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**DOWNTOWN OMAHA THANKSGIVING LIGHTING CEREMONY
LAUNCHES 2018 HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL**
North Omaha, South Omaha Historic Districts Illuminate on December 1

(OMAHA, Neb.) Nov. 14, 2018 - One of the community's most anticipated events of the holiday season, the annual Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony, will take place this year on Thursday, Nov. 22, in the Gene Leahy Mall at 14th and Farnam Streets. The awe-inspiring illumination of thousands of white lights is expected to draw thousands of people to downtown Omaha.

Visitors will be treated to a special performance by Musical Kids beginning at 5:40 p.m. At 6 p.m., Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert will lead the crowd in a countdown to the activation of the 2018 lighting display. Trees throughout the Gene Leahy Mall and neighboring streets will be illuminated. Inspired by the display, downtown businesses and residences traditionally bring out their own holiday lighting and decorations to add to the festive atmosphere. Those needing or requesting special accommodations are welcome to view the lighting from the fourth floor of the W. Dale Clark Library at 215 S. 15th St. just west of the Gene Leahy Mall. The lighting display will be lit each evening from 5 p.m. until 1 a.m. through Jan. 6, 2019.

12 Days of Fearless

Holiday Lights Festival presenting sponsor Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will host special "12 Days of Fearless" activities throughout the Festival including a Thanksgiving social media contest with a VIP lighting ceremony viewing experience as the winning prize. After the Lighting Ceremony, visitors can have a souvenir photo taken by a professional photographer near the slides on the east side of Gene Leahy Mall, courtesy of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, and retrieve their photo online.

Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert presented by Lincoln Financial Group

Following the Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony, the Making Spirits Bright Holiday Concert, presented by Lincoln Financial Group and supported by the Mammel Family Foundation, will take place at the Holland Performing Arts Center located at 13th and Douglas Streets just north of the Gene Leahy Mall. Beginning at 7 p.m., the free concert will feature special guest vocalist Mary Carrick accompanied by the Nebraska Wind Symphony and directed by Keith Davis.

Old Market Shopping and Dining

Some of the Old Market's finest shops, restaurants and pubs will be open for business after the Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony. Magical Journeys, a horse-drawn carriage service, will also be in operation. Old Market merchants and restaurants open Thanksgiving evening are listed on the Festival's website (holidaylightsfestival.org).

North and South Omaha Holiday Lights

The Holiday Lights expand to North Omaha and South Omaha each year, thanks to the generosity of The Sherwood Foundation and The Lozier Foundation. Lights will shine along South Omaha's historic 24th Street between L and Q Streets and in North Omaha along a six-block area around 24th and Lake Streets. These trees will be illuminated each evening beginning the first weekend in December. The North Omaha lighting ceremony will take place Saturday, Dec. 1, at 4:30 p.m. in Dreamland Park on 24th and Lizzie Robinson Dr. during the eighth annual Christmas in the Village. The South Omaha lighting ceremony will also take place on Dec. 1, at 5:30 p.m. near 24th Street between N and O Streets.

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.

For more information, visit holidaylightsfestival.org.