

Designer trees come in all styles, sizes

By Tara Marion

"This is a really neat event, and seeing all those trees together is pretty impressive," said the chairwoman of the designer committee, Carol McGlenn, about the Festival of Trees.

"While the Festival of Trees is a fund raiser for the community, it's also a beautiful event to get you into the Christmas spirit," she said. With donations from local businesses, the committee members solicit designers to decorate trees.

"The designer's contribution is everything that is on the tree and the creative work, because they designed it and put it all together," said Kelly Presta, assistant chairwoman of the committee.

Tree sizes range from 3 feet to 7½ feet and there are 43 trees at festival this year. Although the designers can come up with their own themes for their trees, "the festival has an outdoor feel to it this year," McGlenn said.

In fact, the "call of the wild" will be heard at the festival with a tree by Jacobson's of Kalamazoo that is decorated in a jungle motif. According to Robert Waltz, visual display assistant, "We've got such fun things that I think it's going to be pretty impressive."

Because animal prints are so important in fashion this year, Jacobson's decked their tree with zebra and tiger stripes, leopard spots, peacock and pheasant feathers and textures like raffia and burlap.

When one of his distributors presented him with hand-painted, papier-mâché zebra-striped and leopard-spotted balls, Waltz said his response was "Wow, we like those—we want that!"

Another tree designer, David Crawford, assistant manager of the Bloomin' Shop in Otsego, said his 7 ½-foot creation is "going to be a fun, whimsical type of tree this year."

Crawford's tree decorations are all related to gingerbread men, Christmas cakes or candies in traditional colors of red, green and gold.

"I think what makes it unique is the ornaments I use on the tree," Crawford said. "They're always things that you don't normally find at most stores."

Crawford has participated in the festival for six of its seven years and titles this tree, "Christmas Me Gingerly."

"Celebration of Life" is the name of another tree in display at this year's festival. "It's kind of what life is all about," said its designer, Brenda Wine Harrington, owner of B. Wine Designs in Portage.

Harrington said she was inspired to create the tree after staying at her cottage up north. There, she discovered her passion for relaxing and enjoying life and thought, "What a great theme for a tree!"

The result is a folk-art-style 7½-foot tree decorated with handmade wooden ornaments in burgundy, green and gold.

Presta said the festival is a unique way to get ideas for your own tree. "It's really pretty to go look at more than 40 decorated trees—most of which are done professionally."

The festival is also an enchanting event for children, according to McGlenn. "Their eyes become big and round when they come in. They're just so lit up and excited about seeing all the different trees."