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Wednesday, November 26, 2025

Ludington Daily News



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Aglow on the Avenue to usher in holiday season Nov. 29

LUDINGTON — Downtown Ludington will celebrate the start of the Christmas season with the annual Aglow on the Avenue parade on Saturday, Nov. 29, an evening tradition that draws families downtown for lights, music and the arrival of Santa.

The parade begins at 6 p.m., traveling east along Ludington Avenue between Gaylord Avenue and Harrison Street. The familiar route is expected to be packed with families, many of whom will already be downtown for Small Business Saturday shopping and holiday activities.

Last year's parade brought crowds lining the avenue to watch lighted floats, community groups and marching performers make their way through downtown. Children gathered

candy tossed from passing entries and chased bubbles drifting across the parade route. The Ludington Band added to the festive energy with holiday favorites, and cheers rose as Santa appeared at the end of the lineup, waving to excited onlookers.

Following the parade, the community traditionally gathers at Legacy Plaza for the Downtown Ludington tree lighting — a highlight of the evening that blends music, lights and family photo moments. Last year, choir members led carols as the tree illuminated the plaza and children lined up for a visit with Santa.

This year's Aglow on the Avenue is expected to bring the same holiday spirit as families welcome the season together. For more information, call 231-845-0324.



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Holiday concerts, performances fill calendars in Mason, Manistee counties

BY LOIS TOMASZEWSKI
FOR THE DAILY NEWS

The holiday season across Mason and Manistee counties will be filled with music, theater, parades and community traditions as local schools, colleges, arts organizations and churches present concerts and special events throughout December. From Victorian celebrations and classical ballet to kindergarten winter programs and a Scandinavian Christmas open house, the region's stages and historic venues will offer something for every age.

Below is a roundup of confirmed performances for the 2025 holiday season.

MASON COUNTY

Stage Left Theatre Company – “’Twas the Night Before Christmas”
Nov. 29, 2 p.m. | Ludington Area Center for the Arts

Stage Left brings Ken Ludwig's holiday comedy to the LACA stage. The family-friendly production features a youth cast. Tickets are \$5 per person or \$15 per family.

LHS Choirs at Aglow on the Avenue
Nov. 29, 6:30 p.m. | Downtown Ludington

Ludington High School choir mem-

bers will join the festivities during the Aglow on the Avenue tree-lighting and parade.

Michigan Mandolin Orchestra Holiday Concert

Dec. 6, 7:30–9:30 p.m. | LACA

A full mandolin orchestra performs a seasonal program. Tickets are \$15 early, \$20 advance and \$25 at the door.

WSCC Holiday Rock Spectacular IV
Dec. 6 at 2 and 8 p.m.; Dec. 7 at 2 and 6 p.m. | WSCC Center Stage Theater

The seasonal favorite returns with multiple showtimes and a high-energy holiday rock production.

Ludington Elementary School – Kindergarten Winter Music Program
Dec. 9 and 10, 7 p.m. | LES Gymnasium

Kindergarten students present their two-night winter concert for families and the community.

WSCC Wind Symphony & Drumline
Dec. 8, 7:30 p.m. | Manistee High School Auditorium

The WSCC Wind Symphony and Drumline present their holiday-season performance at Manistee High School.

WSCC Choir Concert
Dec. 16, 7:30 p.m. | WSCC Center Stage Theater

The WSCC Choir performs its annual winter concert.

WSCC Jazz Ensemble I & II
Dec. 18, 7:30 p.m. | WSCC Center Stage Theater

The college's jazz ensembles offer a seasonal program to close out the semester.

MANISTEE COUNTY

Manistee Choral Society – Victorian Christmas Concert
Dec. 4, 7 p.m. | First Congregational UCC, Manistee

Presented during the Victorian Sleighbell Weekend, the community choir performs traditional holiday selections. A free-will offering is accepted.

“The Nutcracker” – Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts
Dec. 5–6, 7:30 p.m. | Ramsdell Theatre

The classic two-act ballet features more than 150 regional performers. Tickets range from \$10 to \$30.

Victorian Murder Mystery
Dec. 5, 7:30–10 p.m. | Ramsdell Ballroom

A Victorian-era immersive performance with hors d'oeuvres and period ambiance. Tickets are approximately \$70 per person or \$135 per couple.

Holiday Magic Show – The Vogue Theatre

Dec. 6, 2–4 p.m. | The Vogue, Manistee

A family-friendly magic show presented as part of Sleighbell Weekend. Free admission.

Manistee Area Public Schools – Holiday Band Concerts

Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m. — 5th and 6th grade
Dec. 10, 7:30 p.m. — Grades 7–12
Dec. 12, 7:30 p.m. — Makeup date, if needed

Concerts are held at Manistee's middle/high school campus.

