



MILWAUKEE HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL

THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON

2025 MILWAUKEE HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL RECAP

For 27 seasons, the Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival presented by Johnson Financial Group has made spirits bright with its animated sculptures, interactive displays, and twinkling street décor. This brilliant holiday tradition attracted families to Downtown Milwaukee, November 20, 2025 – January 1, 2026. While here, visitors created holiday memories by attending the Festival's dynamic kickoff ceremony, dropping letters into Santa's Mailbox, jumping on the Jingle Bus, visiting with Santa at several events, and exploring the Ornament Trail. Here are a few highlights from the 2025 season.

KICKOFF CEREMONY SIGNALS START OF HOLIDAY MERRIMENT

3,100+ GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE

The Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival Kickoff Extravaganza presented by Johnson Financial Group is the city's biggest and brightest holiday show. Over 3,100 guests visited Pere Marquette Park for the celebration. Average dwell time was 75 minutes. Festivities began with pre-show entertainment by Kid Boogie Down. Following this dance warm-up, guests enjoyed performances by Mr. New York, characters from The Rep's "A Christmas Carol," Anita's Dance Center, The Squeezettes, cast members from Cirque du Soleil's "Twas the Night Before...," Marquette University's Gold 'n Blues, Miss Wisconsin, and Jenny Thiel. Fireworks and a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus topped off the night. Over 2,000 cookies and cups of hot cocoa were consumed, and 2,000 light-up wands were given away. In addition, guests were treated to free Jingle Bus rides post-show.



WISN 12 AIRS THE KICKOFF ON TWO NIGHTS

58,900+ IMPRESSIONS FOR "HOLIDAY LIGHTS KICKOFF: LIVE"

Hosted by WISN 12 news anchors Gerron Jordan and Diana Gutiérrez, "Holiday Lights Kickoff: Live" was once again a magical success. WISN 12 aired the kickoff ceremony live at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 20, thanks to support from Stein's Garden & Home. The show re-aired at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 23. In total, the station's two broadcasts netted 58,909 impressions and was #1 in the time period of its original airing for P25-54.

FOUR DECORATED PARKS REMAIN THE HIGHLIGHT

45,100+ GUESTS EXPLORED PARK DÉCOR

“Community Spirit Park” at Cathedral Square Park, “Felices Fiestas!” at Pere Marquette Park, “Santa’s Celebration Square powered by We Energies” at Zeidler Union Square, and “Slice of Ice Lights” at Red Arrow Park attracted over 45,100 pedestrians. Guests were drawn to the Festival’s larger-than-life sculptures and a collective half million lights. “Community Spirit Park” grew bigger and brighter as newly staked trees were decorated with handmade ornaments by over 2,000 students from 100 area schools.



STREET DÉCOR WELCOMES VISITORS

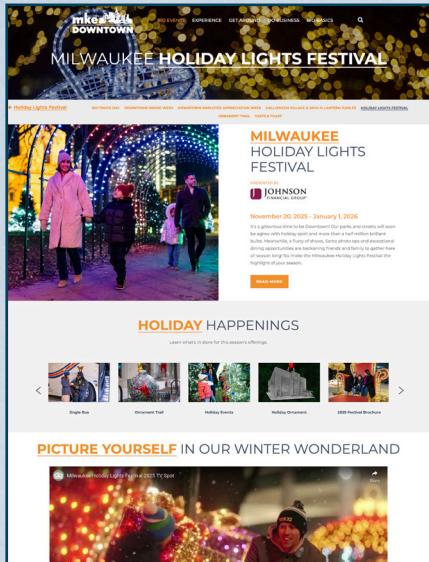
18 CHANDELIER LINED WISCONSIN AVENUE

Cascading chandeliers soared above 18 Wisconsin Avenue intersections and decorative sculptures embellished the harp lamps from 8th Street to Prospect Avenue. In addition, Milwaukee Downtown again partnered with Wisconsin Center District to bring a 24-foot holiday tree to Baird Community Commons.

