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HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL'S FIVE WEEKS OF EVENTS LAUNCH ON THANKSGIVING EVENING *Public Encouraged to "Shine the Light on Hunger"*

(OMAHA, Neb.) Nov. 12, 2013 - The Holiday Lights Festival, produced by Mayor Jean Stothert and the Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation and presented by ConAgra Foods, KMTV Action 3 News and Star 104.5, showcases Downtown Omaha and celebrates the spirit of the holidays by providing a full season of fun, festive, family-friendly activities. Festivalgoers will find an abundance of holiday spirit in Downtown Omaha this winter. The five-week Holiday Lights Festival is packed with exciting activities to offer a little something for everyone each weekend. More than 40 blocks of white lights, painting an incredible picture of Downtown Omaha, will again illuminate this year's event, and more than 300,000 people are expected to enjoy the sight of the lights over their five-week display period.

This year's festival will feature favorites such as the annual CenturyLink Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony, the Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert, Pacific Life Sounds of the Season, the ConAgra Foods Ice Rink, Wells Fargo Family Festival and the New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular.

The community theme will once again be a campaign to "Shine the Light on Hunger," encouraging the entire community to help fight hunger by dropping off non-perishable food and household items at the ice skating rink as well as at collection barrels that will

be placed at other locations throughout the community, including area Baker's stores. Community members can also donate cash online by visiting www.shinethelightonhunger.org.

Last year, ConAgra Foods and the community collected more than 145,000 pounds of food and raised \$305,000 during the campaign, the equivalent of nearly 1.5 million meals donated to Food Bank for the Heartland. The ConAgra Foods Foundation matched donations to Food Bank for the Heartland dollar-for-dollar up to \$100,000. Not only did the campaign reach its goal of 1.1 million meals, the total collected was an increase in meals raised over the previous year. The 2013 goal is 1.2 million meals.

The schedule of Holiday Lights Festival events follows:

**CenturyLink Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony
Thursday, November 28, 6-7 p.m.**

One of Omaha's most anticipated events of the holiday season is the night holiday spirits are boosted with the annual CenturyLink Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony held on Thanksgiving evening, November 28, in the Gene Leahy Mall at 14th and Farnam. The dazzling lights are sure to amaze people of all ages. Patrons will gather to hear a variety of musical performances, including the choral group MasterSingers and the Jingle Brass Bells, beginning at 5:30 p.m. At 6 p.m., Mayor Jean Stothert will lead the crowd in a countdown to turn on the cheer and the 2013 lighting display.

Trees throughout the Gene Leahy Mall and neighboring streets will be lit with hundreds of thousands of white lights. The trees along 16th Street from Howard to Dodge Streets and 10th Street from Douglas Street to Abbott Drive will also be lit. Many downtown businesses and residences will feature lighting and holiday decorations as well. The Gene Leahy Mall lights are sponsored by Coventry Health Care of Nebraska.

Following the ceremony, the lighting display will be turned on each evening from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. through January 5, 2014.

After the ceremony, the public is invited to shop and dine in the Old Market and attend a free holiday concert at the Holland Performing Arts Center.

**Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert
Thursday, November 28, 7 p.m.**

The Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert will be presented at the Holland Performing Arts Center located at 13th and Douglas streets. Beginning at 7 p.m., the free concert will feature special guest vocalist Mary Carrick accompanied by the Nebraska Wind Symphony. TD Ameritrade sponsors the Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert. Mammel Foundation supports the concert.

**Pacific Life Insurance Company Sounds of the Season
Saturdays, November 30-December 28, 7-8 p.m.**

Each Saturday from November 30 through December 28, from 7 to 8 p.m., the Sounds

of the Season will showcase the talent of local choral groups ranging from youth to professional performers, including The Golmanaviches & Giselle, Omaha Academy Choir, and Mater Dei Academy. Performances will take place throughout the Gene Leahy Mall and the Old Market.

**Wells Fargo Family Festival
Sunday, December 8, noon-5 p.m.**

The Wells Fargo Family Festival offers an afternoon of free family fun. Six downtown arts and cultural institutions will provide free admission and hands-on activities for the entire family. Free trolley service provided by Ollie the Trolley will connect all participating locations from noon to 5 p.m. “Shine the Light on Hunger” donation barrels will be located at selected Family Festival venues.

**ConAgra Foods Ice Rink
Friday, December 13-Sunday, January 5**

The ConAgra Foods Ice Rink, located on the ConAgra campus at 10th and Harney streets, will return for a seventh year to entertain families and “Shine the Light on Hunger.” The rink will be open from 1 to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays; 1 p.m. to midnight Fridays and Saturdays; and 1 to 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. The rink will be closed on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.

A \$5 admission fee includes skate rental, although patrons may bring their own skates. The ConAgra Foods Foundation will match all rink income dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 and donate all proceeds to the Food Bank for the Heartland as a component of the Shine the Light on Hunger campaign. Donations of non-perishable food and household goods will also be collected onsite. For details, visit the “Shine the Light on Hunger” website at www.shinethelightonhunger.org.

**New Year’s Eve Fireworks Spectacular
Tuesday, December 31, 7 p.m.**

As a grand finale to the 2013 Holiday Lights Festival, the Fireworks Spectacular will begin at 7 p.m. on New Year’s Eve. Spectators are encouraged to arrive early as the event is expected to draw more than 30,000 people. The show will feature an amazing display of fireworks designed by J&M Displays. The official viewing site is the Gene Leahy Mall located at 14th and Farnam. Each firework burst is choreographed to explode in sequence to a unique musical score featuring lively music from the 1980s. Spectators are encouraged to bring a radio tuned to Star 104.5 to enjoy the musical accompaniment. The fireworks show offers a perfect ending to the fun-filled weeks of holiday activities and events.

Sponsors

The Holiday Lights Festival is produced by Mayor Jean Stothert and the Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation, and presented by ConAgra Foods, KMTV Action 3 News and Star 104.5. For more information, visit or www.holidaylightsfestival.org.