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Ring in 2019: CherryT Ball Drop back for 10th New Year's celebration

BY STEPHANIE SHOMIN sshomin@record-eagle.com Dec 28, 2018



Record-Eagle/Tessa Lighty Traverse City celebrated the new year with the annual CherryT Ball Drop.

Record-Eagle/Tessa Lighty



TRAVERSE CITY — Celebrate 2018 and ring in 2019 during the 10th annual CherryT Ball Drop in downtown Traverse City.

Gates open for the New Year's Eve party at 9:30 p.m. at the corner of Park and Front streets. An optional donation serves as admission, said Bailey Judson, director of special programs for the National Cherry Festival which organizes the event.

"We ask for a suggested \$3 donation," she said. "We won't turn people away. People are still allowed in, but our focus is on raising as much money for the Salvation Army as possible."

The first 2,400 donors will receive a new accessory: an LED light-up bracelet that the DJ controls with the music.

"It's new this year with the donation," Judson said. "We're really focusing on the music. It's a family-friendly event."

Salvation Army Community Resource Development Director Ruth Blick said the organization doesn't have a specific goal in mind for the donations. Any amount helps support its community meals, food pantry, youth initiatives, Good Neighbor emergency assistance program and Pathway of Hope, she said.

"It's where it's needed most," she added. "The funds from the entrance come back to the Salvation Army in Traverse City, which means all funds stay here to help our families."

The organization collected about \$6,839 in 2017 and \$5,062 in 2016 from the event, plus some food donations.

Blick said the impact goes beyond the holiday season.

"People think of us at Christmas, but it's a perfect way to ring in the new year," she said. "It's a wonderful way to remind our community that we're here in 2019. Our services go year round."

The CherryT Ball Drop has been a "party with a purpose" since the beginning, Blick said.

"It's fun. It's family friendly and a good way for the community to come together. We're grateful and blessed to be part of it again," she said.

Entertainment starts at 10 p.m. after a brief welcome. DJ Scott Gardener provides tunes while attendees wait for the countdown to midnight and the drop of the signature CherryT Ball and short fireworks show.

The 600-pound cherry features about 13,000 red lights, with green lights making up the stem. Team Elmer's — which stores, programs and maintains the cherry — begins setting up around dinnertime Dec. 31, Judson said.

Attendance ranges from 8,000 to 12,000 each year, depending on the weather. Those who can't attend the event can watch a live video on the CherryT Ball Drop Facebook page.

Judson's advice for the celebration: "Dress warm because it's always colder than you expect."

If you go:

Park Street and part of West Front Street will close at 5 p.m. Dec. 31. Drivers along these streets should plan to move their vehicles before then.

The city's parking decks will be open late to accommodate the event.

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