WEBSITE REMAINS GO-TO RESOURCE

NEARLY 86,000 WEBSITE SESSIONS

Between October 29, 2025 and January 1, 2026, 85,869 sessions and 115,161 pageviews were accrued on the Festival’s website. Approximately 50% of sessions came from organic search, 25% were direct, 13% were referred, 4% came from organic social, 3% from paid search, 3% from paid social, and 2% came from other sources.



JINGLE BUS BOARDING MOVES TO RED ARROW PARK

3,700+ RIDERS JUMPED ON THE JINGLE BUS

Visitors were acquainted with Downtown’s lights and sights via the return of the Jingle Bus – a motorcoach bus operated by KB Excursions. Milwaukee Downtown’s Public Service Ambassadors narrated the 40-minute tour, which departed from a new warming house location at Red Arrow Park sponsored by Verizon. Guests enjoyed cookies and hot cocoa from Biggby Coffee, discounted parking courtesy of Interstate Parking, and ice-skating beginning Dec. 19. Spanish tours were also offered on Sunday nights through a partnership with Estamos Unidos. Despite eliminating Thursday service and only canceling one night due to inclement weather, ridership grew 13.5%.



SANTA'S MAILBOX CONTINUES TO CONNECT GENERATIONS

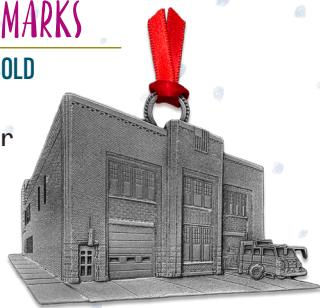
1,300+ PERSONALIZED LETTERS MAILED TO AREA CHILDREN

Thanks to support from Educators Credit Union, Serving Older Adults, and National Letter Carriers Association Branch 2, over 1,300 letters were personalized and mailed to children in our community. Letters were received at Santa's Mailbox in Cathedral Square Park and at a letter-writing station in Red Arrow Park during Jingle Bus hours.

ORNAMENT SERIES CELEBRATES DOWNTOWN LANDMARKS

360+ ORNAMENTS OF MILWAUKEE FIRE DEPARTMENT'S STATION #1 SOLD

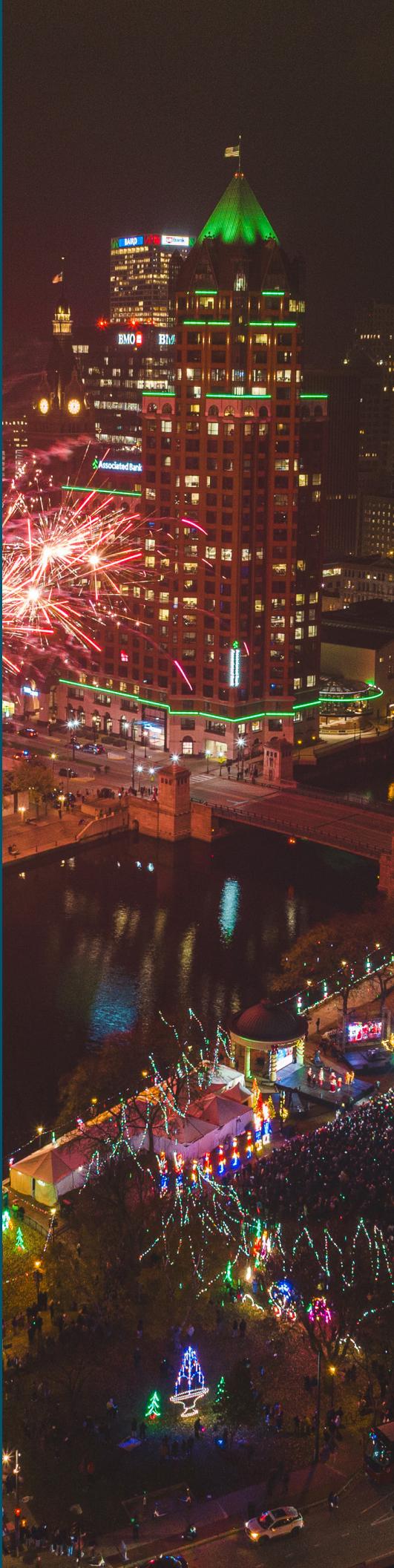
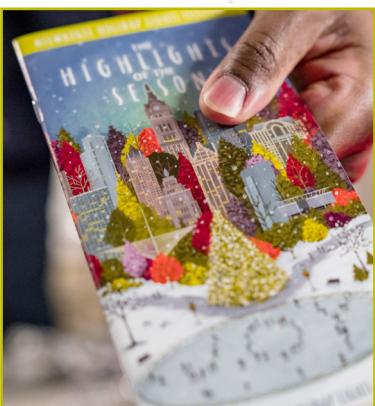
Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival ornaments continue to be one-of-a-kind keepsakes. Each year features an iconic downtown landmark cast in pewter. The 2025 edition was Station #1 of the Milwaukee Fire Department. Over the course of the season, 518 ornaments were purchased across the series, which now totals 25 editions.



