



Township of Belleville
New Jersey

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Making Spirits Bright: 3,500 Residents Enjoy Belleville's Annual Christmas Tree Lighting and Holiday Extravaganza

BELLEVILLE, NJ – December 20, 2024 – A rush of happiness filled the chilly air Saturday, Dec. 14, as Santa Claus and Mayor Michael Melham pushed the official holiday plunger, illuminating the 75-foot-tall tree decorated with 2,800 lights on the Belleville High School lawn.

A gleeful glow was cast across the lawn and throughout the town as an estimated 3,500 people turned out for the annual Christmas Tree Lighting and Holiday Extravaganza, courtesy of the Mayor, Township Council and Board of Education.

Children posed for photos with Santa, couples shared sips of hot chocolate and families brushed Dora the Horse, D.J. the Donkey and other farm animals in specially arranged petting zoo as Belleville rolled out its biggest and brightest holiday celebration.

There were horse-drawn carriage rides down Passaic Avenue, photos with Santa and Mrs. Claus inside their tent and carolers dressed in Victorian-era costumes spreading holiday cheer all around.

The work to transform Belleville into a winter wonderland, however, started in the weeks before the first trackless train ride chug-chug-chugged along Passaic Avenue.

Behind the scenes, Melham and Township Council and the Board of Education took the reins as plans were being formed. And because it takes a village to throw a town-wide celebration, members of the recreation, fire and police departments also played pivotal roles behind the scenes.

There were unsung heroes throughout the town.

People like Vinnie Sousa, the DPW's assistant road supervisor, were inspired by the thoughts of all the joy their hard work would bring to the Belleville children.

"That's what keeps me going every year," Sousa said. "When you come here and you see the families and the kids running around, writing letters to Santa and seeing Santa and Mrs. Claus – it's just this time of year is very joyful. That's what keeps me going."

Sousa and many other members of the DPW under the leadership of Superintendent Robert Welter were working diligently on Friday, putting the finishing touches on the Holiday

Extravaganza. They assembled the hay bales into the Candy Cane Children's Maze and put up the temporary fencing around Mayor Melham's fire pit, where dozens of children sat and wrote personal letters to Santa Claus, with holiday gift guides for the big guy.

Decorating the Christmas tree took about a week, wrapping all those lights.

The members of the DPW were so devoted to creating Christmas cheer that they also decorated Town Hall with green and red uplighting and other decorations, and hung wreaths and other decorations along Washington Avenue.

"This is the season that brings Belleville even closer together as a community," Melham said. "You can feel a real sense of warmth in the air that lasts right through our annual Three Kings Day celebration in January."

The biggest addition to Saturday's Holiday Extravaganza were the holiday shoppes.

Introduced by the Board of Education, the shoppes offered items for that hard-to-shop-for loved one, ranging from homemade soaps to scented candles to personalized coffee mugs. Other stocking stuffers included gourmet dog treats and ornate holiday lamps.

"The shoppes brought a sort of old-time charm to the Holiday Extravaganza, offering a wide array of one-of-a-kind, hand-crafted gifts," said Gabrielle Bennett-Meany, the vice president of the Board of Education. "It was just another way to make the holidays memorable in Belleville."

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