Old Kirke Museum – Scandinavian Christmas Open House
Dec. 6 (Sleighbell Weekend), typically 11 a.m.–2 p.m. | 304 Walnut St., Manistee

Inside the historic 1868 Danish Lutheran church, visitors will find Scandinavian-style Christmas trees, a “Tiny

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Sales: Shelley Kovar, Monica Evans

Graphics:

Judy Lytle, Julie Eilers, Madelyn Kerbyson

News: Lois Tomaszewski, Shanna Avery, Alexis Settler, Cristina Juska, Sean Chase, Larry Launstein Jr., Kate Babel

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"Towns and Trains" exhibit and traditional Scandinavian cookies. Free admission. (Event date and time will be

confirmed when posted.)

Little River Casino Resort
Kenny G – Live in Concert: Dec. 6, 8 p.m. | Little River Casino Resort Event Center

Grammy-winning saxophonist Kenny G brings a holiday-season performance to the resort's 1,600-seat event center. Tickets are available through the casino box office; events are recommended for ages 18 and older.

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Holiday giving shines across Mason County as seasonal fundraisers return



Festival of Lights

The holiday season in Mason County is filled with lights, music and tradition — but it's also a time when community generosity takes center stage. Several major December events will once again pair festive fun with meaningful impact, supporting children, families and non-profit programs throughout the county.

Festival of Lights

The Ludington Area Festival of Lights will illuminate the Mason County Fairgrounds in a drive-through display of synchronized lights, themed tunnels and oversized holiday figures.

For 2025, the show runs Nov. 27, Nov. 29-30, and Dec. 5-8, 12-15, 19-22 and 26-29. Hours are 5:30-9 p.m. Sundays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, and

5:30-10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. A per-vehicle admission supports local nonprofit organizations.

Festival of Trees

The third annual Festival of Trees, benefiting the United Way of Mason County, returns this December at Stix Bar Biergarten, 1963 N. Lakeshore Drive in Ludington.

Businesses, schools, nonprofits and community groups are invited to sponsor and decorate Christmas trees at the venue. Proceeds from sponsorships and public voting support United Way programs assisting families with housing stability, food access, early learning and emergency needs.

Tree decorating is scheduled Dec. 2-4

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from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. The festival opens with a kickoff concert on Thursday, Dec. 5, from 6-8 p.m. Public voting begins the same evening and continues through Dec. 14, with each \$1 donation counted as one vote. A community celebration and closing ceremony will be held Dec. 14, followed by tree takedown Dec. 15-17.

Community Foundation for Mason County Wish List

The Community Foundation for Mason County's Wish List is a holiday-season giving program that connects donors directly with specific project needs submitted by local nonprofit organizations.

The Wish List can be viewed online at: mason-foundation.org/community-wishlist.

The list includes requests across several funding levels—under \$500, \$500-\$1,500 and above \$1,500—and features projects supporting arts and culture, youth programs, community

development, the environment and human services. Donors may contribute to one or several projects and are encouraged to note which Wish List item they are supporting when making a gift so the Foundation can update the status of funded needs.

Toys for Tots / Gifts for Teens

FiveCAP, Inc. has opened donation sites for the region's Toys for Tots/Gifts for Teens program, which serves families in both Mason and Manistee counties. New, unwrapped toys for ages 0-18 can be donated at FiveCAP offices and participating businesses through early December.

FiveCAP Contact Information:

· Scottville (Administrative & Mason County Office) — 302 N. Main Street, PO Box 37, Scottville, MI 49454; Phone: (231) 757-3785; Email: fivecap@fivecap.org

· Manistee County Office — 265 First Street, Manistee, MI 49660; Phone: (231) 723-8327

In the most recent distribution, the



program served 697 children across Mason and Manistee counties. The 2025 distribution is expected mid-December, with exact dates to be announced.

A season rooted in community

Whether it's driving through glowing displays, decorating trees for a cause,

choosing an item from the Wish List or dropping off toys for local families, residents have multiple ways to give back this season. Organizers say these efforts reflect the community's commitment to supporting neighbors in need — a gift that lasts well beyond the holidays.



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It takes a village to host an Old Christmas Weekend in Manistee

BY DAVID L. BARBER

MANISTEE – All the usual Christmas characters will be at the Manistee Sleighbell Parade, beginning with Santa Claus, himself.

A giant, colorful nutcracker is again expected to join the parade on Dec. 6, as will Victorian dressed holiday characters of all description, tiny elves, gi-

ant horses and so many more.

And of course, walking right up front will be Manistee Police Chief Josh Glass and Manistee County Sheriff Brian Gutowski, who will lead an army of law enforcement officers from city, county, state and tribal agencies, along with firefighters, first responders, citizen emergency responders, event volun-

teers and more who will collectively meet and greet the thousands of enthusiastic parader-goers who are expected to line River Street in downtown Manistee.

The parade will get pleasingly personal as it once again will deliver a connection between parade walkers and parade watchers, which is always the

holiday highlight of the festival that has been months in planning by Manistee city leaders, tourism and civic organizations, volunteers, and more.

