

Music, Santa photo ops to highlight Syracuse's Christmas tree lighting festivities

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John Mariani / The Post-Standard
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Syracuse, NY – Santa and Mrs. Claus not only will arrive by fire truck to Syracuse's Christmas tree lighting ceremony this year, but will stay after the city's **Norway spruce** is illuminated to pose for pictures with children.

The Santa and Missus photo op is a new wrinkle for "Home for the Holidays," the city's annual Christmas season kickoff that begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday at Clinton Square.

The National Weather Service is predicting mainly clear skies, light winds from the southwest and a temperature around 50 degrees for downtown during the event.

Joey Nigro-Nilsen and John Nilsen, the Syracuse chapter of the Gospel Music Workshop of America and the Spirit of Syracuse will perform classic holiday favorites.

Then will come the Bank of America tree-lighting ceremony.

Michaela Reitzel, a fourth-grader at J.T. Roberts School, Joe Davis, a Porter School fifth-grader, Adis Ramirez, a seventh-grader at Grant Middle School, and Matt Sardino, an eighth-grader at Roberts, will pull the candy-cane switch that turns on Clinton Square's Christmas lights. They won a contest that invited students to write letters to Mayor Stephanie Miner describing their holiday traditions.

The Clauses will be available for photos on the bandwagon after the tree-lighting until 8:30 p.m., officials said. Visitors must bring their own cameras and shoot their own pictures.

Visitors also can take pictures with Miner at an open house from 7:15 to 8:15 p.m. Friday at City Hall, 333 E. Washington St. Police Chief Frank Fowler and Fire Chief Mark McLees also will be there to greet families.

The events and photos are free, but city officials asked that visitors bring non-perishable food items to donate to the Food Bank of Central New York. Collection bins will be located at the corners of Clinton Square, inside the Clinton Square Ice Rink and in the lobby of City Hall.

Other activities taking place Friday in downtown Syracuse include:

- Free ice skating, weather permitting, from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. at the Clinton Square rink.
- A free showing of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" starring Jim Carrey at 8 p.m. at the newly reopened Landmark Theatre, 362 S. Salina St. Tickets are available at Burdick Audi at Driver's Village, Y94FM's studios and on **Y94's website**; some tickets also will be available that day at the Landmark box office.
- The Onondaga Historical Association will be open 4 to 8 p.m. Light refreshments will be served and holiday films

will be shown. The association also will unveil its new street-level holiday window displays at 5 p.m.. Discounts of 10 percent will be offered that night only on everything in the museum store. The association is at 321 Montgomery St.

- Performances by the Chittenango High School Choir and Spirit of Syracuse prior to the tree lighting at the Landmark Theatre lobby. The performances begin at 5 p.m. The Downtown Committee will play host.
- The Hanover Square Association's annual Yule Log Lighting, 7 p.m. at Hanover Square, featuring the Chittenango High School Choir and the Syracuse Brigadiers Alumni Drum & Bugle Corps.
- The Art Mart, selling original crafts and fine art, will be open until 9 p.m. at City Hall Commons.
- A reception at the Erie Canal Museum from 5 to 9 p.m. at the museum, 318 Erie Blvd. E. Also opening that day through Jan. 8 is the museum's 26th annual Gingerbread Gallery, which this year features 35 replicas of local buildings and landmarks elaborately crafted from edible items by amateurs and professionals. Admission to the museum and reception is free; Gingerbread Gallery admission is \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors and \$2 for children.

Parking will be free at metered spaces around downtown.

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