



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **DOWNTOWN OMAHA DAZZLES DURING HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL** *Five-week Series of Public Events Begins Thanksgiving Evening, Supports Shine the Light on Hunger Campaign*

(OMAHA, Neb.) Nov. 10, 2016 - The Holiday Lights Festival, produced by Mayor Jean Stothert and the Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation and presented by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, KMTV 3 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.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBNE) is a first-time presenting sponsor and has committed to that role for three years, senior vice president Pat Bourne said. "Holiday Lights Festival has become a tradition for local families since its beginnings as the Millennium Lights in 2000, and we're proud to invest in the community we call home through this signature winter event," he said.

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. 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 Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony, the Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert, Sounds of the Season, the Conagra Brands 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 and collection barrels placed at other locations throughout the community, including area Baker's stores. Community members can also donate cash online by visiting [www.holidaylightsfestival.org](http://www.holidaylightsfestival.org) and clicking on the "Shine the Light on Hunger" page.

Last year, ConAgra Foods, the predecessor to Conagra Brands, and the community collected more than 144,000 pounds of food and raised over \$447,000 during the campaign. This was the equivalent of more than 1.4 million meals donated to Food Bank for the Heartland, meeting the community-wide campaign goal. The company's Foundation matched proceeds collected at the ice rink dollar-for-dollar up to \$100,000. This year's campaign goal is 1.4 million meals.

The schedule of Holiday Lights Festival events follows:

### **Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony**

**Thursday, Nov. 24, 6-7 p.m.**

One of Omaha's most anticipated events of the holiday season is the night spirits are boosted with the annual Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony held on Thanksgiving evening, Nov. 26, in the Gene Leahy Mall at 14th and Farnam Streets. The dazzling lights are sure to amaze people of all ages. Patrons will gather to hear a performance by Omaha mother-daughter duo Belles & Whistles 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 2016 lighting display.

Trees throughout the Gene Leahy Mall will be lit with thousands of white lights. Inspired by the display, downtown businesses and residences traditionally bring out their own festive lighting and holiday decorations to add to the charm.

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.

Beginning the day after Thanksgiving, the lighting display will be turned on each evening from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. through Jan. 2, 2017.

### **Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert**

**Thursday, Nov. 24, 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,

supported by the Mammel Foundation, will feature special guest vocalist Drew Duncan accompanied by the Nebraska Wind Symphony.

### **Sounds of the Season**

**Saturdays, Nov. 26-Dec. 17, 7-8 p.m.**

Each Saturday from Nov. 26 through Dec. 17, from 7 to 8 p.m., Sounds of the Season will showcase the talent of local choral groups ranging from youth to professional performers. Performances will take place throughout the Gene Leahy Mall and the Old Market, and a schedule is available online at [www.holidaylightsfestival.org](http://www.holidaylightsfestival.org).

### **Wells Fargo Family Festival**

**Sunday, Dec. 4, noon-5 p.m.**

For the 11th year, Wells Fargo will be sponsoring The Wells Fargo Family Festival, which 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 Brands Ice Rink**

**Friday, Dec. 9- Monday, Jan. 2**

The Conagra Brands Ice Rink, at its new location on 10th Street between Dodge St. and Capitol Ave., will return for its 10th 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 Brands Foundation will match all rink income dollar for dollar up to \$100,000 and donate all proceeds to 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 or to make a donation, visit [www.holidaylightsfestival.org](http://www.holidaylightsfestival.org) and click on the "Shine the Light on Hunger" tab.

### **New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular**

**Saturday, Dec. 31, 7 p.m.**

The grand finale to the 2016 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 Streets. Each firework burst is choreographed to explode in sequence to a unique medley of "Rockin' New Year"-themed hits. Spectators are encouraged to tune in 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 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, KMTV 3 and STAR 104.5.

Event sponsors include Conagra Brands and Wells Fargo. Media sponsors include Lamar Outdoor Advertising and RSM US LLP. Shining Star sponsors include AmeriSphere Properties, Douglas County Board of Commissioners, Shamrock Development, The Sherwood Foundation, Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation, Swain Construction and Union Pacific. Radiant Glow sponsors include Anonymous, Baxter Auto Group, Big Red Keno, Broadmoor, C&A Industries, CH2M, Dixon Family Foundation, Gavilon LLC, HDR, The Lozier Foundation, Moglia Family Foundation, Pinnacle Bank, Valmont Industries, Inc. and Webster. Bright Light sponsors include Ag Processing Inc., Baird Holm LLP, Bank of the West, CHI Health, Circo Enterprises, Colliers International, Fraser Stryker, Gallup, Inc., Great Western Bank, Greater Omaha Chamber, Husch Blackwell LLP, Kutak Rock LLP, McGrath North, MECA, Mutual of Omaha, Nebraska Medicine, Noddle Companies, Security National Bank, Tenaska, The Chicago Lumber Company, Wade Trim, Waste Management and WoodmenLife.

For more information, visit [www.holidaylightsfestival.org](http://www.holidaylightsfestival.org).