Holiday Gift Guide

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10 ways to celebrate the holidays in Ludington and Mason County

From Christmas concerts to the midnight countdown, local traditions offer ways to gather, give and enjoy the season

Holiday celebrations in Mason County stretch from Thanksgiving morning to the first steps of the new year. Whether your plans include children, visiting relatives or an evening with friends, these 10 ideas offer places to start.

1 WELCOME SANTA AT AGLOW ON THE AVENUE

Watch lighted floats, bands and fire trucks travel through downtown Ludington during Aglow on the Avenue. The parade begins at 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 28, traveling east along Ludington Avenue from Gaylord Avenue to Harrison Street. Afterward, gather at Legacy Plaza for Christmas carols and the community tree lighting.

2 MAKE A DAY OF DOWNTOWN SHOPPING

Small Business Saturday on Nov. 28 offers holiday open houses and specials at downtown Ludington businesses. Browse local shops, stop for lunch or dinner and stay for the evening parade. Downtown's event hours are listed as 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., with individual business hours varying.

3 FIND A LOCALLY MADE GIFT AT THE ART OF GIVING HOLIDAY MARKET

Browse artwork and handmade gifts at the Ludington Area Center for the Arts' Art of Giving Holiday Market, Nov. 27-Dec. 18, at 107 S. Harrison St. Posted hours are 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Wednesday; and 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday.

4 HEAR HOLIDAY FAVORITES WITH A ROCK TWIST

West Shore Community College's Holiday Rock Spectacular V brings rock, jazz, country and Christmas music to Center Stage Theater near Scottville. Performances are scheduled for 2 and 8 p.m. Dec. 5 and 2 and 6 p.m. Dec. 6. The lineup includes Lou Musa, Edgar Struble, Chloe Kimes and other regional musicians. Listed admission is 40.

5 ENJOY A FREE COMMUNITY CONCERT

The Ludington Area Center for the Arts will host "We'll Be Home for the Holidays" from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, at 107 S. Harrison St. The annual community concert offers an afternoon of seasonal entertainment without an admission charge.

6 PLAN A CHRISTMAS OUTING FOR THE CHILDREN

Sandcastles Children's Museum's free Christmas party runs from noon to 4 p.m. Dec. 13 at 129 E. Ludington Ave. Ella and Kaiden Plummer will perform holiday music from noon to 1 p.m. Other planned activities include crafts, cookie decorating and visits with Santa and Mrs. Claus.

7 GIVE A GIFT THAT HELPS A NEIGHBOR

Add a community gift to your shopping list. FiveCAP's Toys for Tots/Gifts for Teens program collects new, unwrapped gifts for Mason County children and teenagers. Lakeshore Food Club accepts food and household supplies, while the Community Foundation for Mason County's Community Wish Lists identify specific nonprofit needs.

8 SHOP FOR GIFTS WHILE SUPPORTING STUDENT MUSICIANS

Visit the Mason County Central Band Boosters' Christmas Expo on Saturday, Dec. 12, at MCC High School in Scottville. Vendors, crafts, food and seasonal activities support the school's band program. The event opens at 9 a.m.; check with organizers for its closing time.

9 TAKE THE CELEBRATION OUTDOORS

Join Ludington's Thanksgiving Turkey Trot on Nov. 26 or take Ludington State Park's history walk from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 29. The park walk begins at Hamlin Dam and covers roughly one mile on paved paths. For an active start to 2027, RunLudington lists its New Year's Resolution 5K for 11 a.m. Jan. 1.

10 COUNT DOWN TO 2027 DOWNTOWN

Finish the holiday season at the Pure Ludington New Year's Eve Ball Drop on Thursday, Dec. 31. The free downtown celebration begins at 9 p.m., with music, the midnight ball drop and fireworks. Families seeking an earlier celebration can check Sandcastles Children's Museum's ticketed balloon-drop party, scheduled from 5 to 8 p.m.



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Aglow on the Avenue brings Christmas lights, Santa and carols to Ludington

STAFF REPORTS

LUDINGTON — Santa Claus will have some company when he comes to downtown Ludington: lighted floats, bands and fire trucks, followed by a community gathering for Christmas carols and a tree lighting.

Aglow on the Avenue returns Saturday, Nov. 28, bringing an evening of holiday festivities to the streets after a day of shopping at downtown businesses. The annual parade begins at 6 p.m., traveling east on Ludington Avenue from Gaylord Avenue to Harrison Street.

