



JEFF MINNICH GARDEN DESIGN, INC.

HOLIDAY 2017

Stories

[Winter Time—
Mexico City](#)

[Other Trips
this Year](#)

[Garden
Bloggers
Fling](#)

[Books](#)

[Late Season
Garden Tasks](#)



Holiday 2017

LINKS

[About Jeff](#)

[Projects](#)

[Stonework](#)

[Water Features](#)

[Finishing](#)

[Fences & Gates](#)

[Container Gardens](#)

Dear Clients and Friends,

I don't know why, but this year I have been itching to get started on my holiday decorating. While it was warm yesterday, I put up the outside lights; I'll turn them on after Thanksgiving. I put my lights on timers, which does make life easier. Last year, I was in the middle of having some work done on my kitchen, so the living room was full of boxes of kitchen items—thus, no tree last year. So maybe this sense of impatience and anticipation stems from the lack of holiday spirit in my house last year. How about you?

Right now, the leaf color in my garden is at its peak. I don't know why the trees in my yard wait so long to color up—the fact that I irrigate? Micro-climate? At any rate, I returned from a trip to Georgia over the weekend to Bloodgood Japanese maples in full, glorious fall color (and for this I am thankful, as last week's very hard freeze nipped and crunched the top leaves), and the oaks, beeches, bald cypress, and stewartia are looking pretty spectacular, too. I always feel like I'm living in limbo when the leaves are at peak, until they drop all at once and the "big turn" into winter begins.

Speaking of big turn, I have a big clean-up ahead, too. I've put away all the summer stuff already—

tender plants to over-winter in North Carolina; summer items to the shed; and the pansies are planted. Just need to wrap my windmill palms and have the leaves cleaned up—I'm lucky enough to have an experienced and thorough crew to help me out each fall. It's our "pizza day"—I always order whatever they like, and we have a nice, long lunch by the waterfall.

2018 is looking busy already. In January, I'm planning to attend the Mid-Atlantic Nurseryman's Trade Show, in Baltimore. At the end of the month, I'm hosting a garden club for a winter tour of my garden (provided there is not snow on the ground and the temperatures are not too bitterly cold). And in mid-March, I've agreed to speak at the spring horticultural symposium at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, SC. I have started to get back into magazine work this year, so that will continue, and I have started on some wonderful, new landscape projects which will continue into 2018 and beyond. The best part of my winter, however, will be my travels in February, which we are planning now. Speaking of trips, 2017 has been a whirlwind of travel, which I dearly love to do, as you know.

[Next Page >](#)

This Year's Trips

Winter Time—Mexico City



Moon over Mexico City

The year's big winter trip was to Mexico City, a first for us. Our base was right in the middle of the city. Having relatives living in Mexico City was a boon for us—almost every morning, we were picked up, right in front of our hotel, and whisked off to the day's adventures. What a treat and absolute privilege it is to have locals as guides, who speak the language and know their way around the region! We were very fortunate.



Our big, happy Mexican family

Our first excursion away from Mexico City was to San Miguel de Allende, long on my bucket list of places to visit. It's a compact town, very walkable, with stunning architecture and spectacular winter weather—70s during the day, with blue, blue skies, and 50s at night. Like most towns with ideal

climates, San Miguel has beautifully landscaped parks and plazas throughout, and they are heavily used.



San Miguel de Allende



Pyramid of the Sun

The pyramids at Teotihuacán, near Mexico City, are extensive. The Pyramid of the Sun was our first climb of the day. Keep in mind we were over 7000 feet in altitude before we even started climbing this thing, but we all did it fairly easily. Catching the breath at these altitudes is challenging, though!

And here is the spectacular view from the Pyramid of the Moon. That's the Pyramid of the Sun in the background. Stunning. The distance from this pyramid to the other end of the Avenue of the Dead is about 2 miles. We got a lot of walking in that day. The weather was perfect.



And here is the view from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun

Our second pyramid climb of the day was the Pyramid of the Moon. While a shorter climb, these steps are STEEP!! Whew!

