



Countdown to CherryT Ball Drop

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TRAVERSE CITY — The CherryT Ball got a facelift for 2015.

The giant red illuminated “cherry” that will drop at midnight in downtown Traverse City to welcome in the New Year recently was rewired and now is programmable.

“We went high-tech,” said Al Pakcun, head of the Team Elmer’s crane and rigging division, which handles the ball for the CherryT Ball Drop. “The lights are going to act as a strobe. We can make the red lights flash in different sequences.”

Besides making the ball looking like it's oscillating, the lights also can form graphics, said Tonya Wildfong, Elmer’s Crane and Dozer marketing director and a member of the CherryT Ball Drop committee.

“As the ball drops, it will be able to change from '2014' to '2015,’” she said.

This year’s event will take place at the new permanent location at Park and Front streets, where it moved temporarily last year from its previous location at Cass and Front streets.

And for the first time attendees can interact by posting their pictures, messages and New Year's greetings to a 6-by-12-foot “Jumbotron” social interaction screen that updates every 30 seconds.

“Someone could take selfies in the crowd or anywhere in the world, for that matter, and post them if they use #cherryt,” said committee member Dean Rose. “It will hang up on a truss system, and there will be a monitoring system to make sure nothing (inappropriate) goes up.”

The family-friendly event will feature three parties this year, including ticketed “Magic 4 Humans” and “Magic of the Mind” shows at 7 p.m. at the City Opera House and 9:30 p.m. at the Park Place Hotel’s “Top of the Park.” The latter is part of a “Magic at Midnight” party that also features drinks, dancing, appetizers and a prime view of the CherryT Ball Drop and fireworks at midnight.

Both events star Traverse City-based international magician Ben Whiting, who has built a career around the mysteries of the mind.

Tickets range from \$10 each to \$200 per couple and will help the CherryT Ball Drop be self-sufficient, Rose said.

“We try not to ask the community for money to put on this event. If we sell out the Park Place and the Opera House we can pay for this event next year,” he said.

The parties also are a way to get people downtown earlier on New Year’s Eve and to give those with children and others who can't celebrate late into the night something to do. The street party, with entertainment by DJ Scot Gardner, begins at 10:30 p.m.

The CherryT Ball Drop is a fundraiser for local charities, this year including Goodwill Industries of Northern Michigan, the Father Fred Foundation, Child and Family Services of Northwestern Michigan, and Meals on Wheels in Grand Traverse County.

Revelers are encouraged to bring a cash donation of \$3 or three non-perishable food items to drop off at one of the event’s three “entrances.”

Last year’s event attracted an estimated 12,000-13,000 people and collected the equivalent of 12,000 pounds of food for local food banks, Rose said.

For tickets or more information about parking, traffic and shuttle routes, and street and lot closures, visit www.cherryballdrop.com.

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