



Santa Claus is coming to town

Whether by train or by fire truck, the Jolly Old Elf arrives to kick off Christmas in Polk County

By Emily Mentzer and Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS
Twice the Christmas trees, twice the cocoa, twice the cookies and twice the Santa magic will be on display at Winterfest in Dallas on Friday.

Winterfest officially kicks off at 5 p.m. Friday, with retail and food vendors, cookies, cocoa and Christmas music.

Black Rock BBQ will be setting up in downtown early. Others, including a kettle corn vendor and a few Polk County Bounty regulars, will join the popular food truck just in time for the countdown to Santa's arrival.

Last year, Winterfest ran out of cookies and hot chocolate, said Chelsea Metcalfe, the event's coordinator. She didn't want that to happen for a second time, so she reached out to cookie dough provider Papa Murphy's Pizza and cocoa supplier Dallas Church. They both generously doubled what they offered last year, so there will be enough to serve 1,000 people.

When Santa arrives a little after 6 p.m., he will have double the tree lighting responsibilities, in addition to hearing the wishes of the good little boys and girls.

St. Nick still will be lighting the sequoia on the Polk County Courthouse lawn, but also another Christmas tree placed near the sidewalk on the square. Metcalfe said the sequoia will soon be too big for the Dallas Fire Department's ladder truck to string the lights.

The city wanted to introduce Winterfest attendees to the idea of lighting a new tree.

"That was the city manager (Ron Foggin) and the mayor (Brian Dalton)," Metcalfe said. "They worked with Big Foot Christmas Trees. ... Santa will magically light two trees."

While Santa arriving via fire department escort is the most exciting part of the evening, Metcalfe said the best part of Winterfest is the time Santa spends with children after the tree lighting.

"They say they know this is the real Santa because they have seen him their en-



Santa Claus cruises into Independence Saturday on the Santa Train via Portland & Western Railroad. The seventh-annual event will provide a toy for each child who comes to see Jolly St. Nick.

tire lives," Metcalfe said.

FALLS CITY
Now in its fifth year, the Christmas tree lighting in Falls City has become a holiday tradition.

The gathering will begin at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday in the parking lot next to Mountain Gospel Fellowship Church, 257 N. Main St.

Coordinator Jenn Drill said the lighting will be at 7 p.m. and will be a festive, but simple occasion. Hot chocolate, cider and desserts will be served, and Christmas music will provide holiday spirit.

"It's a time to bring the community together and celebrate the season and our community," Drill said.

INDEPENDENCE
Cynthia Jaramillo didn't grow up with much. In fact, she grew up poor, one of three children of a divorcee mother who didn't have much.

"It motivates me to pass it on," she said.

And pass it on she does. Last year, Jaramillo, organizer of the sixth annual Santa Train, was able to brighten the Christmases of 1,134 kids who came to Independence Cinema to welcome the big man via Portland & Western Railroad.

This year, Chase Bar and Grill is sponsoring the event, with candy provided by FCR and candy canes from the Arena Sports Bar and Grill.

"The Independence Women's Club stepped up and is doing hot dogs this year," Jaramillo said. "Then we have the Grove Community Church doing the hot cocoa."

Toys for Tots provides the toys handed out to each child who comes out from 1 to 3 p.m. on Saturday.

The part that keeps Jaramillo going each year is



Santa arrives in Dallas Friday evening for Winterfest at the Polk County Courthouse.

knowing she can give presents to children who otherwise wouldn't have any.

"I know there's so much poverty in the world," she said. "I try to keep this going so that way, those kids who don't have a gift under the tree — or even a tree — I try to give them a gift for Christmas. I can't see them not having one."

Jaramillo encourages everyone to come down to the cinema and volunteer or just watch the train bring Santa to town.

"Even if they don't want to volunteer, come down and watch the kids, and watch how excited they are about the train," she said.

Later on Saturday, the 14th annual Parade of Lights will make its way from the First Baptist Church parking lot, where entries will begin staging at 4:15 p.m. The parade officially starts its trek to Main Street at 5 p.m.

Nancy Lodge, chairwoman of the Parade of Lights committee, said she expects there will be more

entries this year.

"It looks like we might be getting some horses in the parade," she noted.

Afterward, all are welcome to an open house at Sojourn International on Main Street for Lodge's famous hot cider, hot chocolate, and cookies — made by volunteers.

"This is something we want to give to the community," Lodge said. "It's all free. We want all people from all walks of life to have the opportunity to come together and celebrate."

At the open house, parade participants will be awarded for President's Choice, Best Use of Lights, Best Commercial Entry, and Best Group/Organization Entry.

MONMOUTH
The festivities to ring in the season start in Monmouth at 6 p.m. on Friday — all centered around the campus of Western Oregon University.

At 6, the holiday parade marches through downtown Monmouth and onto campus. The parade includes lighted entries from campus groups, as well as Polk County Fire District No. 1. Santa Claus rides a brightly lit fire engine to the Werner University Center, where he will be available for photos with Mrs. Claus throughout the evening.

The entire campus will go dark before the 129-year-old sequoia tree will come alive with lights in dramatic fashion, and then people can make their way to the Werner Center or down to the Historic Gentle House.

The Werner Center will be bustling with activities, from music to crafts for the whole family.

Perhaps the most fun is the annual cookie bakeoff, where students, staff and faculty submit their best cookies, and the public gets to be the judge. Be forewarned: The cookies go fast. If you want to taste and judge them, make your way to the judging table quickly following the tree lighting or you'll be left with crumbs.

Before you leave campus, make your way to the Gentle House for the annual Wine, Warmth and Music, starting at 7 p.m.

For more information: wou.edu.