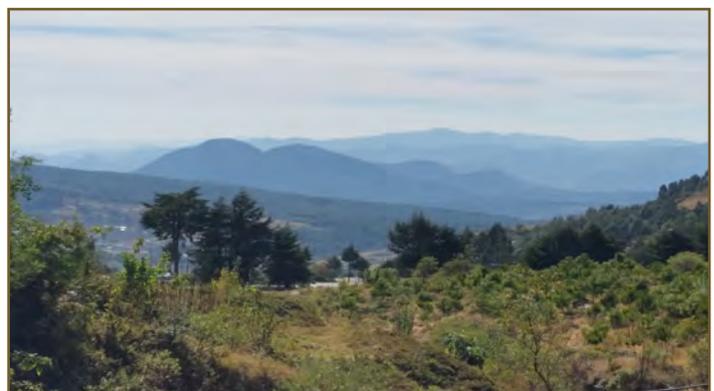


View from the top of the Pyramid of the Moon

Our adventures continued the next day. This was our view, on the way to our next stop, the Monarch winter reserve. Looks like Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, doesn't it?



Climbing the Pyramid of the Moon



Mountains of central Mexico



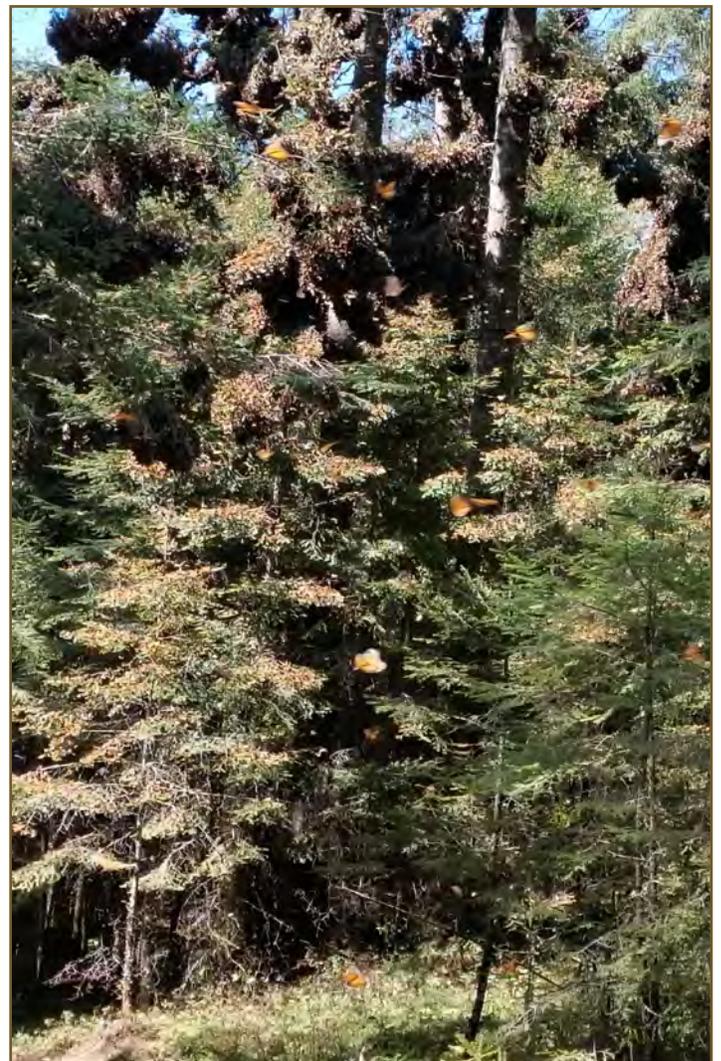
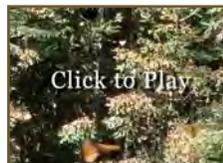
La Gruta

Our lunch spot, after climbing the pyramids at Teotihuacán, was La Gruta (“The Grotto”). See the candles burning in the background? Visitors are invited to light one, to mark their visit, which we did, of course.

We arrived at our special location late in the morning. After a quick lunch at the base of the mountain, it was time to climb up for our reward. The altitude was already high, so I opted to ride up on horseback (with a trusted guide). When we reached the top, there was still a bit of a climb up to 3500 metres, about 11,500 feet. Whoa, I felt the altitude! This is the reserve of the Mariposas Monarcas, also known as Monarch Butterflies, and this is one of five spots where they winter; this is the largest. You really have to be there, to get the full sense of the place.

In the photo at right, those big, dark clumps in the background are Monarchs. And yes, every orange object you see is a butterfly.

