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WINTERFEST
2025

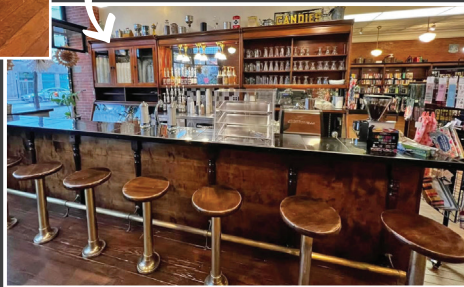
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WARREN DILLAWAY

Visiting royalty from around the state often participate in the Winterfest Pageant parade in downtown Geneva. Kalli Gregory, Port Clinton Grand Supreme Firecracker Queen, waves during the Geneva Winterfest parade in 2022.

Geneva prepares for Winterfest

BY WARREN DILLAWAY

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GENEVA — City and business leaders are prepping for an annual celebration of winter, scheduled for Saturday in downtown Geneva.

A wide variety of activities are available for families seeking to get out of their houses to experience chilly activities downtown. Winterfest will be from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday.

“It’s cold outside and we can’t get away from it so we might as well celebrate it,” Geneva Recreation Director Myke Dowd said. “So come out

and enjoy the snow.”

A traditional kick-off to the event is a pancake breakfast that is scheduled to get rolling at 9 a.m. Events are scheduled at a variety of locations throughout downtown Geneva.

Dowd said a basket raffle and soup are scheduled from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, and the annual chili cook-off will take place from noon-2 p.m.

The city’s Winterfest Parade is scheduled for 12:30 p.m. with a variety of units scheduled to participate. Dowd said volunteers lead games and paint children’s faces.

Non-profit organizations are scheduled to sell

items from 1-4 p.m. at the Geneva Community Center, and at the same time, photos with the princesses will take place at the community center.

The Madison Jazz Band is scheduled to perform at 2 p.m., and the always-popular Jungle Terry is booked from 3-4 p.m. Hot dogs, hot cocoa and donuts will be available from 1-4 p.m.

Other family recreational activities scheduled are carriage rides on Depot Street from 1-3 p.m., and an antique snowmobile from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

A craft show is scheduled from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Geneva Recreation Center.

Winterfest has long history of bringing people downtown

BY WARREN DILLAWAY
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GENEVA — Winterfest has been a staple in downtown Geneva for two decades, as community leaders succeeded in bringing people out of their homes in the frigid cold of February.

Shirley Lehmann, at the time working in local banking, partnered with Jennifer Brown, who worked for the city, to create a diversion for area residents and and visitors alike.

Lehmann was working as a branch manager for Geneva Northwest Savings Bank at the time, and wanted to see something unique occur during the winter.

She drew on her past experience to help kick off the idea of Winterfest.

“I am from New York, and I went to Auburn Community College and they

had a Winterfest,” Lehmann said.

She said the festival in New York included a tug of war and other outdoor activities.

Lehmann and Brown both used their connections to try and get as many people and organizations involved as possible.

“Each of the churches did something,” Lehmann said of the different ways the community supported the event.

She said area businesses, the chamber of commerce, fire department and other organizations all found ways to add to the event.

A chili cook-off has always been a big part of the event with people bringing their favorite recipe to the Depot Street parking lot to be judged by festival attendees. She said the chili cook-off also



WARREN DILLAWAY

Horse drawn carriage rides were a big part of the Geneva Winterfest over the years in early February in downtown Geneva.

SEE PEOPLE, 7

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Winterfest royalty crowned at Geneva High School

BY WARREN DILLAWAY

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GENEVA — The opportunity to receive a crown and appear before a large crowd of people drew 26 contestants to the 2025 Geneva Winterfest Pageant Saturday evening at Geneva High School.

The contestants ranged from two or three years old to high school students, competing in six different age categories.

The young ladies prepared for a year of fun and learning, while past queens shared their experiences during the last year in short recorded messages played for the audience.

Several hundred people attended the event, which has been occurring annually since 2012, with one year

missed due to the coronavirus pandemic, pageant director Bobbie Horvath said.

The contest categories included Miss Winterfest, Junior Miss Winterfest, Young Miss Winterfest, Little Miss Winterfest, Tiny Miss Winterfest and Winterfest Snowflake.

The younger categories seemed excited to be on stage and were quick to wave and jump up and down while waiting for the results to be announced.

Many of the 2024 queens talked about their love for the other court members and their excitement about their learning experience during the past year.

The young ladies will have the opportunity to attend festivals throughout the state, serve the community and meet new friends.



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Julie Horvath returned to the Winterfest Pageant Saturday night as emcee. She won the contest in 2013.



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

The Geneva Miss Winterfest candidates pose for a picture Saturday night after the pageant at Geneva High School.



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Raelynn Gross participates in the Winterfest Snowflake competition Saturday evening at Geneva High School.



