

Raffles, People's Choice Awards fun for visitors and designers alike

By Tara Marion

Two special ways attendees can really get involved in the festival is through their purchase of raffle tickets and by casting their votes in the People's Choice Awards.

This year's raffle prizes include a 7½ foot tree, 6½ foot tree, a 3 foot tree, a restaurant tree, a mini tree, a wreath, a vignette, a gingerbread house and a children's playhouse.

The Junior League usually picks items from the various decorating categories by looking for what has mass appeal. "The idea is obviously then that they will raise more money as a raffle than to sell them individually," said Kathie Quinn, designer of the 6½ raffle tree, the "Harry Potter" tree.

Quinn, who designed the tree with her daughter, Eileen Abbate, said the tree is going to be a "magical, fun experience." Its decorations are all related to the Potter books' setting and characters, such as cats, owls, golden snitches and broomsticks. With the tree will come a full set of Harry Potter books.

The 4½ foot restaurant tree is another raffle prize that should create high demand. It comes filled with area gift certificates, including the Olive Garden, Red Lobster, Black Swan, Epic Bistro and Ample Pantry. While the tree is also decorated with lights and some ornaments, the basic appeal of the tree is the gift certificates. Most gift certificates are good for amounts ranging from \$25 to \$100.

The raffle playhouse was specially designed for the festival. Built by VanDyke Remodeling in Scotts, the playhouse was designed as a cute little cottage befitting this year's Candyland theme. The yearly raffle for the playhouse "is usually a huge draw," said Katie Gilbert, chairperson of the festival's designer committee.

To purchase the \$2 raffle tickets, visitors need only to ask the Junior League hostess stationed in front of the playhouse.

All other raffle prize tickets, said Gilbert, are only \$1. Winners will be announced at 4 p.m. on Nov. 12, and they do not need to be present to win. All raffle prizes will be delivered to the winners' homes, said Gilbert.

"It's just a neat way to entertain people, she added, "because they usually get excited about the opportunity to win something."

Visitors to the festival also seem to get excited about the People's Choice Awards. Quinn explained, "To be chosen for People's Choice means that all of the people who walked through festival looked at your tree, wreath or whatever (your design was), and said they thought, "That's the coolest thing at festival.""

Every designer category—trees, gingerbreads, wreaths, etc.—has its own top winner, who was chosen by the highest number of visitor votes.

Having a creation receive the People's Choice Award, noted Gilbert, "that's got to give designers a really good feeling and make them want to participate again next year."

Winners receive a plaque that designates not only the item that they designed but also that they were the People's Choice winners for that particular year. The names of the winners will also be published later in the Kalamazoo Gazette.

Upon entering the festival, visitors receive a People's Choice ballot along with their program. While some hosts and hostesses stationed throughout the festival many remind and encourage visitors to vote, Gilbert said regular festival goers often do not need any encouragement.

"They come ready with their ballots," she said, "so it's something that they definitely go for right away."

Before leaving, "Festival goers should turn their ballots into the festival bank, which is located at the center of the stadium," said Gilbert.