And, finally, here is a short video to help you get a sense of this magical, spiritual place. This was on our bucket lists, and it was an experience we’ll remember the rest of our lives. (But I will admit we slept like logs that night, after our second day in a row of climbing at high altitudes, at least for us!)



Monarch winter reserve

The next day was a museum day in Mexico City. We went to the Frida Kahlo Museum (“Casa Azul” or the Blue House and, yes, it’s bright blue). It was excellent, and the garden is lush and alluring. I learned a lot about Frida and her husband, Diego Rivera. We went to two beautiful churches, too, with museums attached to them.



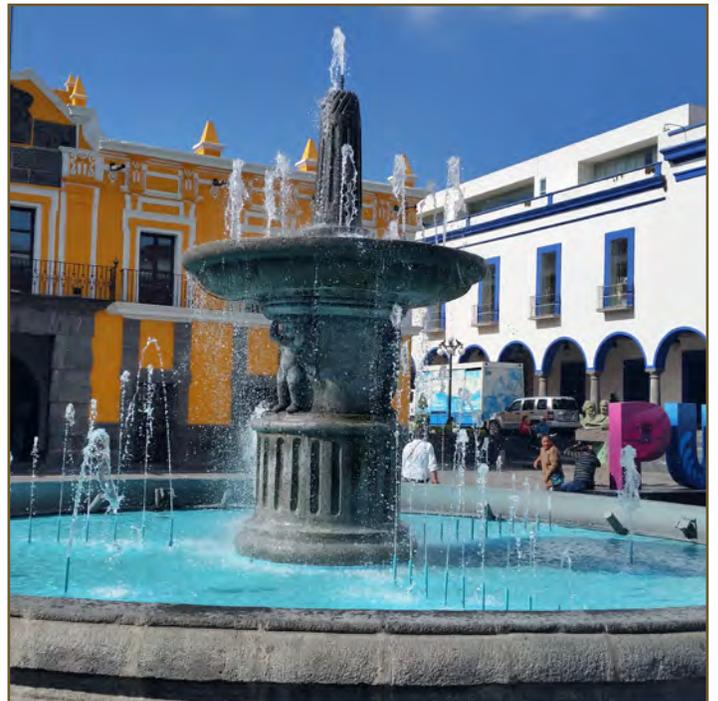
Calla lilies at Frida Kahlo Museum

There is a very modern and efficient double-decker freeway in Mexico City (I have to mention that the traffic there is hideous, and the drivers are daredevils. With 20 million people in Mexico City, I wouldn’t expect less. DC drivers you have no idea--really. Why there aren’t more accidents is beyond me...) Anyway, all the columns--and I mean all--along this freeway are covered on all four sides with panels that have small sacks for soil and plants, as you see here. It certainly makes the drive in all this traffic more pleasant.



Freeway planters

Our next adventure took us to the lovely town of Puebla, about two hours from Mexico City. Puebla is a big center of ceramic and tile production and sales. In fact, I was able to select and order four custom candlesticks for my dining room, which arrived a couple of months later and match my dining room perfectly. The town is full of fountains and multitudes of stunning churches, also.



Puebla

Puebla has a beautiful vista at every turn...



Many Mexicans, even in the bigger cities, still shop the old way, going from vender to vender for their food needs. Supermarkets exist, but not to the extent they do in the U.S. The vast majority of the food we ate in Mexico was fresh, without preservatives or hormones. The restaurants all serve scrumptious food, yet many people walk up to the hundreds (thousands?) of food vendors lining the sidewalks. It's common to see people standing and eating a quick lunch, during the workday. Like Italians, Mexicans seem to prefer their own cuisine to any other food. Why waver, when the food is so good? Here, you see bulk staples.



