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**HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL SHINES BRIGHT FOR 19TH YEAR**  
*Celebration Features Series of Six Community Events In and Around Downtown Omaha*

(OMAHA, Neb.) Nov. 14, 2018 - Omaha's Millennium Lights celebration was originally meant to be a singular, spectacular celebration as the calendar turned to the milestone year 2000. But the celebration endured as the Holiday Lights Festival, an annual holiday season tradition that has expanded to encompass a series of festive events beloved by the community.

"All the signature events are returning, like the Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony and New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular, which respectively start and close the Festival," said Roger Humphries, president of the Downtown Omaha Inc. board. "But festivalgoers can always look forward to new elements or even surprises each year. For 2018 we've added a new attraction for the Family Festival, the musical accompaniment for the New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular is a unique retro theme, and even the lights will be a little different this year with a display of blue lights honoring presenting sponsor Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska's 12 Days of Fearless campaign."

Steven H. Grandfield, President and CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, said that the Holiday Lights Festival's spirit of inclusion and accessibility for all is what compelled his company to become the presenting sponsor of this memorable community event. Grandfield added that because most of the events are free, families from across the city are able to come together and experience them this holiday season.

"Our brand empowers our members to 'Live Fearless' and supports Nebraskans to live their best lives. This holiday season, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is proud to also 'Give Fearless' in a way that touches families throughout the city," Grandfield explained. "This tradition not only provides joy and a spirit of festivity to the community we serve, but also emphasizes supporting those in need – something at the heart of what we do."

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will be presenting special "12 Days of Fearless" activities throughout the Festival. Plans include professional souvenir photographs for Lighting Ceremony visitors, a fireworks-enhancing glasses giveaway, hot cocoa at Festival events, and even social media contests with VIP viewing experiences for the lighting ceremony and fireworks offered as prizes. For more information on 12 Days of Fearless, visit the Holiday Lights Festival Facebook page.

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 KETV Channel 7 and STAR 104.5.

Crews began installing hundreds of thousands of intricately strung white lights—the “Lights” in Holiday Lights Festival are the heart of the Festival—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 and additional downtown streets. The display also covers North and South Omaha along 24th Street. The lights shine nightly for six weeks to awe visitors.

The Festival also features a communitywide campaign to “Shine the Light on Hunger.” The campaign, supported by Conagra Brands Foundation, encourages community members to drop off nonperishable food and household items at collection barrels placed at Festival events and other Omaha area locations, including Baker’s supermarkets. Donations can also be made online through the Holiday Lights Festival website ([holidaylightsfestival.org](http://holidaylightsfestival.org)). This year’s campaign goal is to raise the equivalent of 1.5 million meals for the greater Omaha community. Last year, more than 56,000 pounds of food and over \$470,000 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 Capitol District Ice Rink.

#### **Holiday Lights Festival Schedule:**

##### **Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony**

**Thursday, Nov. 22, 6-7 p.m.**

The Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony takes place Thanksgiving evening in the Gene Leahy Mall at 14th and Farnam Streets. Musical Kids will take the stage at 5:40 p.m. At 6 p.m., Mayor Jean Stothert will lead the crowd in a countdown to reveal the 2018 lighting display.

Downtown businesses and residences traditionally feature festive lighting and holiday decorations to add to the charm. Some 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 Thursday, Nov. 22, 2018, through Sunday, Jan. 6, 2019.

##### **Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert Presented by Lincoln Financial Group**

**Thursday, Nov. 22, 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, Mary Carrick, accompanied by the Nebraska Wind Symphony.

##### **The Capitol District Ice Rink Presented by Energy Center Omaha**

**Friday, Dec. 7 – Monday, Jan. 21**

The Capitol District Ice Rink on 10th Street and Capitol Avenue returns to entertain families and “Shine the Light on Hunger.” The rink will be open seven days a week from Dec. 7, 2018,

through Jan. 21, 2019, with special holiday hours on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The rink is closed Christmas Day. Visit [holidaylightsfestival.org](http://holidaylightsfestival.org) for a complete schedule.

A \$10 admission fee 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. 24 - Dec. 22, 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](http://holidaylightsfestival.org).

### **KETV Family Festival**

**Sunday, Dec. 2, noon-5 p.m.**

The Family Festival features 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 to horse rides to a visit with Santa. Visitors of all ages can also enjoy refreshments and family-friendly entertainment. Free trolley service provided by Ollie the Trolley connects all participating locations from noon to 5 p.m.

### **New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular Sponsored by Wells Fargo**

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

The last signature event of the 2018 Holiday Lights Festival is the New Year's Eve Fireworks Spectacular. The official viewing site is 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 a musical "Iconic '60s"-themed accompaniment. 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 KETV Channel 7 and STAR 104.5.

Event sponsors include Conagra Brands and Lincoln Financial Group.

Shining Star sponsors include Douglas County Board of Commissioners; Lamar Outdoor Advertising; The Sherwood Foundation; Union Pacific; and Wells Fargo.

Radiant Glow sponsors include Ag Processing Inc.; Anonymous; Applied Underwriters, Inc.; Big Red Keno; Broadmoor; C&A Industries, Inc.; Gavilon; HDR; Jacobs; The Lozier Foundation; Mammel Family Foundation; Moglia Family Foundation; Omaha Public Power District; Pinnacle Bank; Valmont Industries, Inc.; Webster; and WoodmenLife.

Bright Light sponsors include Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture; Baird Holm LLP; Bank of the West; CHI Healthcare; Circo Enterprises; Clarity Development Companies; Colliers International; Gallup, Inc.; Great Western Bank; Greater Omaha Chamber; GreenSlate Development; Husch Blackwell, LLP; Kutak Rock LLP; MECA; Noddle Companies; NuStyle Development Corp; Physicians Mutual; Security National Bank; Tenaska; Wade Trim; and Warren Distribution.

**About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, Inc., is part of a mutual health insurance holding company structure and has been serving Nebraskans for nearly 80 years. BCBSNE is committed to providing stability and security to Nebraska families and is leading the way in supporting patient-focused care. We're the state's largest health insurance company, and the only one headquartered in Nebraska. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

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