

# Christmas 'Magic' lights up Willamette Heritage Center



A lighted wagon crosses a bridge as thousands of lights illuminated Mission Mill Museum for the Magic at the Mill celebration in 2010. / THOMAS PATTERSON / Statesman Journal file

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The Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill will be enveloped in Christmas magic Wednesday through Dec. 23.

An endless supply of twinkling lights will lead visitors from areas inside and out where they can enjoy all the diverse music, activities and holiday spirit offered during "Magic at the Mill."

"It's a Salem tradition. It's the 13th year we've done it," Heritage Center Executive Director Peter Booth said of the event that welcomes almost 5,000 visitors during five December evenings each year.

"We display these lights to enhance the beauty of our 14 historic buildings. It's a several-month project to get all the lights up on all the buildings, the fence and trees around here. And, it's all within a historic ambiance you can't duplicate anywhere else," he said.

"Five nights of magic" is how Booth describes the annual event. He said that by surveying guests as they exit, the event planners have identified what pleases the crowd the most. Hands down, kid's activities are the most popular, Booth said.

This year, Booth highlighted free activities for kids such as having a pen-and-ink family silhouette created, similar to the historic portraiture seen throughout the museum. Silhouettes are free with admission, so is the chance to make reindeer food.

A new activity this year is writing cards or letters to a company of U.S. Marines serving in Afghanistan.

Though the next new offering this year is aimed at adults, it should be no less popular, as the Salem Big Band always is a big hit when playing yesterday's dance favorites at the Mill.

"We've never had the Big Band during Magic at the Mill," Booth said. "That's going to be neat," he added.

The popular group provides the event's finishing touch 7:30 to 10 p.m. Dec. 23.

Visitors can catch many other musical performances during the magical five days, as well. Scheduled musicians include Figs & Thistle, Madrigal Singers and Salvation Army Band. Festival Chorale entertains in their historic costumes both Thursday and Saturday.

See the full schedule of music and family-friendly activities online at [www.magicatthemill.org](http://www.magicatthemill.org). The music does change each evening, but visits from Santa are constant. Parents also should be certain that their kiddos get to see the Thomas the Tank train engine and model train.

"It's always a big hit for the kids," Booth said.

Adults can visit the museum's gift shop for made-in-Oregon gifts that include selections from the largest supply of Salem-area history books.

Food and drinks are available at the museum's café, with sit-down eating. Booth recommends calling ahead for a seating reservation if you plan a meal during event evenings.

Tickets for evening entry are available at Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill, 1313 Mill St. SE.