44-PAGE GUIDE HIGHLIGHTS HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

9,000 BROCHURES DISTRIBUTED

The Festival produced a comprehensive events guide highlighting shows, sporting events, and art exhibitions. The brochure was made available online and mailed to Milwaukee Downtown's database of stakeholders, past festgoers, and friends of the organization.



ORNAMENT TRAIL EXPANDS

20 HAND-PAINTED BAUBLES LINED WISCONSIN AVENUE AND BEYOND

The Ornament Trail delighted pedestrians for the third straight year. The art installation returned with five new ornaments, bringing the collection's total to 20 ornaments. Each four-foot round bauble was hand-painted by a different artist with local or regional ties to the city. While the trail extended along Wisconsin Avenue, several ornaments appeared in nearby corridors including Water Street, Broadway in the Historic Third Ward, and on the Marquette University campus and in Davidson Park in the Near West Side neighborhood. An activity guide with coupons to nearby businesses was produced to help guide trail explorers.



SANTA, MRS. CLAUS, AND SARAH FIEREK HIT THE TOWN

TWO CHRISTMAS CAVALCADES DELIGHTED SPECTATORS

Festivalgoers received a delightful glimpse of Santa and Mrs. Claus during Santa's Christmas Cavalcade. On the first night, Santa, Mrs. Claus, and jazz singer Sarah Fierek appeared aboard the Historic Third Ward's vintage firetruck. The following week, the cavalcade entailed three pop-up locations. Accompanied by the Grinch, the trio visited the Milwaukee Public Market, Red Arrow Park, and 3rd St. Market Hall.

FRIDGID FORECAST CANCELS COCOA WITH THE CLAUSES

2,000+ COOKIES SHARED WITH DOWNTOWN WORKFORCE

Cocoa with the Clauses, an outdoor meet-and-greet with Santa, Mrs. Claus, and a crew of North Pole characters, was canceled this year due to subzero temperatures. With an abundance of goodies already on hand, Santa and Milwaukee Downtown's Public Service Ambassadors visited three office locations bearing 2,000 cookies courtesy of Educators Credit Union.



PAID MEDIA REACHES FAMILIES AT HOME, IN THE CAR, AND AT WORK

6.8+ MILLION PAID MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

The Festival partnered with WISN 12 and B97.3 FM as its official media partners. Other print, broadcast, and digital outlets were utilized to target women 35–64 within a 15-mile radius of Downtown Milwaukee.



PUBLIC RELATIONS BUILDS AWARENESS OF THINGS TO DO

\$6+ MILLION IN EARNED MEDIA COVERAGE ACCRUED

Throughout the six-week festival, more than 280 mentions were obtained through broadcast, print and web outlets, resulting in \$6,023,360 in earned media coverage.



SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS SOAR AS FAMILIES SEEK WINTER ACTIVITIES

1.37+ MILLION IMPRESSIONS RECEIVED

509,507 UNIQUE PROFILES REACHED

1,170+ NEW FOLLOWERS GAINED

3,760+ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS IN THE LATINO COMMUNITIES

Social media is a vital tool for informing consumers of the plethora of things to do downtown. During the Festival, the organic campaign generated over 1.37 million impressions!



More information available at www.milwaukeeholidaylights.com.

For sponsorship opportunities, contact Isabel Ullrich at iullrich@milwaukee-downtown.com.