

Why Host Festival of Trees During a Pandemic?

Some people have asked why we are hosting Festival of Trees at this time when so many other things have been cancelled. We hope some of the reasons, which we'll be sharing in a number of posts over the next few days, will help you understand why we feel it is so important.

Reason #1: We need each other.

This has been a difficult year that has affected each of us in unique and challenging ways. As we approach this Thanksgiving and Christmas season, we're feeling different kinds of stress than we ever have before. Many of us could benefit from coming together, safely, to support each other. At Festival of Trees, we can support the small businesses represented by our vendors. We can support those we pass by with a kind word, a nod, or a wave. We can support the musicians, who have had few opportunities to perform this year, with toe tapping and gentle applause. We can help each other unwind in a festive environment while following safety protocols. We expect that attendance will be much lower this year and that the Festival of Trees won't be a major fundraiser for Dakota Hope Clinic, but this event – especially this year – is so much more than that. It's a gift that our sponsors, volunteers and staff are giving to the community, because we need each other.

Reason #2: There's plenty of room for safety and fun.

At Festival of Trees, we will be able to prepare for and celebrate the upcoming holidays in an environment with ample space for social distancing. The rooms we are using at the State Fair Center are huge. There will be no problem staying within the 25% capacity limitation for either room. We can bring a family member and stroll through the tables staffed by vendors who have worked so hard to prepare their items for us to view and buy. Then we can step across the hall to relax as we stroll through the beautifully decorated Christmas trees, one of which might be the perfect tree to bring home for the holidays.

Reason #3: Exercise is a great physical and mental health boost.

Added to the Festival of Trees celebration this year is a healthy and fun event the whole family can do together! Rather than riding in a one-horse open sleigh, we can go "dashing through the snow" on our own two feet beginning at noon on Saturday, Nov. 21. Check out the Dashing Through the Snow 5K and 1-mile Family Fun Run Facebook event for all the details. Get ready, get set, snow!

Reason #4: Our children will experience the reason for the season.

It's more challenging this year for churches and schools to put on Christmas programs or rehearse for children's Christmas choirs, but that doesn't mean our children can't experience the reason for the season. During Saturday's Follow the Star Family Treasure Hunt, they will meet and learn about the characters from the Nativity story while deepening their understanding of the greatest gift ever – our Savior Jesus Christ!

Reason #5: It's a great place for a family photo.

Amongst the beautiful Christmas trees will be a place where you can pose for a free family photo! Don't miss this opportunity to make memories and share your smiles in a safe and warm setting.

Reason #6: Our small businesses are hurting; we can help.

Many of the vendors who will be in the Dakota Holiday Market & Sweet Shop on Friday and Saturday have had very few opportunities this year to sell the items they create and offer. With the vendor displays safely distanced from each other, it will be easy for us to find just what we're looking for and to support the people who put their time and their hearts into these small businesses. Thanks to everyone in advance for making their holidays a little more joyful.

Reason #7: Nothing lifts our spirits like music.

Area musicians and performers haven't gotten to share their musical gifts much this year. Friday's Concert in the Trees, from noon to 8 p.m., will lift our spirits and theirs. We can listen while walking through the decorated trees, or sit and relax as the music fills the room. We're sure to appreciate the live music from these talented musicians, whether we're watching in person or virtually.

Reason #8: We can be a part of the event while being apart from each other.

Those of us who would rather not venture out don't have to miss the Festival of Trees. We can watch and listen to Friday's Concert in the Trees online! We can also see and bid on the auction items, supporting Dakota Hope Clinic from our homes. There's even a help line to call if we are wondering how to make a bid or have other questions. Even if we can't be there physically, we can be a part of the fun. Please join us!

Reason #9: We all need to feel God's love.

One of the most difficult things about these past few months has been enduring separation from those we love. We may have missed opportunities to visit our parents or grandparents in care centers, or been afraid or unable to travel to see distant relatives and friends. Even more devastating, we may have suffered the loss of someone we loved as a result of the virus or another illness. We want you to know that, at Dakota Hope Clinic, we pray every day for the women and men we have the privilege to help. We also pray for everyone in the region that we serve. Prayer is the foundation of our work and we implore God the Holy Spirit to be our guide. We pray that the beautiful trees, lights and music you experience at Festival of Trees, either virtually or in person, will help you feel God's great love for you.