

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS

The secret ingredient

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Every great Festival of Trees recipe has three ingredients: creativity, generosity and trust. The early festival had all three in abundance — a community-wide bake of sorts, where art and enterprise mixed until joy rose high enough to fill the RiverCenter, then spilled into the Adler Theatre and even The Mark.

In the late 1980s, Karen Getz stirred in something new — music. She helped launch Holiday Pops, a partnership between the Quad City Symphony Orchestra and John Deere. Together, they created a shared stage for hundreds of local musicians — from schools, churches and community choirs — blending tradition with performance in a way that defined the season. Holiday Pops didn't just entertain; it showed what was possible when collaboration became culture. It was the perfect harmony — the sparkle of holiday décor meeting the sound of hundreds of local voices.

By 2003, the event had matured into a full-course community experience — festival, parade, concert and commerce. Downtown Davenport was alive with movement. The same energy that built trees in the RiverCenter now built pride in the region.

The evolution that followed was natural. The symphony — guided by an unshakable belief that music must meet people where they are — moved its celebration outdoors. Riverfront Pops was born, extending the same spirit of togetherness from Christmas lights to starlit lawns. Whether performing a popular show under the stars or a beloved film score inside the Adler, the QCSO has always been about belonging — about making music that draws people closer to their city and to each other.

That ethos — partnership as performance — is alive and well today under Brian Baxter's leadership. The symphony continues to be a culture champion for collaboration, proving that great partnerships, like great orchestras, rely on trust, timing and shared purpose.

The festival's "kitchen" has always been crowded in the best way — volunteers, civic leaders, artists and sponsors elbow-to-elbow, creating something greater than any one ingredient. It's how a fundraiser became a regional identity — and eventually, a Cultural Trust.



That same recipe lives on at The Cultural Trust. They didn't invent collaboration; they just formalized it — measuring, funding and scaling what has always worked: people creating together in harmony.

When you trace it back, the through-line is clear.

John Deere invested early in Holiday Pops. Decades later, their continued partnership, alongside Legacy Partners like the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, Figge Art Museum, Quad City Botanical Center, Common Chord, Putnam Museum and Quad City Arts, keeps the creative capital of the Midwest thriving.

Partnership was — and still is — the secret ingredient.

It's what keeps the recipe from falling flat. It's what binds the creative, the practical and the philanthropic into something that always rises.

Because culture matters here — and it always will.

Coming Monday: The birth of The Cultural Trust

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