

Friendship Tree gives visitors another way to show support

By Tara Marion

As the holiday season approaches, we are often reminded that “it is better to give than to receive,” but the fact of the matter is that while gift-giving can certainly be a joy, there is nothing quite like being on the receiving end of the perfect present.

At this year’s Festival of Trees, patrons can have the best of both worlds by purchasing an ornament off the Friendship Tree. This unique tree differs from the rest of the designer trees in that patrons purchase single ornaments off the trimmings. It bears 50 hand-carved, star-shaped wooden ornaments, which will be sold for \$50 each.

When an ornament is sold and removed from the tree, the Junior League replaces it with a star-shaped cutout with the buyer’s name on it. “It’s just another way that one can support and be a friend of the Festival of Trees,” explained Cindy Mein, one of the co-chairs of this year’s event. Look for the tree near the Festival of Trees bank, which is where all business is conducted.

The ornaments were carved and generously donated by members of the Kalamazoo Valley Woodcarvers Guild, a group of woodcarvers who get together to promote the art of woodcarving and display their craft.

Woodcarvers Guild member Wesley Merriman said that all 50 stars share the same natural finish and resemble the shape of either a snowflake or a cross, but after that, every star is different.

Merriman noted that each star is uniquely handcrafted by a different member of the guild, with some stars having five or six points, while others might have eight or 10. Many of them have decorative elements created on the surface by chip carving and wood burning. Chip carving is a style of wood carving in which knives are used to remove selected chips of wood from the project in a single piece, he explained, while wood burning is the art or process of producing designs on the wood or by using heated tools or a fine flame.

The Friendship Tree was re-inspired by the festival’s move from Wings Stadium to the Radisson Plaza Hotel. At each of the first six festivals, which were held at the Wings Stadium Annex, there was a Friendship Tree with friendship ornaments. “When the festival moved from the Annex to Wings Stadium proper, the idea seemed to have gotten lost in the confusion of moving,” Mein said, “and the last six years of the event lacked a Friendship Tree.” “With the new move to downtown,” Mein said, “the Junior League wanted to make sure that it did not overlook the popular attraction again.”

The Friendship Tree is just one example of this year’s renewal of old traditions at the festival. Another is this year’s theme, “Come Join the Magic ...Downtown,” which plays off the festival’s first-year theme, “Come Join the Magic.”

The holiday season invites us to celebrate the spirit of giving. Come and be part of the magic happening downtown this year by giving to the Junior League through the purchase of a friendship ornament. The money you spend on the ornament will help the Junior League spread its magic, by giving back to our community. You give, they receive, they give, we all receive. That’s the magic of the Junior League and this year’s Festival of Trees.