



*He's making
a list and
checking it twice*

Santa is ready to visit Polk County

**By Emily Mentzer and
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POLK COUNTY — With the Thanksgiving weekend behind us, communities in Polk County turn their thoughts to Christmas. Friday and Saturday brings tree lightings, light parades, crafts for families — and, of course, chances for kids of all ages to meet the big man himself, Santa Claus.

DALLAS

Santa has a new posse for Winterfest this year.

He's still going to ride in on Dallas Fire & EMS' restored classic fire engine, but he will be escorted this year by a pack of DOGGs — that is, the Dallas Old Guys & Gals Motorcycle Club.

Santa will roar into downtown at about 6:15 p.m. on Friday to light the tree on the Polk County Courthouse lawn and take his honored place under a tent in front of the courthouse to listen to the wishes of good boys and girls.

Though Santa is the guest of honor and highlight of the evening, there's a lot to enjoy leading up to his arrival.

The Dallas Vitality Connection will host a "cash mob" at 5 p.m., with participants meeting at the corner of Main and Mill streets. The mob will then walk to a business — the identity is kept secret, even from the owners — with cash on



Kids sit in Santa's lap at Winterfest, which will start just after 6 p.m. on Friday.

JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer file

hand to spend with the local merchant.

Food trucks and vendors, which will offer wine tastings and wine for sale, kettle corn, stockings, candles, and even face painting, will be planted around the courthouse square.

The Dallas High School jazz band will play holiday tunes from 5 to 6 p.m. and hand the entertainment off

to the LaCreole and Dallas High School choirs for caroling from 6 to 6:30 p.m., before and after Santa rolls into town.

Bonnie Dreier, the events and programs coordinator at the visitors center, said this year features partnerships between businesses and organizations to schedule their holiday kickoff events on the same weekend.

In addition to the cash mob, Downtown antiques store Some Things will keep the evening festive with a group of carolers.

What would a Christmas season kickoff be without hot chocolate, cider and cookies? Rest assured there will be plenty of all three at Winterfest. Dreier said Dallas Church provides the hot coco, Dutch Bros the cider, Papa Murphy's the cookie dough and Dallas Retirement Village the baking.

There's one major change to the Winterfest 2017 schedule.

Dallas Cinema will once again play a holiday movie, but not on Friday before the start of Winterfest. The movie began too early for families to arrive after school ends, so the opening Christmas celebration will carry over to Saturday morning.

"It's a Wonderful Life" will show at 11 a.m., and don't forget, the movie is a benefit for Dallas Food Bank.

"It's a free movie," Dreier said. "Just bring a donation

for the Dallas Food Bank."

MONMOUTH

Monmouth and Western Oregon University will celebrate 50 years of lighting the giant sequoia on Western's campus on Friday.

"We're trying to connect with as many alumni, as many community members past and present," said John Wilkins, organizer of the event. "We know it's a big event for our community, and we're looking to get as many folks involved with this as we can to come celebrate and share their experiences with the tree lighting."

The evening kicks off with a light parade at 6. Lighted floats and walking entries make their way from the Monmouth Public Library to campus.

This year, efforts are underway to encourage people to participate in both Monmouth's Friday parade and Independence's annual Parade of Lights on Saturday.

After the parade passes by the Werner University Center, President Rex Fuller will welcome everyone to the annual tree lighting.

The winner of the annual elementary school essay contest will read his or her essay.

"Then we'll light the tree," Wilkins said.

Nowadays, lights are put on the tree using a crane rented by the university, but Marc Powell remembers when the volunteer firefighters strung the lights.

the tree and take up the rope, Powell said.

"That was my job once," he said. "You have to climb a ladder to get to the first branch. At first, the branches are about a foot around. When you first start, you're reaching for branches, and at the top, you're snaking around them. It was a little more difficult at the top."

Powell, unafraid of heights, said he didn't mind taking his turn to climb the 122-foot-tall tree.

"One time I went up there and it was one of the most beautiful, crisp winter days I'd ever seen in my life," Powell said. "I could see for miles and miles. It was just gorgeous up there. You could see five mountains — all the mountains around — I'll never forget that sight."

After the tree lighting on Friday, the Werner University Center will be open to the community with crafts hosted by the Athletics Department, elementary school choirs, and, of course, a chance to sit in Santa's lap and tell him all you want for Christmas.

The annual holiday cookie bake-off — open to the community — and tree decorating contest also is inside.

If you hurry, you may be able to help judge the cookie bake-off.

All trees and ornaments in the tree decorating contest are donated to Toys for Tots, Wilkins said.

See SANTA, Page 10A



EMILY MENTZER/Itemizer-Observer file

Santa Claus will get an escort via Portland & Western for the seventh annual Santa Train at Independence Cinema.



JOLENE GUZMAN/Itemizer-Observer file

Students from Morrison help recreate Santa's village on the lawn of the Polk County Courthouse.