



# 2023

## MILWAUKEE HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL RECAP

For 25 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 16, 2023 – January 1, 2024. 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 a new Ornament Trail. Here are a few highlights from the 2023 season.

### KICKOFF CEREMONY SHATTERS ATTENDANCE RECORDS

#### 5,400+ Guests Gathered to Celebrate 25th Season

Unseasonably mild temperatures drew over 5,400 attendees to Pere Marquette Park for the 25th anniversary kickoff celebration. The historic night included live music, dance performances, fireworks, and a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus. Over 2,000 cookies and 2,000 cups of hot cocoa were consumed, and 500 T-shirts and 500 light-up wands were given away. In addition, guests were treated to free Jingle Bus rides post-show. Vendors also expressed record sales, with one vendor selling nearly 3,000 items.

### WISN 12 AIRS THE KICKOFF CEREMONY FOR THREE NIGHTS

#### 87,000+ Viewers Tuned in to “Holiday Lights: Live”

WISN 12, the Festival’s television sponsor, aired the kickoff ceremony live at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 16, thanks to support from Stein’s Garden & Home. The show re-aired at 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 19 and 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 24. In total, the station’s three broadcasts netted over 87,969 impressions for adults 18+ — a 57% increase over last year.



### DECORATIONS PROVIDE SPARKLING BACKDROP

#### 500,000+ Lights Illuminated Downtown

“Community Spirit Park” at Cathedral Square Park, “¡Felices Fiestas!” at Pere Marquette Park and “Santa’s Celebration Square powered by We Energies” at Zeidler Union Square continued to delight guests with larger-than-life sculptures and a collective half million lights. Wisconsin Avenue shone bright with its succession of cascading chandeliers and Red Arrow Park received a twinkling treatment, too. Meanwhile, the mood at “Community Spirit Park” carried on as over 90 trees were decorated by schools and community organizations.



A  
**BRILLIANT**  
HOLIDAY TRADITION  
/ 25 YEARS /





#### WEBSITE REMAINS GO-TO RESOURCE FOR AREA MOMS

### 86,000+ Web Sessions

Between November 1, 2023 and January 1, 2024, 86,397 sessions and 176,684 pageviews were accrued on the Festival's website. The top 10 origins of those seeking info were Chicago (20k), Milwaukee (17k), undefined (4.3k), Denver (1.7k), Madison (1.3k), Dallas (1.3k), Waukesha (1.1k), Wauwatosa (1.1k), Oak Creek (1k) and Brookfield (838).

#### JINGLE BUS TOURS CONVENIENTLY LINK SIGHTS

### 6,000+ 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 Coach USA. Riders purchased tickets in advance online. Meanwhile, four local actors were hired to narrate the 40-minute tour, which departed from the Courtyard Milwaukee Downtown. Guests enjoyed food and beverage options from the adjacent 3rd Street Market Hall, along with discounted parking thanks to Interstate Parking. Spanish tours were also offered on select nights through a partnership with Estamos Unidos.



#### SANTA'S MAILBOX CONTINUES TO CONNECT GENERATIONS

### 1,650+ Handwritten Letters Delivered to Area Children

Thanks to support from Educators Credit Union, Serving Older Adults and National Letter Carriers Association Branch 2, over 1,650 letters were personalized and mailed to children in our community. Letters were received at Santa's Mailbox in Cathedral Square Park.

#### ORNAMENT SERIES CELEBRATES DOWNTOWN LANDMARKS

### 225+ Pfister Hotel ornaments were sold in 2023

Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival ornaments continue to be one-of-a-kind keepsakes. Each year features an iconic downtown landmark cast in pewter. The 2023 edition was The Pfister Hotel. Over the course of the season, nearly 350 ornaments were purchased across the series, which now totals 23 editions.



#### 44-PAGE GUIDE HIGHLIGHTS HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

### 7,500 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  
ADDS NEW INTEREST TO FESTIVAL DÉCOR**

**15 Hand-Painted Ornaments  
Lined Wisconsin Avenue**

New this year, festgoers strolled the brand-new Ornament Trail lining Wisconsin Avenue and a portion of Water Street. The installation featured 15 super-sized ornaments hand painted by acclaimed artists. An activity guide was created to keep kids busy with coloring pages and puzzles. The guide also included coupons for businesses along the trail. 2,500 editions were printed.



**SANTA, MRS. CLAUS AND SARAH FIEREK  
ADD TO DOWNTOWN'S MERRIMENT**

**Two Christmas Cavalcades  
Delight Spectators**

Festivalgoers received a delightful glimpse of Santa and Mrs. Claus aboard the Historic Third Ward's vintage firetruck on two select nights in December. Jazz singer Sarah Fierek tagged along to provide the festive soundtrack.



## CHRISTMAS' MOST FAVORITE COUPLE CONTINUES TO CHARM

### 1,000+ Participants Attended Cocoa with the Clauses

Families gathered at Cathedral Square Park to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus. Elves and other holiday characters were available for this annual cocoa klatch presented by Madison Medical Affiliates. More than 300 professional portraits were taken of families. Free hot cocoa and cookies were provided (75¢ of each!), and over 500 goodie bags were distributed to kids.



## NEW YEAR'S EVE EVENT SUPPORTS PUBLIC ART

### 225 Guests Attend End-of-Year Bash

Milwaukee Downtown and Events By Design collaborated again on NYE MKE. Held at Discovery World, the event featured nonstop entertainment, an open bar, food stations, live art and performances. Proceeds from the event will benefit Milwaukee Downtown, BID #21's upcoming public art initiatives.

## PAID MEDIA REACHED FAMILIES AT HOME, IN THE CAR AND AT WORK

### 4.2+ Million Paid Media Impressions

The Festival continued to partner with WISN 12 and 95.7 BIG 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

### \$12+ Million Impressions in Earned Media

Throughout the six-week festival, over \$1.05+ million in earned media coverage and 12+ million impressions were obtained through broadcast, print and web outlets.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS SOAR AS FAMILIES SEEK WINTER ACTIVITIES

### 970,000+ Impressions Generated

### 1,850+ New Followers Gained

### 81,000+ Social Engagements in the Latinx 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 900,000 impressions!

More information available at [www.milwaukeeholidaylights.com](http://www.milwaukeeholidaylights.com).  
For sponsorship opportunities, contact **Rebecca Sue Button** at [rbutton@milwaukeedowntown.com](mailto:rbutton@milwaukeedowntown.com).