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HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL SHINES BRIGHTER THAN EVER IN 2022

The RiverFront Brings Seasonal Spirit Back to Gene Leahy Mall in Tandem with a Season of Free Holiday Events

(OMAHA, Neb.) November 17, 2022 – The Holiday Lights Festival, produced by Mayor Jean Stothert and Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation, celebrates its 23rd season this year. The Festival features a season of free holiday events and festive lighting displays, from November 24th to January 2nd. And there’s cause for extra celebration this year because in conjunction with the Holiday Lights Festival, The Gene Leahy Mall is once again decked out with countless sparkling lights and seasonal decorations, thanks to The RiverFront.

“This year’s Festival is going to be incredible,” said Richard Callahan, Executive Director of Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation. “From the Making Spirits Bright Concert to the KETV Family Festival to the New Year’s Eve Fireworks Spectacular, we’ve got an entire season of amazing holiday events planned for the whole Omaha community. And, we are so grateful to The RiverFront for their partnership to ensure the newly renovated Gene Leahy Mall is as festive as possible!”

Thanks to The RiverFront, lights will return to Gene Leahy Mall for the first time since 2018. Along with traditional white tree lights and some sizable ornaments, this year the park will also feature a festive multimedia show that will debut during the official Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony on November 24th. This dazzling production will incorporate color-changing “up-lights,” video projections onto the Gene Leahy Mall Performance Pavilion and Burlington Building, thematic video on the 10th Street Bridge LED wall and holiday music sounding throughout the park. The multimedia show, which is about seven minutes long, can be seen every Friday and Saturday throughout the holiday season, running every hour. Along with these lighting displays, The RiverFront is also hosting a number of fun and free events – with a full online calendar available at

TheRiverFrontOmaha.com.

"The RiverFront team has been busy preparing for the holidays, not only by wrapping the trees as seen in years past, but by adding seasonal decorations throughout park and planning numerous family friendly activities in the weeks ahead," said Roger Dixon, MECA President & CEO. "Since reopening this summer, Gene Leahy Mall has become a favorite destination for our community. We are happy to help carry on this wintertime tradition in Omaha."

The Holiday Lights Festival runs from November 24th to January 2nd. In addition to the displays in the Gene Leahy Mall, lights will illuminate the Old Market from 10th to 13th Street and Farnam to Jackson Street; North Omaha along 24th Street from Burdette to Ohio Street; and South Omaha along 24th Street from L to Q Street. The Festival also features an entire season of free holiday events, such as:

The Thanksgiving Lighting Ceremony will take place on Thursday, November 24th in the Gene Leahy Mall at The RiverFront. The Lighting Ceremony, led by Terri McCormick of STAR 104.5 The Christmas Station, serves as the official “kick-off” for the Festival. A short performance by Musical Kids will precede the program, and Mayor Jean Stothert will lead the entire Omaha community in a countdown to the start of the holiday season!

The Making Spirits Bright Concert will take place immediately following the lighting ceremony on November 24th at 7pm at the Holland Performing Arts Center. This concert is FREE to the public and family-friendly – there are no tickets and seating is available on a first-come first-served basis. The Making Spirits Bright Concert, with special emcee Jonah Gilmore from KETV Channel 7, will feature a selection of holiday music performed by the Nebraska Wind Symphony and special guest vocalist Ryan Daly.

The KETV Family Festival, presented by Bank of America, will take place on Sunday, December 4th from 11am to 4pm. Downtown Omaha’s favorite attractions will offer free admission as well as holiday activities and entertainment. There will also be a free trolley service transporting festivalgoers between venues!

The New Year’s Eve Fireworks Spectacular on December 31st is the perfect way to bid farewell to 2022 and ring in 2023! Like the past few years, the show will take place near CHI Health Center Omaha at 10th and Cass Streets. Free parking will be available in CHI Health Center Omaha parking lots so spectators can enjoy the fireworks show from the comfort of their own vehicles.

