



It's beginning  
to look a lot like



**Christmas**

**Photos by Lukas Eggen, Jolene Guzman and Emily Mentzer**  
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Communities throughout Polk County rang in the Christmas season Friday and Saturday with visits from Santa, candy canes, hot cocoa, Christmas carols and lights — lots of lights.

The 49th annual Monmouth Tree Lighting included performances from elementary school choirs, as well as arts and crafts, hosted by the Western Oregon University athletics department.

A parade kicked off the festivities, with free hot chocolate and candy canes handed out at Western Oregon University.

After the tree was lit,

Santa was in the house for photos with plenty of coloring and live performances to keep the mood festive.

Celebrations at Dallas' Winterfest had children — and their parents — lined up for hours to have their secret wishes heard by Santa Claus. The event included a variety of food trucks and holiday vendors with crafts to sell on the Polk County Courthouse lawn.

Santa arrived via Dallas Fire & EMS fire engine right on time. His tree lighting duties were doubled this year as the city of Dallas brought in a second tree on the sidewalk in front of the Polk County Courthouse for the first time.

After lighting the trees, Santa sat down for his biggest responsibility of all: hearing the Christmas present hopes of Dallas' youngest residents.

In Independence, the Santa Train attendance was record-breaking, with children lined up so far, Santa decided to stay more than two hours beyond his scheduled 1 to 3 p.m. so he could hear all the wishes of the boys and girls.

An epic Parade of Lights headed down Monmouth Avenue — 15 floats, including horses, emergency vehicles, and an appearance by St. Nick.

The open house that follows the parade was moved downtown from the Independence Civic Center, and was hosted by Sojourn International. Attendees could warm up from the cold night, get to know each other and enjoy cookies, hot cocoa and cider.

The weekend was a wonderful way for all to gather together and kick off the spirit of the season.



**Mackenzie Welker, four, gets a little help from Tyler Welker with coloring Friday night during Western Oregon's Holiday Tree Lighting celebration.**



**One of 15 glowing entries in Independence's Parade of Lights that made its way down Monmouth Avenue Saturday night, helping kick off the Christmas season.**



**Hailey Soukup, 5, shares what she wants for Christmas with Santa on Friday during Western Oregon University's 49th annual Holiday Tree Lighting celebration.**



**Maxx and Gauge Michaelson, both 2, weren't so sure they wanted to meet Santa on Friday night at Winterfest in Dallas. They were brave enough to pose for a photo, though.**



**Good little boys and girls had plenty of time to contemplate what they wanted to ask Santa for while waiting in line at Winterfest in Dallas on Friday night.**