For families planning an outing over Thanksgiving weekend, the schedule offers a chance to move from downtown shops to the parade route, then gather at Legacy Plaza as the community Christmas tree is illuminated.

The Chamber Alliance of Mason County and Downtown Ludington Board organize the parade, which welcomes Santa to town and marks the beginning of the downtown holiday season. Illuminated entries are the centerpiece of the procession, with music and Santa's appearance also part of the evening's plans.

The celebration continues after the last parade entry passes. A community tree lighting and Christmas carols will follow immediately at Legacy Plaza, giving spectators another reason to linger downtown.

Earlier in the day, downtown merchants will take part in Small Business Saturday, scheduled from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Holiday open houses and store specials will give shoppers opportunities to work on their gift lists before finding a place along Ludington Avenue.

Among the offerings listed by Downtown Ludington are Red Door Gallery's holiday open house, with gift wrapping and treats, and hot cider, homemade Christmas cookies and complimentary gift wrapping at Snyder's Shoes. Other participating businesses include Purple Monkey/ABC Kidz, Sister Bees, Spindrift Cyclesports and Windowsill.

Together, the shopping day, parade and tree lighting bring several parts of Ludington's Christmas season into one Saturday — beginning at local storefronts and ending with neighbors gathered around the community tree.

Parade entry is free, and a registration link is available on the Chamber Alliance's Aglow on the Avenue webpage. For more information, call 231-845-0324.



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Holiday giving helps Mason County neighbors

Auctions, wish lists and donation programs offer ways to support local causes

A Christmas gift for a child, a donation of groceries or a bid on an auction item can help Mason County neighbors during the holiday season.

Local giving opportunities support needs ranging from food and household supplies to student scholarships and music education. Some invite donors to attend an event, while others make it possible to help with a stop at a collection site or a contribution to a specific project.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION WISH LISTS

The Community Foundation for Mason County maintains Community Wish Lists identifying specific needs submitted by area nonprofit organizations.

Requests are grouped into three categories: under $500, $500 to $1,500 and over $1,500. Donors can browse for a familiar organization or choose a project that interests them.

People with donor-advised funds can recommend grants through the foundation. Others can give directly to the nonprofit, noting that they found the request on the Community Wish Lists.

The lists are available at mason-foundation.org/community-wishlist. For information, call 231-845-0326.

TOYS FOR TOTS/GIFTS FOR TEENS

FiveCAP and Synergy Media are coordinating Mason County's 54th annual Toys for Tots/Gifts for Teens program.

The collection accepts new, unwrapped toys and gifts for children from birth through age 18. Stocking stuffers, family games and gifts suitable for teenagers are among the ways donors can contribute.

Collection barrels are located at participating businesses and offices. Donations also can be brought to FiveCAP's Mason County office, 302 N. Main St., Scottville.

A current collection-site list is available at fivecap.org. Call 231-757-3785 for donation deadlines and other information.

FOOD AND HOUSEHOLD SUPPLIES

Families, workplaces, churches and community groups can organize collections for Lakeshore Food Club.

Requested items include cereal, soup, canned pasta, paper products and hygiene and personal care supplies. The organization identifies those items as frequently requested by families and students and among the more expensive supplies to obtain.

Donations are accepted from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at the back receiving door of the Food Club, 920 E. Tinkham Ave., Ludington. Donors should coordinate deliveries and should not leave items outside.

For information about planning a collection or fundraiser, email Hello@LakeshoreFoodClub.org.

ROTARY HOLIDAY AUCTION

The Rotary Club of Ludington's 27th annual Holiday Auction offers shoppers a chance to purchase donated items



while supporting the club's STRIVE program and college scholarships.

Online bidding continues through 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 2. The Holiday Auction Gala begins at 5:30 p.m. that evening at Lincoln Hills Golf Club, 1527 N. Lakeshore Drive, with dinner and a live auction.

Organizers list more than 180 donated items. Gala tickets are listed at $50 per person. Auction and ticket information is available through ludingtonrotary.org.

Shopping for student musicians

The Mason County Central Band Boosters' Christmas Expo is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 12, at Mason County Central High School in Scottville.

The event supports the MCC band program and includes local vendors, gifts, crafts, food and seasonal activities. It opens at 9 a.m.; shoppers should check with organizers for the closing time.

