics every time.

New Year's resolution?

Wendy: Trying to make at least one new person happy every day next year!

Kaeley: Every two months, volunteer for the dog shelter.

Christy: To drink less Coca Cola.

Story by Shannon North