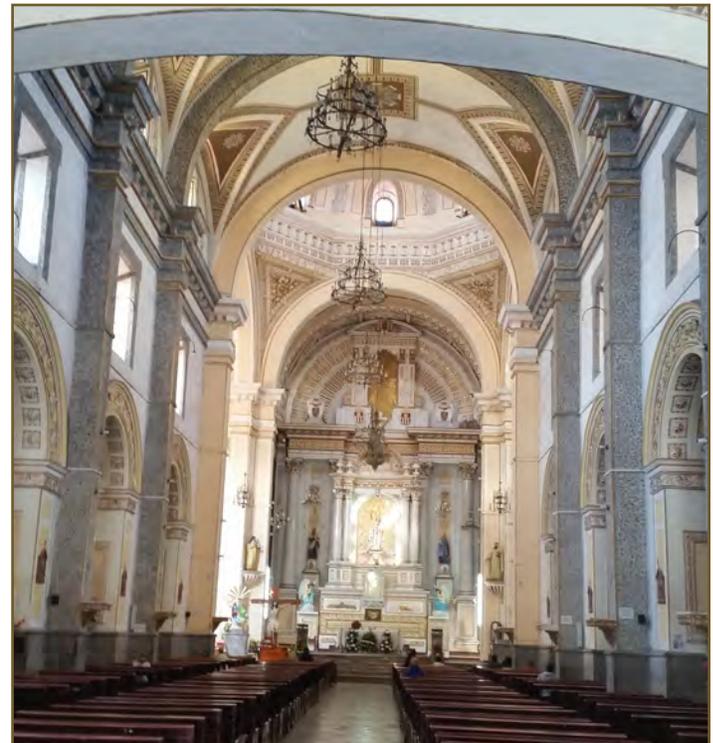
A Mexican market

The church interiors take away the breath. As in Italy, the presence of priceless art in EVERY church blows my mind. Even in the smallest village church, there is museum-quality art, something that is just not seen in the U.S. The interior of this church is simple, in comparison to most others we entered. Not a religious person, I still feel the pull to enter as I pass any beautiful church. I am always rewarded.

When we returned to Mexico City, we made a night visit to the Basilica of Guadalupe, a must-see stop. Ah, Guadalupe ("La Lupita" to Mexicans)... she is visible at every turn as you journey through Mexico...she is the patroness and protectress of the Mexican people (and we certainly benefitted from her protection while there). The Basilica complex is massive, with two old churches and a larger, modern church, or Iglesia in Spanish. The Basilica sits at the end of the Paseo de la Reforma, which is the main drag through Mexico City, a stately boulevard marked with statues and memorials along its length. At the other end of Reforma, perched on a hill, is a castle.



La Lupita



And parks and plazas abound...



One of the delightful aspects of Mexico is the combination of very modern conveniences and the continuation of many old traditions. Here, for example, is the neighborhood knife sharpener. How nice it would be to have this at home!

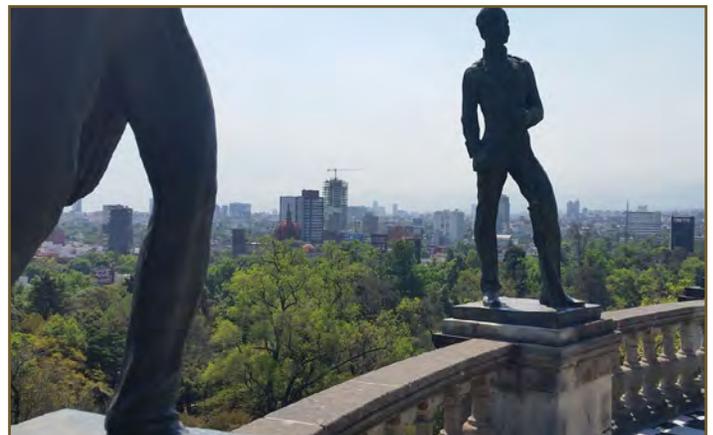


Bright and early on our last day in Mexico City, our beautiful and brilliant hostess and tour guide took us to the Castillo de Chapultepec (and thank goodness it was early, because the line was what seemed a mile long when we were leaving). If you remember, this castle sits at the opposite end of Reforma from the Basilica of Guadalupe. The castle housed many of

Mexico's rulers until the mid-1930s, when it became an outstanding museum. Since the castle is on a high hill, the views are vast.



Castillo de Chapultepec





View down a portion of the Boulevard Reforma

Our last evening was spent with our dear Mexican family at a very intimate Cuban dance club called La Botega. We ate, drank, laughed and danced until the wee hours, and there were tears, too, as none of us wanted to say goodbye. They welcomed us with love and open arms, and gave us their time and undivided attention. Despite language barriers, we all made it work, through patience and understanding--and we all learned a great deal. We shared about our different cultures, customs, food, and histories. And laughter really is the universal language. We only hope to reciprocate someday, though it will be hard to repay them and top their warm hospitality!