WARREN DILLAWAY | STAR BEACON

Siomara Marquez takes her last walk as 2024 Tiny Miss Winterfest Saturday evening during the 2025 Miss Winterfest Pageant at Geneva High School.



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Oaklynn Hyde was named Winterfest Snowflake Saturday evening at Geneva High School.



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Reporter reflects on Winterfests past

I remember being excited when the concept of Winterfest was brought to town by area business and government leaders about 20 years ago.

The opportunity to have an event to photograph, and write about, in the dead of winter was an exciting proposition for a photographer seeking something to record as the temperatures dropped into chilly ranges that required extra clothes.

The festival has had a variety of weather conditions over the years, from temperatures dropping into the low single digits to almost balmy weather, as the parade kicked off through downtown streets.



Warren Dillaway

A wide variety of Winterfest experiences slosh around in my ever-aging memory bank, including the Winterfest Court riding on a fire engine, ice carvings throughout the downtown area and of course Jungle Terry providing his unique entertainment through the showing of lovable animals.

“Lake Effect,” a mascot for the festival, has been a part of the event over the years, providing children

with a wintry image during the parade.

Parades are a big draw in Geneva and many other communities. Often, visitors from all over northeastern Ohio and beyond line the streets for the special experience.

During the cold years, large balls of snow are pushed to the edge of the Depot Street parking lot, and sometimes children would sled down the large mounds of snow.

The event gets rolling a week early, as the Winterfest Pageant selects royalty to preside over the festival and represent the community state-wide for the rest of the year.

On Saturday, 26 young ladies participated in the pageant in a variety of age categories, and will be ready to represent the area this weekend.

Memories were created Saturday evening, and recorded for posterity by happy parents and other family members and friends.

Memories are yet to be created for the 2025 Winterfest, scheduled for Saturday morning.

Get those memory banks ready for action.

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The Geneva Winterfest Royalty has appeared in the Austinburg Country Days parade and other events throughout Ashtabula County and other parts of Ohio.

PEOPLE: Winterfest has a history of drawing crowds to downtown

FROM PAGE 3

came from her experiences in New York state.

“I know I got the chamber involved to take the chili cook-off,” Lehmann said. “It was great.”

Lehmann said the event started in the early 2000s.

“Loved everything about promoting Geneva and getting people downtown,” she said.

Dave Johnson, former longtime director of the Grape Jamboree and treasurer of the Geneva Business Association, loves the idea of the two festivals.

He said the idea of getting

people outside in the middle of winter and enjoying downtown Geneva has been a good thing.

“It is something to give [the city] a shot in the arm,” Johnson said. “One of the big draws is the pancake breakfast at 9 a.m. at the Methodist Church.”



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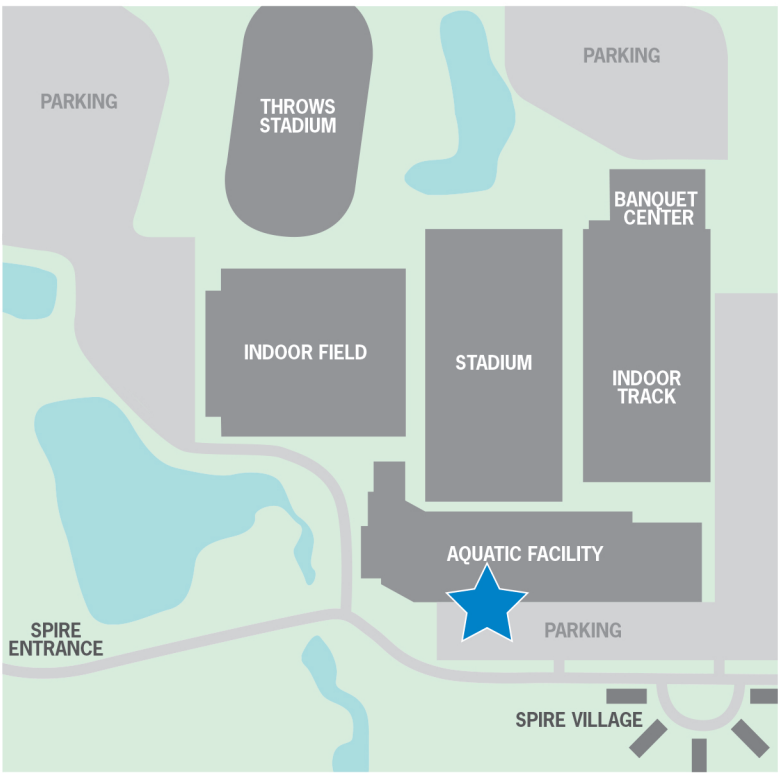
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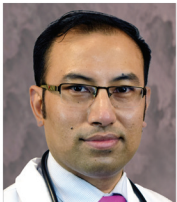
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