For additional fundraisers, donation drives and updated event details, check the Community Calendar in the Ludington Daily News or The Scene, the weekly entertainment publication.

Small acts can make a difference

Simple ways to help neighbors during the holidays

Helping does not have to involve a large donation. Consider these ways to contribute:

- **Ask what is needed.** Contact a local pantry, shelter or service organization before shopping. Its current wish list can help put your donation to use.
- **Organize a small collection.** Invite coworkers, friends or relatives to contribute one requested item, then arrange a single delivery.
- **Remember teenagers.** When supporting a toy drive, ask organizers about gifts for older children and teens.
- **Give time.** Offer to sort donations, pack food, help at a fundraiser or fill another volunteer shift identified by organizers.
- **Pool contributions.** Combine smaller donations to fund a nonprofit's specific wish-list item.
- **Check on a neighbor.** Offer help with errands, snow removal or another task. Ask first and respect the person's preferences.
- **Continue after Christmas.** Food, household supplies and volunteer help are needed beyond the holiday season.
- **Protect recipients' privacy.** Let organizations handle distributions, and avoid sharing names, photographs or personal circumstances without permission.



Holiday runs and park walks offer a breath of fresh air

A Thanksgiving morning run, a walk through Ludington State Park or a holiday 5K can offer a change of pace from shopping, concerts and Christmas parties.

Outdoor events scheduled from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day give area residents opportunities to gather with friends, support local causes and spend time outside.

Thanksgiving trots

Ludington's Turkey Trot is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 26, with an 8 a.m. start listed on Downtown Ludington's calendar. The RunLudington fun run gathers at 1254 N. Lakeshore Drive.

For information about the route and participation, email ludingtonrunclub@gmail.com.

In Manistee, the Turkey Trot 5K begins at 8:30 a.m. Thanksgiving Day at Douglas Park, 181 S. Lakeshore Drive.

Participants may run or walk the casual course, which follows Cherry Street and continues out 12th Street before returning. Beverages and a snack follow.

Registration is $10, with proceeds benefiting a local food bank. Organizers welcome people who decide to participate that morning and will accept donations before the run. Registration information is available through RunSignup under "Manistee Turkey Trot 5k."

A walk through park history

Ludington State Park will offer a history walk from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 29, beginning at Hamlin Dam.

The roughly one-mile walk follows paved paths while exploring the area's past, including the former town of Hamlin and improvements made by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The program is free. For information, call the park at 231-843-9261.

Jingle Bell Jog

Manistee's Jingle Bell Jog 5K Run/Walk is scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 5, at Manistee Elementary School, 550 Maple St.

Held during Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend, the event benefits the Manistee Area Public Schools cross-country program.

Registration is listed at $20 through Nov. 29, with a price increase afterward. Separate running and walking registration options are available through RunSignup.

Start the year outside

RunLudington lists its next New Year's race for 11 a.m. Friday, Jan. 1, 2027.

The New Year's Resolution 5K offers an opportunity to begin the year with a run or walk. Participants should visit runludington.com for current registration, starting location and packet pickup details.

Lantern walks continue into winter

For those looking beyond the holidays, Friends of Ludington State Park has announced lantern-lit walks from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 9 and 23, Feb. 6 and 20, and March 6.

The approximately one-mile route begins at the warming shelter near the park entrance and includes a bonfire stop with hot chocolate and marshmallow roasting.



Participation is free, and snowshoes will be available if there is sufficient snow. Current event information is available at friendsofludingtonstatepark.org.

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Holiday concerts and holiday shows fill area stages

Community choirs, school musicians and touring performers offer seasonal outings in Mason, Manistee and Lake counties

Christmas carols, holiday stage shows and school music programs will give area residents several ways to celebrate the season, with performances scheduled from Thanksgiving weekend through December.

The lineup ranges from West Shore Community College's Holiday Rock Spectacular to a community Christmas concert in Ludington and singing and dancing during Manistee's Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend. Free concerts, museum activities and children's movie events also are planned.

Mason County

West Shore Community College's Holiday Rock Spectacular V returns Dec. 5-6 at Center Stage Theater, 3000 N. Stiles Road near Scottville. Performances are scheduled for 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday and 2 and 6 p.m. Sunday.

The production combines rock, jazz, country and Christmas music. Performers include Lou Musa of The Verve Pipe, Craig Avery of Brena, drummer Kevin DePree, Edgar Struble, Dave Kosla and Chloe Kimes. Concert lighting, stage visuals and special effects accompany the music. Listed admission is 40.

