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HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL SHINES BRIGHT FOR 18TH YEAR
*Celebration Features Six Community Events and Anti-hunger Campaign,
Thousands of Lights in Downtown Omaha Create Festive Atmosphere*

(OMAHA, Neb.) Nov. 9, 2017 - Omaha's Millennium Lights celebration was originally meant to be a singular, spectacular celebration as the calendar turned to the milestone year 2000. But in the 17 years since, the Holiday Lights Festival endured and became an annual holiday season tradition that has expanded to encompass a series of festive events beloved by the community.

"This year's celebration includes all the signature events such as the Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony and New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular, which bookend the Festival," said Roger Humphries, president of the Downtown Omaha Inc. board. "But festivalgoers can also expect new elements like a relocated, brand-new ice rink and a unique musical theme for the New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular."

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 with media support from KMTV 3 News Now and STAR 104.5.

Steve Martin, President and CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, said, "One of the reasons this is such an extraordinary festival is that most of its activities are free to the public, allowing families from across the city to enjoy it. That feature of the Festival was one of the reasons behind our sponsorship. Our brand, to 'Live Fearless' and support others living their best lives, is part of our giving spirit. This festival also emphasizes supporting others in need."

The "Lights" in Holiday Lights Festival are the centerpiece of the Festival and crews began installing the hundreds of thousands of intricately strung white lights over the summer. The Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony serves as the premiere for the display that stretches throughout the trees surrounding the Gene Leahy Mall between Farnam and Douglas Streets.

The lights shine nightly for five weeks to awe the more than 300,000 people expected to visit the site.

The Festival features a community-wide campaign to “Shine the Light on Hunger.” The campaign, supported by Conagra Brands Foundation, encourages community members to drop off non-perishable food and household items at collection barrels placed at Festival events and other Omaha area locations, including Baker’s supermarkets and Wells Fargo branches. Donations can also be made online through the Holiday Lights Festival website (holidaylightsfestival.org). This year’s campaign goal is to raise the equivalent of 1.4 million meals for the greater Omaha community. Last year, more than 78,000 pounds of food and over \$463,000 were collected during the campaign to support the efforts of Food Bank for the Heartland. The Conagra Brands Foundation will once again provide a generous \$100,000 match of funds raised during the campaign, which includes a portion of proceeds from admission fees at the NRG Energy Ice Rink in the new Capitol District.

Holiday Lights Festival Schedule:

[Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony Presented by T-Mobile](#)

Thursday, Nov. 23, 6-7 p.m.

The Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony takes place Thanksgiving evening in the Gene Leahy Mall at 14th and Farnam Streets. The Omaha Children’s Choir takes the stage at 5:40 p.m. At 6 p.m., Mayor Jean Stothert leads the crowd in a countdown to reveal the 2017 lighting display.

Downtown businesses and residences traditionally feature festive lighting and holiday decorations to add to the charm. Many shops and restaurants in the Old Market are open before and after the ceremony; visit the Holiday Lights Festival’s website for a complete list.

The lighting display is illuminated nightly from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. from Friday, Nov. 24 through Monday, Jan. 1, 2018.

[Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert Presented by Lincoln Financial Group](#)

Thursday, Nov. 23, 7 p.m.

The Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert is performed in the Holland Performing Arts Center located at 13th and Douglas Streets. The free concert, supported by the Mammel Family Foundation, features a special guest vocalist, “Omaha’s most versatile singer” Camille Metoyer Moten, accompanied by the Nebraska Wind Symphony.

[NRG Energy Ice Rink in The Capitol District](#)

Tuesday, Nov. 21 – Wednesday, Feb. 14

The NRG Energy Ice Rink, at its new location in The Capitol District on 10th Street and Capitol Avenue, returns to entertain families and “Shine the Light on Hunger.” The rink will open Nov. 21 through Feb. 14, 2018 from 6 to 10 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 6 p.m. to midnight Fridays, 1 p.m. to midnight Saturdays and 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays. Special holiday hours for Christmas Eve are 1 to 5 p.m., closed Christmas Day and 1 to 8 p.m. on New Year’s Eve. Hours are extended from Dec. 22 – Jan. 8 and Jan. 15, 2018. Visit holidaylightsfestival.org for a complete schedule.

An \$8 admission fee (plus tax) includes skate rental, although patrons may bring their own skates. As part of the Shine the Light on Hunger campaign, a portion of the admission fee will

be matched by a \$100,000 gift from the Conagra Brands Foundation to support Food Bank for the Heartland.

Sounds of the Season

Saturdays, Nov. 25 - Dec. 23, 7-8 p.m.

Sounds of the Season showcases local choral groups ranging from school-based youth choirs to seasoned professionals. Performances take place in the Gene Leahy Mall at 11th and Farnam Streets and in the Old Market at 11th and Howard Streets. A schedule of performances is available online at holidaylightsfestival.org.

Wells Fargo Family Festival

Sunday, Dec. 3, noon-5 p.m.

For the 12th year, Wells Fargo is sponsoring the Family Festival, an afternoon of free family fun. Six downtown arts and cultural institutions offer free admission and hands-on activities for the entire family from simple crafts and cookie decorating to stagecoach rides and a visit with Santa. Visitors of all ages can also enjoy refreshments and family-friendly entertainment and collect souvenirs at most of the sites. Free trolley service provided by Ollie the Trolley connects all participating locations from noon to 5 p.m.

New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular Presented by T-Mobile

Sunday, Dec. 31, 7 p.m.

The last signature event of the 2017 Holiday Lights Festival is expected to draw more than 30,000 people, so spectators are encouraged to arrive early to the official viewing site at the Gene Leahy Mall located at 14th and Farnam Streets. The show features a professionally choreographed display of fireworks designed by J&M Displays to hit songs from *Girls Who Rock* over the decades. STAR 104.5 will broadcast the live musical accompaniment onsite, and viewers elsewhere can tune in as they watch the show that will be visible for miles.

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 with media sponsors KMTV 3 News Now and STAR 104.5.

Event sponsors include Conagra Brands, Lincoln Financial Group, T-Mobile and Wells Fargo. *Shining Star sponsors* include Douglas County Board of Commissioners, Lamar Outdoor Advertising, The Sherwood Foundation, Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation and Union Pacific. *Radiant Glow sponsors* include Anonymous, Big Red Keno, Broadmoor, C&A Industries, CH2M, Dixon Family Foundation, Gaviion LLC, HDR, The Lozier Foundation, Mammel Family 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, Baxter Auto Group, CHI Health, Circo Enterprises, Colliers International, Gallup, Inc., Greater Omaha Chamber, Husch Blackwell LLP, Kutak Rock LLP, Mutual of Omaha, Noddle Companies, Tenaska, Waste Management and WoodmenLife.

For more information, visit www.holidaylightsfestival.org.