

Holiday season comes to light with Barton's Festival of Trees

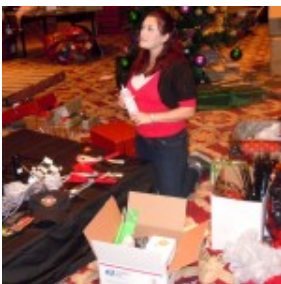
By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It was not the traditional Santa's workshop, but a definite holiday buzz was coming from MontBleu's convention center.

By 10am the Mardis Gras tree was well assembled, as was the Party in a Box tree. Food Network star Guy Fieri sent items to Tahoe for a tree with his name on it. Hollywood is showing up with an Eat, Pray, Love tree.

All of these trees and more are part of the second annual Festival of Tree and Lights. The three-day event – Dec. 3-5 – is all about giving local youths some holiday fun, families an indoor activity, and the Barton Community Clinic a unique vehicle to raise cash.

Each designer has a 10-foot by 10-foot space to work in. Decorating the winter wonderland was supposed to be done as the clock struck midnight Wednesday. Although the public doesn't get to look at the splendor until Dec. 3, Barton employees will be treated to a special event tonight and a VIP gathering was last night.



Jessica

DeFranco is a bit nervous Guy Fieri may attend the event because she is decorating the tree with his name.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

"Most of the growth is in mini trees and table tops," Kindle Craig, executive director of the Barton Foundation, told *Lake Tahoe News* as she walked among the clutter Tuesday.

Although she would like to be able to have more large trees, the space doesn't allow for it. But MontBleu is not charging for use of the space.

"I'd really like the convention center (across the street) to open so it could be bigger," Kindle said.

New this year is two trips on the Polar Express on Sunday because of the sell-out last year. A Teddy Bear Hospital is also new. A Champagne brunch fashion show had been planned, but has since been crossed off the event schedule.

The inaugural event raised almost \$28,000 for the clinic. With not having the start-up costs associated with last year, organizers are hoping to raise even more money this year. It is also hoped more people will participate. Last year 2,500 people were part of the festival.

More than a dozen trees are elaborately decorated – mostly with a theme, such as the Powder tree. Each tree has a sponsor (Barton's orthopedics are behind this one), and each has a decorator. Sponsors pay \$1,200 per tree. The designer is

reimbursed up to \$600; the other \$600 goes to the clinic.

Gifts under the tree – like the goggles, skis and chairlift are donated. In this case, the chair came from Sierra-at-Tahoe.

Then, the tree and everything associated with it is auctioned off to the highest bidder. In 2009, the most expensive tree went for \$3,000 even though it had a value of about \$5,000.

That money, too, went right to the community clinic coffers.

The clinic plans an \$800,000 renovation that will begin next year. It is at capacity with 11 exam rooms, so more will be added, along with a larger waiting area. The clinic saw nearly 1,600 patients in October.

Event details:

Location: MontBleu casino in Stateline

Dec. 3:

9am-4pm Public Viewing of Designer Trees: Tickets are available for purchase only at the door; \$5 for adults, \$3 for senior citizens (55+), \$3 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free.

5-9pm Family Night: Families are welcome to attend special late night festival hours, free cocoa and cookies. Enjoy a holiday light show provided by Horizon casino. Admission is \$25 per family (up to 5 people), which includes one Santa photo. Additional Santa photos can be purchased for \$5 each.

Dec. 4:

9am Teddy Bear Breakfast: Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free, \$200 reserved table (10 Guests). One Santa photo per family is included. Additional photos can be purchased for \$5 each.

Enjoy a holiday buffet in the convention center surrounded by all the trees and holiday lights. Every child is encouraged to bring a doll or teddy bear that will be whisked away and returned to their table adorned with holiday flair.

11am-2pm Teddy Bear Hospital/Gingerbread Junction/Public Viewing of Designer Trees: Children age 12 and under are invited to visit the Teddy Bear Hospital – an interactive place where they learn about their health and hospitals in a safe, “no pokes” environment from Barton Health’s physicians, nurses and staff. Each child will receive a free teddy bear as they are “admitted” to the hospital.

The Gingerbread Junction will have holiday coloring pages and holiday craft projects for kids.

Tickets are available for purchase only at the door. Ticket Price: \$5 for adults, \$3 for senior citizens (55+), \$3 for children (ages 3-12), children 2 and under are free.

6pm Gala: Black-tie optional. Complete with a 10-piece band, five-course meal catered by MontBleu, silent and live auctions, and more; \$150 per person, \$1,650 Patron Table (10 Guests with sponsorship benefits), \$2,000 Benefactor Table (10 Guests with sponsorship benefits).

Dec. 5:

3-5pm and 6-8pm Polar Express: Festivalgoers will ride on the Polar Express Tahoe style. Attendees will dress up in their best pajamas and grab a seat on one of our “trains” (really, they’re school buses). Carols will be sung as they make their way to the first stop to the Red Hut. From there the “trains” will continue on to the MontBleu for a reading of the Polar Express and the songs of the Belles of Christmas choir.

All days:

- The Festival will feature nonstop entertainment on the

festival stage with local dance troupes, singing groups and magic shows.

- Santa Claus will be on hand. Santa photos are \$5 each.
- Silent auction of mini-trees, wreaths and décor.
- Raffle tickets are \$5 each.
- Wish Tree – Make someone's holiday wish come true. Visit the very special "Wish Tree" and you can do just that – determine how much you would like to give, pull off an existing wish or make your own. Minimum gift is \$5.
- Mrs. Claus' Gift Shop – The Barton Auxiliary creates a holiday store. Shop here for ornaments, décor, See's candies and the world-famous cheese balls.
- People's Choice Award – Vote for your favorite Designer Tree by placing your ticket in the bin located next to each Designer Tree.
- Contact: For information or to purchase tickets online or call (530) 543.5909.

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