Ella and Kaiden Plummer will perform holiday music from noon to 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, during Sandcastles Children's Museum's free Christmas party. The party runs from noon to 4 p.m. at 129 E. Ludington Ave., with crafts, cookie decorating and visits with Santa and Mrs. Claus among the activities.

The annual "We'll Be Home for the Holidays" community concert is scheduled from 2 to 4 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Ludington Area Center for the Arts, 107 S. Harrison St. Admission is free. Additional program details will be announced.

Ludington Area Catholic School's calendar lists its Christmas program at 2 p.m. Dec. 13, followed by refreshments. The school and church complex is at 700 E. Bryant Road.

WSCC's December schedule continues with its Concert Choir at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 15, and Jazz Ensembles I and II at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 17, at Center Stage Theater. Admission to the college's community ensemble concerts is free.

Manistee County

Celtic Woman brings its "Silver Bells Christmas" tour to Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Highway, at 9 p.m. Friday, Nov. 27.



The program includes Christmas favorites, Irish melodies and selections from the group's repertoire. Advertised songs include "Silver Bells," "O Holy Night," "Carol of the Bells" and "Joy to the World." Listed ticket prices range from $50 to $80. The event is for ages 18 and older.

The Manistee Choral Society will present its Christmas concert at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3, at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 412 Fourth St.

Part of Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend, the concert features traditional, popular and gospel Christmas music, including sacred and secular selections. Admission is free, with donations accepted.

"Sleighbell Spectacular" brings singing and dancing to the Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Dec. 4-6. Presented by the Ramsdell and directed by The Conservatory of Dance, the family production has performances at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4; 1 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5; and 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6. Tickets are 35.

Community caroling will follow the Victorian Sleighbell Parade, which begins at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 5 on River Street. The evening also includes the community tree lighting and fireworks.

Earlier that day, Trinity Lutheran Church, 420 Oak St., will offer Christmas music, Nativity displays, a craft and refreshments from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Admission is free.

Old Kirke Museum, 304 Walnut St., will host its Scandinavian Christmas Open House and "Tiny Towns and Trains" exhibit from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dec. 6. Visitors can view Christmas trees decorated in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish traditions, sample cookies and explore the miniature displays. Admission is free.

WSCC's Wind Symphony and Percussion Ensemble will perform at 7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 7, at the Manistee High School auditorium. Admission is free.

Manistee's student musicians follow with two holiday band concerts. The Mariner Bands calendar lists fifth- and sixth-grade performers at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8, and seventh- through 12th-grade performers at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9. Dec. 10 is reserved as a snow-day make-up date.

Marty Miller's performance schedule lists a Christmas concert at 11 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 13, at Heritage Baptist Church in Manistee. An offering will be collected.

Lake County

The TEEM Center, 1850 E. U.S. 10 in Idlewild, lists a movie night at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 11. Popcorn will be available for $1.

A Toys for Tots event with a feature movie for children ages 0-12 is scheduled from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 19, at the center.

For additional events and entertainment listings, check the Community Calendar in the Ludington Daily News or The Scene, the weekly entertainment publication.

Live music adds to holiday outings

Several Ludington venues have live music scheduled during Thanksgiving weekend and December. Christmas-themed programs have not been specified.

Ludington bars and breweries schedule Thanksgiving weekend and December performances

The Mitten Bar, 109 W. Ludington Ave.

- Wednesday, Nov. 25: Velvet Mushroom Syndicate, 8-11 p.m., Thanksgiving Eve show.

Jamesport Brewing Company, 410 S. James St.

- Friday, Nov. 27: Eric Engblade, 6-9 p.m.

Ludington Bay Brewing Co., 515 S. James St.

- Friday, Nov. 27: Kyle Brown, 6-10 p.m.
- Friday, Dec. 4: Gabrial James, 6-10 p.m.
- Friday, Dec. 11: Jacob McLeod, 6-10 p.m.
- Friday, Dec. 18: Nick Viene, 6-10 p.m.

For additional events and entertainment listings, check the Community Calendar in the Ludington Daily News or The Scene, the weekly entertainment publication.

