



EO Media Group file photo

Dontez White, 1, of Hermiston reaches out to touch Christmas lights during the Winter Festival in Hermiston.

Hermiston brings the magic with trees, toys and lights

By JADE MCDOWELL
EO Media Group

Tickets are selling out fast for one of Hermiston's most highly anticipated holiday events, the Festival of Trees.

The annual event, in its 24th year, kicks off with a 21-and-over dinner and auction at the Hermiston Conference Center on Dec. 2 at 6 p.m. followed by family day on Dec. 3 from noon to 4 p.m. Money raised by the festival — a collaboration between Hermiston Kiwanis Club, Good Shepherd Community Health Foundation and Soroptomists International of the Greater Hermiston Area — will go to support local causes including health and wellness grants, financial assistance for women returning to school and a renovation of Greenwood Park.

"We get the community to support the festival and then turn around and give the money back," said Cathy Wamsley of Kiwanis.

Tickets for the dinner are \$40 apiece, available at the Hermiston Conference Center, and family day is a suggested donation of \$5 per family. The rest of the money is raised in a combination of silent auction and live auction of large Christmas trees, small artificial trees, wreaths and baskets.

Liz Marvin of the health foundation said the trees and wreaths that are donated each year after being decorated by sponsoring businesses are "truly magical." Each tree includes a pile of gifts "for a large family" underneath, and is decorated in a theme ranging from the Grinch to Hawaii to a vintage feel.

"One year we had a Darth



EO Media Group file photo

Omar Campos, center, with Claudia Arellano and Bryan Bazquez stop for a photo in front of the giant Christmas tree at the "Hermiston North Pole" after the city's tree-lighting ceremony.

Vader tree that actually looked like Darth Vader," Marvin said.

For those who don't get a ticket to the dinner and auction, Denise Derbyshire of Soroptomists said the trees will still be on display at the Hermiston Conference Center the next day for families to enjoy. The family day event will also include Christmas crafts, cookie decorating, live entertainment, pictures with Santa and other family-friendly activities.

"There's something for everything," Derbyshire said.

Other holiday activities in the Hermiston area include:

The city of Hermiston is hosting a tree lighting ceremony on Dec. 7 at 6 p.m. on Northeast Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue. Activities will include food vendors, caroling by Hermiston High School choirs and a visit from Santa Claus. The event will coincide with the downtown district's First Thursday event, which includes special deals and

treats at downtown businesses from 4:30-7 p.m. that night.

Hermiston Parks and Recreation director Larry Fetter said the city is still looking for the perfect tree, which will be planted in the middle of Second Street for the Christmas season, and is still trying to work out some dates for live entertainment and light shows on other nights in December, weather permitting.

"Every year we add something new to the mix," he said.

The city will also host its annual Pancakes With Santa event Saturday, Dec. 16 from 9:30-11 a.m. at

the Hermiston Conference Center. Tickets are \$8 per child, \$10 per adult or \$30 per family and must be purchased ahead of time from the parks and recreation department. The experience includes a digital photo with Santa and holiday storytime.

Despite the passing of founder Laurie Ball Kiser and the demolition of its former home at the Hermiston Senior Center, the Community Fellowship Dinner on Christmas Day will go on.

The free community meal has moved to the Hermiston High School commons, 600 South First St., with board chair Gary Humphreys helping lead the way. Food will be served by volunteers in the new space — which includes more seating than the old venue — from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

In Echo, the annual Toy Run will bring motorcyclists to town in droves on Dec. 2 to bring donations of unwrapped toys from Echo to Good Shepherd Medical Center to be distributed to children in extra need of some cheer this year.

The ride will start at noon from Echo's Main Street, and non-motorcyclists are encouraged to drop off toys before noon for the ride. For more information contact Al Sells, 541-571-1820.

Hermiston

Community Fellowship Dinner

•Thursday, Nov. 23 & Monday, Dec. 25; 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
•Hermiston High School main commons, 600 S. First St.

www.facebook.com/communityfellowshipdinnerhermistonOR

Free. Holiday meals with all the trimmings. Everyone is welcome. For delivery service, a ride or to volunteer, contact cfhermiston@gmail.com or 541-371-9772.

Journey to Bethlehem

•Friday, Dec. 1-Sunday, Dec. 3; 5-9 p.m.
•Seventh-day Adventist Church,

Free. Features the sights, smells and sounds of a bustling village during Biblical times — sharing the reason behind the season. Outdoor tours followed by refreshments indoors.

Holiday Bazaar

•Saturday, Dec. 2; 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
•The Arc, 215 W. Orchard Ave.

Free admission. For vendor space, call 541-314-0166.

Hermiston Festival of Trees

•Saturday, Dec. 2; 6-9 p.m., gala event
•Sunday, Dec. 3; noon-4 p.m., family day
•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395
www.facebook.com/HermistonFestivalofTrees

\$40/gala event, \$5/suggested Family Day donation. The evening event includes dinner, live/silent auction for Christmas trees and other holiday decor and gift baskets.

Family Day features holiday fun for the whole family.

Community Tree Lighting Ceremony

•Thursday, Dec. 7; 6-9 p.m.
•Festival Street, Downtown Hermiston

www.www.hermiston.or.us
Free. Kick off the holiday season with music, Santa Claus, campfires and vendors with food, hot chocolate and holiday treats. Held in conjunction with the downtown district's First Thursday event, special deals available from 4:30-7 p.m.

Light of the World

•Saturday, Dec. 9; 7:30-9:30 p.m.
•Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 850 S.W. 11th St.

www.facebook.com/hermistoncommunitychristmasconcert

Free. Features the Hermiston Community Choir singing holiday favorites. Refreshments served.

Hermiston Farmers Christmas Market

•Friday, Dec. 15; 2-6 p.m.; Saturday, Dec. 16; 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395
Free. Includes festivities, crafts, food.

Pancakes with Santa

•Saturday, Dec. 16; 9:30-11:30 a.m.

•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395
www.www.hermiston.or.us
\$10/ages 16+, \$8/ages 2-15, \$30/family of 4. Tickets must be purchased by Dec. 13. In addition to a pancake breakfast, visit and take pictures with Santa and enjoy a holiday story shared by Hermiston Public Library staff.

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