

Local Search Site Search  
GO

- HOME
- TODAY'S GLOBE
- NEWS
- BUSINESS
- SPORTS
- LIFESTYLE
- A&E
- THINGS TO DO
- TRAVEL
- CARS
- JOB
- REAL ESTATE
- LOCAL SEARCH

HOME / NEWS / LOCAL

# Holidays at Elm Bank: From tree to shining tree

The Boston Globe

MassHort hopes to start tradition



Gloria Freitas-Steidinger and her husband, Paul Steidinger, unload their contribution to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society's Festival of Trees in Wellesley. (Joanne Rathe/ Globe Staff)

By Matt Rocheleau  
Globe Correspondent / November 22, 2009

E-mail | Print | Reprints |

Text size - +

WELLESLEY - With 36 acres of fields and meadows, streams and pools, forests, and formal gardens, the scenic landscape of the grounds at Elm Bank Reservation has long served as a peaceful getaway during the spring and summertime.

But with the formal gardens once again put to bed for the coming winter and the last-remaining leaves falling from their branches, those who own and maintain the estate are focusing their attention indoors, as they look to start an annual holiday tradition that they hope can serve as a respite during what can be a chaotic time of year for many families.

The Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which is headquartered at Elm Bank, on Route 16 at the Wellesley-Dover border, has transformed the property's 89-year-old, red-brick Hunnewell Building into a festive gathering of some three dozen creatively decorated trees.

"It is about bringing the holidays back to the basics," said Neal Sanders, a Medfield resident who volunteers with the MassHort organization in many efforts, including its inaugural Festival of Trees, which opened Friday with a preview party and continues through Dec. 4 (except for Thanksgiving).

"Instead of being in the stores blaring techno-pop Christmas songs, this is all about kids understanding the magic of the season," he said. "And for their parents, it's a way of seeing the holidays through a child's eyes."

Andover resident Joyce Bakshi, the event's chairwoman, got the idea for the Festival of Trees from similar holiday events held locally, including one in Methuen, and across the country. And for the festival's first year, about 30 area businesses, civic organizations, and individuals have donated, delivered, and

ADVERTISEMENT

## MOST E-MAILED »

1. [Hiker falls to death on NH's Mount Washington](#)
2. [Canadian woman loses benefits over Facebook photo](#)
3. [In fiddlers' songs, echoes of the past](#)
4. [On this rock, a myth was built](#)
5. [RI bishop asked Kennedy in 2007 to avoid Communion](#)
6. [Fortunate Evora still glimmers](#)
7. [Baby boomers find growing acceptance of marijuana use](#)

## RECOMMENDED SEARCHES

- Ski and Snowboard Expo
- Oprah Winfrey
- Food Section
- Horoscope
- Obituaries
- Movies

ABOUT THIS LIST »

decorated their own trees, which will be raffled off at its conclusion.

The trees, which are artificial to comply with fire codes, range from 12 inches to 10 feet tall, and are arranged in the great hall of the Hunnewell Building, a carriage house on the estate that now hosts weddings, parties, and other functions. Each tree has its own theme: teddy bears, golf, soccer, gardening, goddesses, the Red Sox, the Grinch, nature, dogs, Santa's reindeer; there's even one decorated entirely with sea glass. Many of the trees are also stocked with gift certificates and merchandise.

An Easton couple, Gloria Freitas-Steidinger and husband Paul Steidinger, both in their late 70s, were among the first to deliver a tree early last week.

Fashioned with natural materials including celosia, gilded lemon leaves, and jack pine cones, and decorated with gold-colored ribbon, lights, and other ornaments, their tree was donated by the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts, which encompasses all of the state's 192 garden clubs.

Freitas-Steidinger was among a group of designers from around the country who were invited to decorate the Clinton White House for the holidays in 1997.

"It's the most beautiful house in the world to decorate. It was an exciting experience," said Freitas-Steidinger, adding that she was also honored to help with the Festival of Trees in its debut year at Elm Bank.

"I'm hoping this takes off and becomes an annual event. You're seeing the trees are all so many different themes and sizes; it's really going to be interesting to see how creative people can be," she said.

Josh Schiering, executive director of the Wellesley-based LINX, a youth enrichment club that hosts a summer camp at Elm Bank, showed some creativity in his group's donated tree.

"We wanted to go with a warm-weather theme in honor of our summer camp, so we thought, 'How can we convey summer in the dead of winter? Oh, a palm tree,'" Schiering said.

Schiering said he planned to add a beach chair and other summer-related items alongside the palm tree, which is wrapped with holiday lights.

The historic Hunnewell Building is a 3,000-square-foot space that once housed carriages and automobiles, and was among several buildings on the Elm Bank grounds to undergo renovation in 2001 as part of a nearly \$6 million project.

"It's a magical place in and of itself," said Sanders. "The place just glows."

And, though the rest of the grounds at Elm Bank are not in bloom, "This place, at this time of year and through the winter, is really quite beautiful," Bakshi added.

Betsy Ridge Madsen, president of the society's board of trustees, said she often finds herself thumbing through plant catalogs during the winter, anxiously waiting for the snow to melt and anticipating orders she may place for the coming spring.

"It's really great to have this project to work on right now. I think we're all just really excited to have something like this going on in the wintertime," she said.

The Festival of Trees at Elm Bank, 900 Washington St. (Route 16) Wellesley, will be open Monday through Friday from 5 to 9 p.m., and from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends, as well as on the day after Thanksgiving, thru Dec. 4. Admission is \$7; children under 12 are free.

Holiday Hayrides around the property, at a cost of \$2, will be offered during the festival hours, operated by Peter Pineo of Pine Meadow Farm in Canton.

All proceeds benefit the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

For more information, go online to [www.masshort.org](http://www.masshort.org), or visit [www.masshortfestivaloftrees.org](http://www.masshortfestivaloftrees.org). ■

© Copyright 2009 Globe Newspaper Company.

[Home](#) | [Today's Globe](#) | [News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [A&E](#) | [Things to Do](#) | [Travel](#) | [Cars](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Local Search](#)

[CONTACT BOSTON.COM](#) | [Help](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Work here](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Mobile](#) | [RSS feeds](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Make Boston.com your homepage](#)

[CONTACT THE BOSTON GLOBE](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Manage your subscription](#) | [Advertise](#) | [The Boston Globe Extras](#) | [The Boston Globe Store](#) | © NY Times Co.