“The Sleighbell Parade really is what’s best about our community,” said Gutowski. “It’s an event that brings our community, and residents from many other communities, together to show-



case the unique character of Manistee. There aren't many events anymore that aren't impacted by ever changing technology but the Sleighbell Parade is the exception. It's an opportunity to step back in time and remember when things were simpler and less chaotic which is why I think it has such a wide draw.

"Since I was elected in November of 2020, our local leaders in Public Safety have walked together and escorted the tree through the parade. I have always viewed it as an opportunity to showcase one of the things we do best in Manistee which is to work together. As a small community, we rely on our assistance from our partners to make

sure Manistee County is a safe place to live, work, and visit.

"Walking together in our local parade is an opportunity to show the community the unity and shared commitment we have to serve them," said Gutowski. "Aside from that, it's really a great experience to walk down River Street and see so many familiar faces. In a world

where it seems like there is always some sort of controversy or conflict, it's a time when we can escape from that and have a shared positive experience."

For 3 ½ decades the Manistee Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend has been recognized far and wide for its charming, time-honored theme. Its parade features horse-



drawn sleighs and wagons – no motorized vehicles are allowed – vendors cheerfully hand out chestnuts that are roasted over open fires, wandering musicians play spirit-churning music, and a giant Christmas tree is pulled through the center of town at the end of the parade during which the massive crowd falls in behind to where the tree is put in place. Once there, the crowd sings carols, and watching fireworks.

This year's festival will feature a Victorian Christmas Concert that will be held on Thursday, Dec. 4, at the First Congregational Church (time TBA); and a Cookie Crawl the following day on Friday, Dec. 5, where visitors can purchase a cookie collection box and then stop by local businesses to gather specially designed and crafted signature cookies (only 100 cookie boxes will be sold by freewill donation).

"The Manistee Sleighbell Festival is, without question, a singular event in our community," said Glass. "Since 2004, I have had the distinct privilege of experiencing this festival from several vantage points. For many years, my involvement was operational, serving on the ground as a patrol officer. On a few occasions, I enjoyed the spectacle off duty, as a member of the crowd. More recently, I have overseen our operation as a law enforcement leader.

"This progression has afforded me a comprehensive understanding of the event's scale and its significant community impact. I have particularly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with attendees, many of whom travel from across the state and make this an annual tradition."

Glass said that regarding the parade itself, there are a few observations that consistently stand out.

You must witness it," said Glass.

"The atmosphere and scope of the festival are simply something that requires firsthand experience. A mere description cannot capture its full essence."

Glass called the festival "... a true community effort."

"It truly is the closest thing to a 'Hallmark movie' experience – not just in terms of its festive, visual appeal, but also as an embodiment of our community organizations coming together to create a unified, special weekend," he said.

Saying the festival serves as "the season's kick-off," he added that "for many of us, the Manistee Sleighbell weekend serves as the official and beloved start of the Christmas season."

"We look forward to ensuring another safe and successful festival this year," he said.

For more information on the festival go to manisteesleighbell-parade.com





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Ludington readies for another bright New Year's Eve celebration

Downtown ball drop named one of the nation's best, plans return Dec. 31, 2025

LUDINGTON — As the final hours of 2025 tick down, downtown Ludington will once again shimmer with lights, laughter and the glow of a six-foot, five-inch ball ready to drop from the night sky.

The city's signature New Year's Eve Ball Drop — a lake-shore tradition now gaining national attention — is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 31, 2025, beginning at 9 p.m. in the heart of downtown at Ludington Avenue and James Street. The celebration culminates with the illuminated ball's descent at midnight and a burst of fireworks to welcome the new year.

For now, organizers have listed the date as tentative, but the energy surrounding the event is anything but uncertain. Each December, thousands of revelers fill Legacy Plaza and the surrounding blocks, bundled in scarves and smiles, counting down together beneath a cascade of 6,000 LED lights.

Visitors can expect familiar favorites: live DJ entertainment — in past years hosted by DJ Chris Bosse — plus outdoor heaters, a beverage garden, and downtown businesses keeping their doors open late for warm-ups and quick bites. The event remains free to attend, drawing families, friends and visitors from across the region.

"It's like Times Square, only friendlier," is a common refrain heard among regulars who have made the Ludington ball drop their yearly ritual.

Safety is always part of the plan. Local sponsors and towing services once again anticipate offering free rides and tows through the Safe Rides Program to ensure everyone gets home safely after the celebration.

Ludington's lakeshore count-

down has also earned a national spotlight. USA Today's 10Best Readers' Choice Awards named it America's Best New Year's Eve Drop in 2024, and the event is once again nominated for the 2025 honor — the only Michigan celebration among the

finalists.

From the first note of music at 9 p.m. to the final flash of fireworks above downtown, the New Year's Eve Ball Drop has become more than a party — it's a community reunion at the close of each year. Whether

you're visiting for the first time or returning for another round of countdown cheers, Ludington promises a warm welcome in the heart of winter.

For updates and lodging information, visit VisitLudington.com or PureLudington.com.



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