

Bethalto Christmas Village adding craft sales, live nativity to this year's event

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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BETHALTO - This year, the Bethalto Christmas Village is adding a small craft fair and a live nativity to its display.

Created by Jane Ahasay with help from volunteers and the village, the Bethalto Christmas Village is a free, walk-through Christmas attraction for the entire family. The live nativity includes a petting zoo, and guests are invited to view small cottages sponsored and decorated by several local businesses. This year, the amount of those cottages grew from six to 10. There are also 75 "giving trees" in the village this year as well.

"Those are all decorated and on display until next Sunday, when we give them all to families across the area who may need a Christmas tree," Ahasay said.

The village is located in Central Park on Prairie Street, which is behind the Bethalto Village Hall. It is also the park, which hosts the Bethalto Homecoming Carnival every year. The village will continue in all of its holiday glory from this Friday, Dec. 8 - Sun. Dec. 10 from 5-8 p.m., and next weekend on Friday, Dec. 15 and Sat. Dec. 16, also from 5-8 p.m.

This weekend, the event will coincide with the Bethalto Victorian Christmas Walk, which Ahasay said would help create an abundance of Christmas memories for all who attend.

Last year, Ahasay estimated the event drew as many as 3,000 visitors - a number hard to tally due to admission being free. She said, this year, with the timing to coincide with the Christmas Walk as well as the additional decorations, she expects even more people.

"We expect numbers to be greater this year," she said. "There will be a lot of photo opportunities for families. We want everyone in the village to come out and make Christmas memories with us."

Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow has been incredibly supportive during the process, she said.

"He has been side by side with us the whole time, helping us with everything - even wiring up the lights to the trees," Ahasay said. "The trustees have been wonderful as well. This is such a great way to showcase community."

Other activities at the free event include Mr. and Mrs. Claus, a barrel train for the kids and coffee and hot cocoa.