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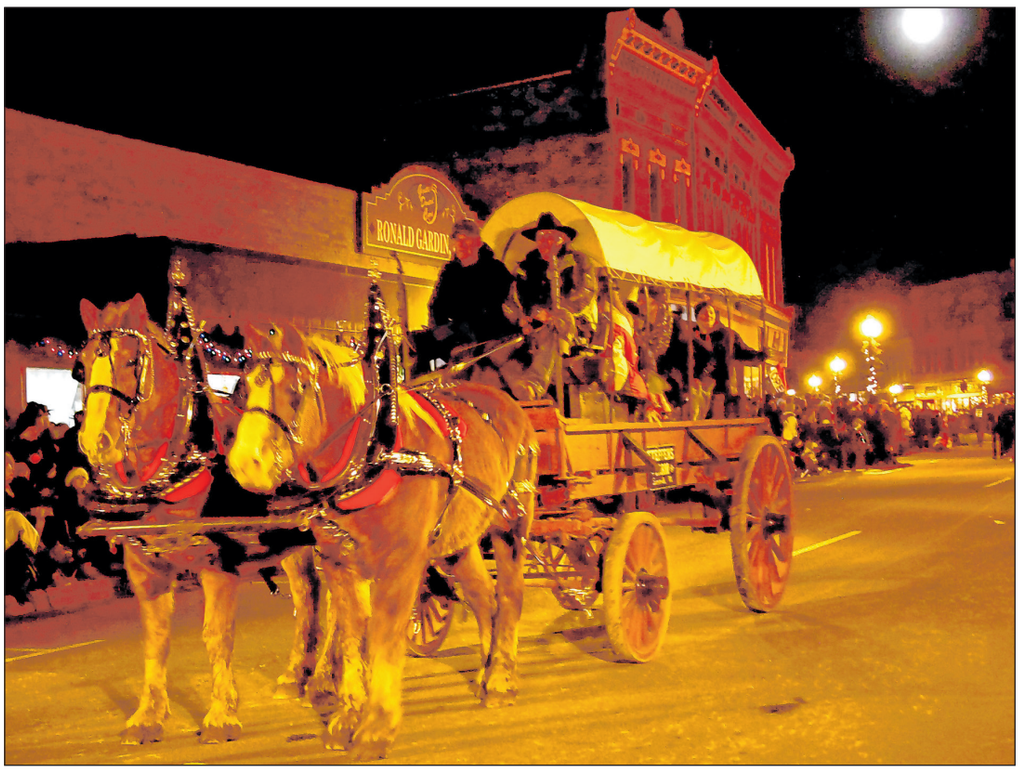

Horse-drawn parade brings Victorian Christmas to Manistee

Dec. 3-6 Sleighbell weekend features caroling, holiday shows, decorated trees and family activities

MANISTEE — Sleighbells, horse-drawn carriages and a towering Christmas tree will bring the character of a Victorian Christmas to downtown Manistee during the city's annual holiday celebration.

The 37th annual Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend runs Dec. 3-6, with four days of concerts, shopping, performances and family activities leading to the signature parade at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5.

Draft horses pulling a 30-foot Christmas tree down River Street are among the procession's highlights, along with bagpipers, horse-drawn entries and carolers dressed in Victorian clothing.

The parade's old-fashioned appearance is carefully maintained. Entry rules require clothing, decorations and music appropriate to the Victorian period. Organizers encourage sleighbells, live greenery, cloth ribbons and fresh fruit. Recorded music and amplification are prohibited.

Motorized vehicles are excluded except for automobiles built before 1901. Lighting must resemble candles, lanterns or oil lamps, with limited exceptions for lights already attached to carriages and similar entries.

Presented by Filer Credit Union, the parade concludes near the fountain at downtown's west end, where the community gathers for caroling and the Christmas tree lighting. Fireworks follow after the horses are safely clear of the parade route.

The celebration begins before parade night.

The Manistee Choral Society will present its Christmas concert at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 3, at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 412 Fourth St. The program includes traditional, popular and gospel Christmas music, with sacred and secular selections. Admission is free, with donations accepted.

At the Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, "Sleighbell Spectacular" will bring singing and dancing to the stage in a family production directed by The Conservatory of Dance.

Performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 4; 1 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5; and 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6. Tickets are 35. The theater is at 101 Maple St.

The Lakeside Club of Manistee County's Festival of Trees and Holiday Decor will fill the Ramsdell ballroom and Hardy Hall with decorated trees, wreaths and seasonal items available through an auction.

The club lists public viewing and bidding from 1 to 5:30 p.m. Dec. 4 and 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Dec. 5. Admission is a minimum $2 donation. Bidding closes at 8 p.m. Saturday.