Other Trips this Year

April took us to the garden of very dear friends, in Hillsborough, NC, for a garden art show and delightful visit. I returned for another visit in August, where I met a delightful

photography crew and stylist who joined me to help put together an article for *Southern Living*. Look for this article in a spring 2018 issue...that's all I'm going to tell you!

Additionally, in October, I was fortunate enough to be asked to style another feature for *Southern Living*, where I joined the same photo crew I had met in August in NC. Look for this article next fall—it will feature a private residence in the Blackberry Farm complex, near Knoxville, TN. I have to say, styling for a photo shoot is hard and exhausting work! I understand this article will be published sometime in the fall of 2018.

Helen Norman, the photographer hired for these features, and her expert assistant, Nate Smith, are marvelous. We visited Helen, at her Star Bright Farm, north of Baltimore, in August. Please have a look at her website—the work she does is brilliant. www.helennorman.com And you really *must* have a look at her Star Bright Farm, which she runs with her son and family. www.starbright-farm.com

We were based this August in Wilmington, NC, as is often the case, and we traveled from there. Our regional driving trip took us to our beloved Savannah, GA; Beaufort, SC; and Holden Beach, NC, where we visited dear friends. A visit to Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, just outside Charleston, SC, was a memorable surprise. I emailed the executive director, Tom Johnson, mentioning that we would be passing by and could we meet? (We had been Facebook friends, yet never met in person.) Hospitable and delightful Tom said, “Spend the night! I’ll take y’all to dinner, and we can put you up in the Writer’s Cottage! Tomorrow, y’all can walk the gardens with me and go on some of our tours.” Well—we were delightfully surprised and grateful, as you can imagine, and we had a really fun time getting to know Tom and his lovely wife, Mary Ann, who is director of operations at Magnolia.



Bald Cyresses at Magnolia Plantation

Magnolia is a romantic style garden and home of some of the most important camellia and azalea collections in the country. They offer many tours throughout the plantation and gardens—we chose From Slavery to Freedom: The Magnolia Cabin Project Tour and the Rice Field Boat Tour. Both were outstanding.

Wandering with Tom, we got the sense of the ageless and timeless qualities of Magnolia. Perched on the Ashley River, the vastness of the gardens allows peace and repose, and it appeals to all the senses. I have been to Magnolia several times in the past, yet each time I go, I enjoy these qualities and learn something new, at the same time. I highly recommend you visit Magnolia the next time you are in Charleston, if you can work it into your schedule. Check out their website for more information and to see all that is offered at Magnolia. www.magnoliaplantation.com

Our summer vacation ended with a day trip from Wilmington, NC, down to Georgetown, SC, to view the total eclipse. Georgetown was just inside the area where the eclipse could be seen in totality. I am so glad we took the time to drive and see the total eclipse. It is hard to describe that moment...I can only say that it was a complete sensory experience and one I will never forget.

Tom and Mary Ann Johnson, of Magnolia, invited us to visit their other home near Columbus, GA, to collect seeds of native and evergreen azaleas. We joined forces with Ernest Koone, noted native azalea expert, and traveled to nearby Callaway Gardens, which has extensive azalea collections. Ernest guided us through the woodlands of Callaway, where we learned how to identify and harvest azalea seed. Delightful, and we made a new friend along the way. Tom and Mary Ann are gracious hosts!



Full solar eclipse



Collecting native azalea seed

Garden Bloggers Fling

I was so grateful to have my garden included in this year's Garden Bloggers Fling tours, which took place this year in the Washington, DC, area, in late June. Though it was a hot day, we had clear weather, and the garden was flooded with enthusiastic visitors, full of questions and comments. What a treat! I love to share my garden, and we made many new friends that day.

Books

My dear friend, Frances Mayes, has a new novel which will be released next spring, *Women in Sunlight*. I can't wait to read her latest offering.

Another book worth pursuing is *The Cooking Gene: A Journey Through African American Culinary History in the Old South*, by Michael Twitty.