Additionally, for the 16th year the Shine the Light on Hunger campaign will take place in conjunction with the Holiday Lights Festival. The campaign, led by the Conagra Brands Foundation, is a rallying call to leaders, businesses and families throughout the local community to support essential front-line hunger relief efforts and provide meals for those in need. All proceeds benefit Food Bank for the Heartland and the work they do to support and empower the community.

From November 17th through December 31st, community members are encouraged to drop off nonperishable food at collection barrels placed at Omaha-area locations, including Baker’s Supermarkets and local arts and cultural organizations. Monetary donations can be made online by visiting [FoodBankHeartland.org](https://www.FoodBankHeartland.org). To learn about additional ways to support the campaign, visit www.HolidayLightsFestival.org.

To encourage the public’s participation in the campaign, every gift made before December 31 will be matched up to \$320,000. This includes a generous match of \$100,000 from the Conagra Brands Foundation, \$100,000 from the Scouler Foundation, \$100,000 from Farm Credit Services of America, and \$20,000 from Baker’s Supermarkets’ Zero Hunger Zero Waste commitment.

The Holiday Lights Festival would not be possible without the generosity of various corporate, foundation, and individual sponsors:

Producing Sponsors are Mayor Jean Stothert and the Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation.

Media Sponsors are KETV Channel 7 and STAR 104.5 The Christmas Station.

Event Sponsors are Conagra Brands and The RiverFront.

Shining Star Sponsors include The Sherwood Foundation; Douglas County Board of Commissioners; Anonymous; The Lozier Foundation; City of Omaha; Union Pacific; Peter Kiewit Foundation; and Bank of America.

Radiant Glow Sponsors include Applied Underwriters, Inc.; Baxter; Broadmoor; CHI Health; Fiserv; Five Points Bank; Gavilon; Kiewit Companies Foundation; Lincoln Financial Group; Mammel Foundation; Mutual of Omaha; Noddle Companies; Omaha Public Power District; Pinnacle Bank; Tenaska; Valmont Industries, Inc.; and WoodmenLife.

Bright Light Sponsors include Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture; Annette and Paul Smith; Baird Holm LLP; Circo Enterprises; Kutak Rock LLP; Omaha Downtown Improvement District; Physicians Mutual; Scottish Rite Valley of Omaha; Security National Bank; and Wade Trim.

About Holiday Lights Festival

In 1999, a coalition of city officials, corporations, and foundations chose to present a legacy gift of holiday lights to the City of Omaha as the Millennium Lights celebration. The Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation was established the following year, and the Millennium Lights officially transformed to the Holiday Lights Festival. Since then, the Festival has become an annual celebration of Omaha's holiday spirit, complete with free, family-friendly events scheduled throughout the entire holiday season. In 2007, the Holiday Lights Festival added the Shine the Light on Hunger campaign, sponsored by Conagra Brands Foundation and in partnership with Food Bank for the Heartland. For more information on the 2022 Holiday Lights Festival, visit www.HolidayLightsFestival.org and follow the Festival on both Facebook and Instagram.

About Downtown Omaha Inc. Foundation

For more than 50 years, Downtown Omaha Inc. has followed our mission to inform, promote and unite the Downtown community. Formed as a business group to discuss parking, retail, promotion, and development issues, the group was incorporated in 1968 and has become a fierce promoter of the common good in Downtown Omaha and its surrounding area. DOI helps to connect and build communities by serving downtown residents and putting on programs that attract people who are visiting Omaha and people from local neighborhoods. Through these programs, everyone is able to enjoy and experience all that downtown Omaha has to offer.

About The RiverFront

The RiverFront is a transformation of 72-acres in downtown Omaha, renovating and interconnecting three previously existing city parks: Gene Leahy Mall, Heartland of America Park and Lewis & Clark Landing. The project spans from the Missouri River eastward into the city's urban core, extending to 13th Street. The Metropolitan Entertainment & Convention Authority (MECA) is managing park construction, activation and maintenance. The RiverFront, which is a highly programmed green space, rich with native plantings and permanent amenities, is reopening in phases starting with Gene Leahy Mall on July 1, 2022. Lewis & Clark Landing and Heartland of America Park will be completed in 2023.