



Festival of Trees

Annual event shines light on reason for the season

By Diane Gale Andreassi

VISITING the spectacular Festival of Trees extravaganza has become a longtime tradition for many to emphasize the meaning of the holidays by supporting a good cause.

The Festival of Trees, at the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center in



Dearborn, is celebrating its 38th year and typically draws upward of 7,000 visitors from all over southeast Michigan. It's the largest fundraiser for Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation, raising money for pediatric research at the hospital.

Since its inception in 1985, Festival of Trees has raised more than \$20 million for an endowment to fund research. The income from the endowment to date has provided almost \$10 million in research grants.

Let the festivities begin

The event kicks off November 19 with a black-tie preview gala offering participation at three levels. VIP tickets are \$175, patron tickets are \$100 and tickets for children are \$30. There will also be a silent auction, live entertainment, strolling food stations, a magical sweets-and-treats room, and a raffle. Tickets are available online at fot.org.

The public is invited to come out and see the decorated trees, wreaths and centerpieces, kids' activities, and of course, Santa, from November 20-27. The display is closed on Thanksgiving.

Don't forget to stop by the festive gift shop, filled with a wonderful variety of items to help you check off your holiday gift list, or find something special for yourself.

"It's a beautiful way to kick off the holiday season," said Theresa Diefenbach, director of Festival of Trees. "A family of four can come in with \$20, see everything and get a holiday experience."

Grab a gift

If you're looking for a special holiday gift, each year the Festival of Trees commissions an artist to create a small

number of handblown glass ornaments. They are currently available to order by going to www.fot.org.

Every year, supporters are surprised by the creative Christmas tree themes that in the past ranged from a Red Wings-themed Christmas tree to Willy Wonka's famous purple hat and a singing Elvis. This year, it's anyone's guess how the trees will wow spectators.

The trees are sponsored and or sold, fully decorated, to raise money for research at Children's Hospital of Michigan.

Thank you, sponsors and volunteers

Main event sponsors are English Gardens, which provides the trees; the Ford Community and Performing Arts Center, and Palmer Moving and Storage.

Festival of Trees is a nonprofit charity run and operated by volunteers in all sorts of capacities, from setup to working the days of the event to taking everything down.

Volunteers are needed and appreciated.

"We cannot do this without our amazing volunteers, who give their time to help us help the kids" Diefenbach said.

Reach out to the event's volunteer coordinator, Jennifer Ribby, at FOTsignup@outlook.com. Visit fot.org for more information, including how you can help raise funding, by sponsoring trees, donating funds or items to the auction and raffle, buying an ad in the program book, and much more.

Festival of Trees is at the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center, 15801 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. General admission tickets are available at the door. Adults \$5, Child \$3 and children under two are free. Members of the military are invited to attend for free November 22. For groups of 10 or more, reach out to Diefenbach at (734) 748-3822.

