

Lighted parade to kick off Christmas downtown

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Santa is coming to Beloit a little early this year.

The 22nd annual Holiday Lighted Parade will be this Friday in Downtown Beloit. Sponsored by the Downtown Beloit Association, the event will feature holiday floats, the lighting of the Christmas Tree and an appearance by Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Live music starts at 5 p.m. at the First National Bank Plaza near the corner of State Street and Grand Avenue, and will continue until 6 p.m. when Santa arrives and helps light the tree. At 6:15 p.m. the lighted parade will begin along Grand Avenue between Third Street and Horace White Park. Shauna El-Amin, executive director for the DBA, said 31 floats and participants have registered for the parade this year.

Santa and Mrs. Claus will be at the Turtle Creek Bookstore, 444 E. Grand Ave., and will be available for photos as well. The Salvation Army will be at the plaza handing out free hot chocolate, and the Stateline Boys & Girls Club will be at Suds O'Hanahan's from 4 - 8 p.m. with a chili and hot chocolate fundraiser.

Those attending the parade are encouraged to bring canned food or boxed items to donate to the Care a TAD Bit organization. All items will be donated to Caritas in Beloit, said Lori Wikel, one of the founders of the organization. Wikel's son, Tad Cherry, was killed in a motorcycle accident last year. Wikel said they will have their own float this year in the parade.

"Our parade walkers will be collecting the donated items from the public and stacking them on the float as we walk," she said. "We'll be doing the traditional parade activities (including) handing out candy and displaying our message, but most importantly we will be donating our food collection to Caritas of Beloit."

Xclusive Ryders MSC, a motorcycle group in Beloit, helped with the organization's float, Wikel said. Cherry was a member of the group, and it has helped Wikel with other food drives.

Participants in the parade will also be donating non-perishable food items. The floats in the parade will be judged on originality, effort, creativity and overall effect. First place will win \$100 and second place will win \$50.