Proceeds benefit the Arc of Manistee County, Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club and the Lakeside Club's Scholarship for Service Award program. Visitors also can bring canned goods to vote for a favorite display or unwrapped toys for FiveCAP's Toys for Tots/Gifts for Teens program.





Friday's Sleighbell Cookie Crawl runs from 4 to 7 p.m. Collection bags and maps will be available beginning at 3:45 p.m. at West Shore Community College's Downtown Education Center, 400 River St. Participation requires a $10 donation, with 200 available.

Saturday's activities include the Sleighbell Craft Bazaar from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Wagoner Center, 260 St. Mary's Parkway. Trinity Lutheran Church, 420 Oak St., will offer Nativity displays, Christmas music, a craft and refreshments from 10 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Admission is free.

On Sunday, Old Kirke Museum, 304 Walnut St., will host its Scandinavian Christmas Open House and "Tiny Towns and Trains" exhibit from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Visitors can view trees decorated in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish traditions, sample cookies and explore the miniature displays. Admission is free.

River Street is scheduled to close to traffic from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday. An updated weekend schedule is available at manisteesleighbellparade.com.








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Dec. 14th	*Keratin Smoothing Treatment **$250**	
	*3 Months Unlimited **$130** Upgraded **$220**	
Dec. 15th	*Brazilian Wax **$70**	*100 Minutes **$35**
Dec. 16th	*5 Tanning Visits **$32** Upgraded **$50**	
Dec. 17th	*Shellac **$40**	*1 Year Tanning **$390** Upgraded **$550**
Dec. 18th	*Wet Brushes $12 each	*2 Months Unlimited **$89** Upgraded **$165**
Dec. 19th	*Olaplex Treatment **$45**	***50% Off** Tanning Lotions (Reg. Price)
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Ludington to welcome 2027 with ball drop and fireworks

LUDINGTON — A lighted ball above downtown, a crowd counting down the final seconds and fireworks welcoming the new year will mark Ludington's farewell to 2026.

The Pure Ludington New Year's Eve Ball Drop returns Thursday, Dec. 31, with a downtown street party beginning at 9 p.m. The free, family-friendly celebration continues through 12:15 a.m. Jan. 1, with music, the midnight ball drop and fireworks.

Legacy Plaza on North James Street will be a gathering place for the evening, giving residents and visitors an opportunity to celebrate together before the countdown to 2027.

The ball measures 6 feet, 5 inches in diameter and is illuminated by 6,000 LED lights. Its construction brought together local workers, with employees of GLC Metal Fabricators and Harsco making the ball and Tye Signs installing its lights.

The community celebration also has earned national recognition. In December 2024, Ludington's event took first place in USA Today's 10Best Readers' Choice competition for New Year's Eve drops.

Visitors can make an evening of downtown dining before joining the outdoor celebration. Participating businesses in the Ludington Outdoor Social District also offer beverages that may be enjoyed within the district's designated boundaries.

For families who want to celebrate earlier, Sandcastles Children's Museum will hold its New Year's Eve Balloon Drop from 5 to 8 p.m. Dec. 31 at 129 E. Ludington Ave.

The museum's plans include balloon drops on two floors, refreshments, face painting, crafts and ice cream donated by House of Flavors. Admission is charged, with registration and prepayment details to be announced. The museum will be closed during the day to prepare for the party.

All Occasions Events & Floral, 110 N. James St., adjacent to Legacy Plaza, also lists a free New Year's Eve warming party with music, food and door prizes. Soundwaves Next Generation DJ Services will provide music. Visitors should check the business's current listing for the starting time.

Those attending the ball drop should dress for an outdoor winter event and check for updated plans as New Year's Eve approaches.

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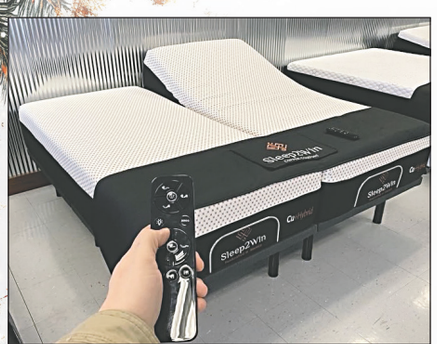

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DOWNTOWN LUDINGTON

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Aglow on the Avenue Holiday Parade - 6pm