Late Season Garden Tasks

Please be aware of these tasks, as we move into the winter season:

- Don't forget to turn off your outdoor faucets from the inside and drain them so your pipes don't freeze! Irrigation systems should be professionally blown-out, drained, and turned off for the winter, if you haven't done so already, to protect from damage. In addition, bring in your hoses. Ceramic/terra cotta pots can freeze, swell and crack, too—unless you have the frost-proof kinds (Impruneta)--so don't forget to store or cover them.
- Though many of your gardens have experienced the first frosts/freezes of the season, the serious, serious cold usually doesn't come in until January. If we have a warm spell, and it still seems dry, turn on your water and give your new plantings, especially, a good, deep soak. This is important going into the winter because when the ground freezes hard, plants cannot absorb any water into their systems. As the winter winds blow, moisture is whipped out of the plants and there is no way for them to replace it. This is the cause for winter-burn and consequently, death, if the freeze goes on long enough and the plants were already dry. Fall watering "plumps them up" and helps to protect them against winter-burn. Just don't forget to turn off your spigots again if another serious freeze comes in.
- Clean fallen leaves off your lawn. The leaves can mat down and kill the grass underneath. Fallen leaves can remain in beds, if desired.



- Be sure to gently knock off any snow from your flexible plants, such as boxwoods and waxmyrtles, to prevent breakage. Do not try to knock off ice (or pour hot water on your plants to melt it!). Let it melt naturally and fall on its own. The stems are extremely brittle when covered with ice. What I learned from the heavy, heavy snows and ice of recent winters: Let Nature take its course. I tried to knock the snow off early on, but eventually I just let the snow pile up and enclose the plants. Then I left them alone. I made this decision after I tried to get proactive and knock off some heavy snow from a big boxwood branch—the branch had iced underneath the snow and the whole thing cracked off when I shook it too hard. Lesson learned—and I went inside. What else I learned: After a good pruning and some time, all my plants recovered from breakage and look great now. Be patient.
- Get out and buy snow shovels now, so you're ready, while the supply is still good! Be careful that any deicers you apply to your sidewalks/driveway do not contain salts that can damage the lawn or plants adjacent to these areas.
- You can protect your most tender evergreens by wrapping them in cotton burlap, if you wish (though, personally, I only protect my tender palm trees). This helps protect camellias and other plants in areas exposed to

winter sun and wind. The sun can burn plants after a particularly cold night, too.

- If you decorate the indoors of your home for the holidays, now is a good time to do some pruning on your evergreens. You can use the cuttings for your decorating. Just make sure to step back frequently to make sure your pruning is uniform!



- You can add mulch now, too, if it is needed, and especially around your more tender plants. Your mulch should measure no more than two-three inches deep—this includes the mulch you added earlier this year. Mulch that is too

deep stifles plant growth, so go easy. Do not pile up mulch against the trunks of your trees or stems of your plants—they need to breathe. No fertilizing on your shrubbery should take place until late winter—early spring.

- Let your houseplants rest while indoors for the winter. I give them as much light as I can, and I only water them when they begin to look like they need it—which isn't very often. I don't fertilize at all over the winter, either, because I don't want them to grow until the sun gets strong again in late winter. I begin feeding them again around March 1st with a water-soluble fertilizer like Miracle-Gro or Peter's.
- I never leave liquid garden chemicals out in the shed where they can freeze. It can ruin them. I put them in my utility room, on a high shelf, out of the sun. They should be in a cool, dry, frost-free storage spot. The main thing is to safely store them out of the reach of children and pets, and others who may not know what they are grabbing. Always read the labels (you should be doing this, anyway, for everyone's safety)—they will always tell you about storage. And check those expiration dates—*safely and properly* discard them if out-of-date.
- This winter, check out some good garden books, magazines and websites. It's a wonderful time to get inspired for next spring. It's a great time to get out in your garden, walk around, and see where there might be any "holes". Stop and assess. This is the time of year the "bones" of your garden are important and really shine.



As I close this long letter, I would like to thank you for your business this year. 2017 has been another excellent year for Jeff Minnich Garden Design, and I am grateful for your business and friendships. If you foresee the need for any work in 2018, let me know—things are beginning to book already! Jeff Minnich Garden Design will celebrate 20 years of business in 2018, a milestone I cannot believe—time just flies! Astounding.

I wish you a peaceful and joyful holiday season, and a happy, healthy, and prosperous 2018. See you next year!
Many thanks and all the best,

Handwritten signature of Jeff Minnich.