

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to open Christmas light show this week

By Lily Avery
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Grab your coats, hats and mittens and a little holiday spirit, because Christmas is coming early to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds this year for the second annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights.

Officially debuting on Thanksgiving night, Thursday, Nov. 23, the show is a unique affair to the North Georgia Mountains, and the only one of its kind in the area.

To celebrate the impending kick off of the festivities at the Fairgrounds, the Towns County Chamber of Commerce brought out the yellow ribbon and giant scissors for a ribbon cutting at the Fairgrounds on Wednes-

day, Nov. 15, along with Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Hiwassee Mayor-elect Liz Ordiales and several invested GMF volunteers, all excited for the first walk-thru of this year's light show.

"The first year, we did \$150,000 worth of lights and displays," said Thomason. "This year we added another \$50,000. It's a lot of lights and a lot of new displays. We're really excited for it and we're so grateful for everyone who has helped make this possible, all the sponsors and everyone who has supported Mountain Country Christmas in Lights."

Just like last year, patrons will be free to roam the Fairgrounds, meandering through the historic Pioneer Village and craft booths, and

following the row of peppermint cane lights on the self-guided tour of the light show.

Guests can expect Christmas music singing in the air, with only the sweet crooning of live holiday carolers to break the "Jingle Bell Rock" and "White Christmas" renditions. And down at Exhibit Hall, guests will be treated to holiday classics on antique organs, performed by the one and only Towns County Historian Jerry Taylor, all while sipping on delicious hot chocolate and cider.

"We have a lot of new additions this year, new displays and new lights," said Thomason. "We also have a lot more of the craft booths filled this year. As of right now, we have 68 booths and we only have 15 booths that are empty. We have civic organizations,



The Towns County Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights with the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and friends on Wednesday, Nov. 15. Photo/Lily Avery

businesses, churches and individuals, all coming out for the light show. They're selling food. They're selling crafts. Some of the businesses are just decorating their booths for the advertisement.

"We also have the Eudora Animal Farms petting zoo. There will be around 18 different animals and it's a 20 x 40 tent. They'll be offering camel rides and pony rides. They're going to be here starting the first weekend of December, up until Christmas. People can buy feed and feed the animals, so it'll be really nice."

And no holiday festivity would be complete without the jolly elf himself, Santa Claus, who will be available for pictures and plenty of Christmas gift requests.

For those wishing to come see the show who are unable to walk around the Fairgrounds, golf carts are

available for a driving tour of the grounds. To have access to such carts, simply wait by the front gate when entering the light show.

"Mountain Country Christmas in Lights" will be open every Thursday through Sunday, 6 p.m. until 9 p.m., from Thanksgiving evening until Dec. 30. Tickets for the show are \$5 per person and all children under 12 years of age get in for free.

Thomason and the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds would like to extend a warm welcome to all to come out and enjoy a festive evening of lights and holiday spirit at the Fairgrounds.

"We want everyone to come on down and enjoy the beautiful lights at the Fairgrounds," said Thomason. "And remember, Jesus is the reason for the season."



'Tis the season at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiwassee. Photo/Lily Avery

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most about this is being able to share the stories of our cancer survivors and to give them a voice. We want their stories out there and this is a good way to do that."

Featuring designs donated by Sharon's Fashions, 10 local cancer survivors strutted the runway, told their stories and enjoyed an evening of fellowship and bonding, with a light dinner as well, donated by Chick-fil-A.

Fashionistas last Saturday included: Pat Cook, Glenda Taylor, Carla Drake, Caroline Legg, Judith Williams, Kay Jones, Betty Easter, Mary Nicole Graphman, Susan Miles and Janet Carlin.

"We've been so blessed with everyone who has helped put this together," said McGraw. "Ticket sales were outrageous. We were actually worried about not having enough food. We don't know if we'll have it again next year. Who knows."

"But we are always looking for volunteers so if someone comes along and wants to help, we would love



The always fashionable Betty Easter. Photo/Lily Avery

to have them."

And while the purpose of the event was to showcase and celebrate the survivors, it also served as a fundraiser for the upcoming 2018 Relay For Life that is just around the corner. According to McGraw, kickoff for 2018 Relay regular fundraising will start after the New Year but they are not opposed to raising funds now to help find a cure for this awful disease.

"We're getting ready to kickoff 2018," said McGraw. "The theme for next year is Lasso the Cure, so we want to go ahead and get people excited for that. We just have sent out flyers for our 2018 sponsors and we have our dates set for kickoff and that sort of thing."

"We actually already have some teams registered - we always want more - but we're excited about what the future holds for us."

Each year, Relay For Life raises millions of dollars toward the cost of lifesaving medical research, always with the prayer that one day there might be a cure.

And while there may not be a cure for cancer just yet, with the American Cancer Society and Relay For Life's annual fundraising efforts, there is definitely hope.

Sponsors for the evening included, but are not limited to: Budget Blinds, Kids Zone USA, Ingles, Foodland, Sharon E. Penner Origami Owl, Chick-fil-A, Sharon's Fashions and many more who donated gifts for door prizes.