

HolidayFest ushers in the holiday spirit

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By HOLLY SETTER
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PORTLAND -

Portland businesses will be decking their halls and their windows for the annual HolidayFest on the Grand this week.

The three day festival begins Thursday, with a record 25 businesses participating.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," said Patrick Reagan, Portland Main Street manager and DDA director.

"I've been feeling a lot of energy about this. The business owners are really pumped up about it, and I've had a lot of calls about it coming in."

As people wander downtown, they'll be able to peruse the local shops' wares during extended hours, pick up free gifts or take part in hands-on demonstrations. Luminaries will light the way from store to store nightly.

"We've got a lot," Reagan said. "We're bringing back the carriage rides on Friday from 6-9 p.m. downtown. That should be a lot of fun."

There will be no shortage of things to do on foot. For example, from 6-8 p.m. Thursday, people can stop by the Country Cupboard to see a demonstration on how to make vases out of ice.

After hours, the women out and about can exercise their shopping bug and plant some Christmas gift ideas during the Ladies Wish List Reception. The first 150 to sign up for a Wish List item at Distinctive Occasions will receive a free gift.

On Friday, the children of the community can do their best to decorate downtown at Tate's Playhouse. Between 6-8 p.m., the store is hosting a "kid's ornament workshop," where the youths will assemble ornaments for Portland's community Christmas tree.

The tree will be lit on Saturday evening at 6 p.m. at Scout Park.

Decorating downtown isn't limited to the youngsters. Nearly every business participating in the festival is also participating in the window decorating contest.

Reagan said visitors downtown will be able to vote for the best window display. The winners will be announced at 6 p.m. downtown on Saturday.

Though many of the shops downtown are an option for finding that perfect present, the local restaurants are happy to whet guests' appetites as they move from store to store.

The Pizza Shop is offering free Italian hors d'oeuvres throughout the festival. Seasoned home cooks will go head to head at Jerry's Restaurant and Pub Saturday night during the chili cookoff.

In short, Reagan said the three-day festival promises to be a good time for everyone involved.

"There will be a lot of good sales, free gifts and fun for the whole family," Reagan said. "There are a lot of things to do, not just things to look at or buy."

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