

THE AMICI NEWSLETTER

Cari amici,

Christmas magic has begun! Take time to enjoy the moments – and these special events coming to an area near you!

The Way of Lights

For a beautiful and meaningful Christmas experience at night, take time to visit the “Way of Lights” at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville (IL). It attracts hundreds of visitors from near and far and is an annual tradition for many of us. Open now through Dec. 31 (5 – 9 p.m.), this special drive-through *Journey to Bethlehem* contains light tunnels with over 1 ½ million lights and life-sized figures depicting The Christmas Story. Additional activities include camel and pony rides, a petting zoo, Lego Bricks display, and indoor Christmas displays and events. For more information, visit snows.org or call (618) 397-6700. Free admission.

Christmas on The Hill

The Hill neighborhood in St. Louis invites you to join them for their festive Christmas celebration (“Christmas on The Hill”) on Sat., Dec. 2nd (noon – 9 p.m.). They’re opening their doors wide to give you a taste of this special place where Italian immigrants settled many years ago. Centered around St. Ambrose Church (5130 Wilson), you’ll enjoy free samples of salsiccia and roasted chestnuts, listen to La Befana tell Christmas stories to children, see an art show, have some gelato (at Gelato di Riso), enjoy a carriage ride, and lots more. Don’t miss a special Christmas concert (7 p.m.) at St. Ambrose Church – where you will hear the wonderful voices of Kathryn Favazza, Nika Leoni, and the Women’s HOPE Chorale. More details at www.hillstl.org.

The Nativity Walk

While you’re on The Hill, take time to experience the Nativity Walk. Stop by Girasole Gift and Imports (across from St. Ambrose Church), and ask for a self-guided map of the Nativity scenes (*presepi*). (Maps are available in a small mail box at the entrance when the shop is closed.) Then take a leisurely sidewalk stroll – stopping at windows of participating stores to see Italian Nativities from throughout the regions of Italy. Fascinating. The sets are on loan from area families who share their precious pieces year after year. (The Nativity Walk is open Dec. 2 through Jan. 6.)

Nativity Festival in Springfield

One of our region’s largest Nativity festivals is only a short road trip away! The 11th Annual Franciscan Nativity Festival is held at the Chiara Center, 4875 La Verna Road, in Springfield (IL). The display (free and open to the public) includes more than one hundred Nativity scenes from throughout the world – including some from Italy. Festival dates: Fri., Dec. 1 (2 – 7 p.m.), Sat. & Sun., Dec. 2/3 (noon – 4 p.m.). This is on the grounds of the St. Francis Convent. (A tour of the St. Francis of Assisi Church is included.) For more information, call (217) 523-0901 or visit www.chiaracenter.org.

A Walk to Bethlehem

On Dec. 1 (6:30 – 9 p.m.) and Dec. 2 & 3 (5:30 - 8:30 p.m.), take time to experience “The Bethlehem Journey” – an interactive, outdoor walk through the city of Bethlehem presented by Grace Church, 5151 N. Illinois, in Fairview Heights (IL). This event is brought about by hundreds of church volunteers.

Along the way, you'll encounter Roman guards, the Wise Men, shepherds, angels, the markets in Bethlehem – leading to the Christ Child in a manger. Note: Dress for weather. Most of this event is spent outside on a mulched trail. (More details available at www.thebethlehemjourney.com or by calling (618) 234-5910.) Free admission.

Italian Characters at St. Charles Festival

At night, during their Christmas Traditions Festival, St. Charles is a picture-perfect scene out of a Christmas card. The cobbled streets, horse-driven carriages, carolers, and festively-decorated shops provide a magical setting. Now through Dec. 24, the Traditions Festival is open Wed., Fri., Sat., and Sun. evenings on Historic Main Street. Strolling the sidewalks, you'll find a host of Christmas costumed characters who enjoy visiting with children and distributing their character cards. This year, La Befana (and Santa Lucia) will be there. Also check out Las Posadas (Dec. 2), the Candlelight Christmas Concert, & Candlelight Guided Tours. Take a photo tour of the festivities at www.discoverstcharles.com or call 1-800-366-2427.

Christmas Lights 'Round the Lake

A favorite Christmas destination in Southern Illinois is DuQuoin Holiday Lights (drive-through and indoor festival) at the DuQuoin (IL) State Fairgrounds now through Dec. 30. The millions of twinkling lights reflecting off the water make for an enchanting 3-mile drive. Cost: \$10 per vehicle. During the first three weeks of December, this cost also provides an opportunity to enjoy The Holiday Lights Expo Hall events including a visit with Santa, free activities for children, train rides, kids' craft corner, train displays, and entertainment. Drive-through open 5:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. Sponsored by DuQuoin Tourism (618-542-8338, www.duquointourism.org).

Christkindlmarkt in Belleville

In Italy, Christmas markets are bustling this time of year. You can experience a festive, European-style market not far away – in Belleville (IL). The Belleville Christkindlmarkt (German Christmas Market) is located around the Belleville Square (fountain area) and modeled after outdoor Christmas markets in Europe. You can peek inside more than 15 wooden Christmas huts to see a variety of Christmas items made throughout the world. Enjoy free concerts (in a heated tent), horse-drawn trolley rides, pastries made by recipes passed down through generations, Bavarian cooking, and special treats from the Sister Cities of Paderborn. Santa's also there -- and LIVE reindeer! The market is open daily through Dec. 23 (Mon. - Thurs.) 11 a.m. – 7 p.m., (Fri./Sat.) 10 a.m. – 9 p.m., (Sun.) 10 a.m. – 7 p.m. Free admission. Learn more, and see photos at <https://www.bellevillechristkindlmarkt.com> (618-233-2015).

Seeking Names of Collinsville Italian Families

Attention, residents of Collinsville and other areas! We need your help. The Collinsville Chamber of Commerce and Italian Fest Committee are seeking names of Italian families who immigrated to Collinsville from Italy long ago. We're ordering a new Collinsville Paesani T-shirt with family names on it, and we don't want to omit anyone. Visit our Italian Fest web site (www.italianfest.net), and click on the link to see family names accumulated so far. During the holidays, please ask your family and friends for names not included. Send new names to david@collinsvillecommunitychurch.org. For more information, feel free to contact me. (Phone/email below.) *Mille grazie!*

New This Year...

Now through New Year's Day, enjoy "The Magic of Lights" -- a unique Christmas drive-through at Gateway Motorsports Park in Madison (IL). It's a 1½ mile drive with over a million lights -- winding

your way around the race track! (Horse-drawn carriage rides also available.) Visit www.gatewaymsp.com for hours and pricing. AND Collinsville invites you to their first “Christmas at the Collins House” and Light Up Parade on Sat., Dec. 2 (5:30 p.m.), on Main Street. After the parade, enjoy the festivities at the historic Collins House (621 West Main) with a tree lighting ceremony, photo with Santa, and free hot chocolate and apple cider.

FROM OUR HOUSE TO YOURS,

We wish you a wonderful, safe, and blessed Christmas! Buon Natale!

Annette (Annette M. Graebe)

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