

Festival of Trees

Brightening up the holiday with decorated trees for a cause

By Diane Gale Andreassi

Imagine walking into a ballroom filled with decorated holiday trees and knowing that your trek through this breathtaking wonderland is also supporting the largest fundraiser for Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation for pediatric research.

The Festival of Trees, at the Ford Community and Arts Center in Dearborn, is celebrating its 37th year. Typically drawing upwards of 7,000 visitors, this holiday extravaganza has become a must-attend tradition for people all over southeast Michigan. Even better, it has over the years cumulatively raised more than \$18 million for the foundation.

Kick off the holiday season

The event kicks off November 20 with a black tie preview gala offering participation at three levels. VIP tickets are \$125, patron tickets are \$75 and tickets for children are \$25. There will also be a silent auction and raffle.

The public is invited to come out and see the decorated trees, wreaths and centerpieces November 21-28. The display is closed on Thanksgiving. Don't forget to check out the gift store, with proceeds also going to the foundation.

"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

Tickets to view the trees are \$5 for adults and \$3 for children. Kids under 2 are free. Members of the military are invited to attend for free November 23.

If you're looking for a special holiday gift, each year the Festival of Trees commissions an artist to create a small number of handmade ornaments made from recycled glass. They are currently available to order by going to www.fot.org

Every year, supporters are surprised by the creative 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 often sponsored and/or sold, fully decorated, to raise money for research at Children's Hospital.



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Thank you, sponsors

Main event sponsors are English Gardens, which provides the trees; the Ford Community and Arts Center, and Palmer Moving and Storage. Last year, due to coronavirus concerns, the event was canceled for the first time.

"Even though the pandemic hit, it didn't change that kids need the money for research," Diefenbach said. "Us being able to come back is a God send."

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

Volunteers needed and appreciated

"We couldn't do this without the volunteers and get to where we are today," she said. "We always need more volunteers. It's something we need to keep going in order to support pediatric research."

The Festival of Trees also accepts donations for Children's Hospital of Michigan Foundation by filling out a form online.

Tickets are available at the door for general admission. Go to fot.org for more details or call Diefenbach at (734) 748-3822.

