

From festivals to concerts to tree trimming,
these quintessential local traditions bring home
the true spirit of the season

CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS IN GREENWICH

BY JILL JOHNSON

Light It Up!

TOWN HALL TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

"Let there be light!" That's the proclamation that used to accompany the lighting of the Christmas tree in town, an annual tradition that supposedly dates back to just after World War II (though no one—not even some retirees in Florida—can confirm that. Does anyone out there remember?). Another rumor has it that sometimes a rabbi spoke before the illumination of this traditionally Christian symbol. This also remains unproven, but it is a fact that the "Christmas Tree Lighting" has evolved into the "Tree Lighting" over the years. The younger set won't miss the reverend or rabbi because Santa and Mrs. Claus, Rudolf and Frosty will be in attendance offering free candy canes and mechanical reindeer rides. Greenwich High School Choir sings carols each year at this fun event.

DATE & TIME: December 4, 3:45 to 4:30 p.m.

INFORMATION: greenwichct.org

Old-Fashioned Night

FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL, OLD GREENWICH

"Ten years ago the merchants in Old Greenwich

organized this festival as a thank you to the community for their patronage over the years," explains John Martello of Sam's Package Store. "It was such a success that it became an annual tradition." Each store offers something different, from wine tasting at Sam's to free roses at the flower shop. "It's one of our favorite traditions," says Old Greenwich resident, Kim-Marie Evans, the mother of four. "The kids look forward to it every year, and they know exactly which shops have hot cocoa or magicians. The toy store gives away a toy; and their favorite, the bagel shop, turns into a kid's disco!" The event also features horse-drawn carriage rides and, of course, the lighting of the Christmas tree.

DATE & TIME: December 5, 6 to 8 p.m.

Fun at the Fair

CHRISTMAS ON ROUND HILL

This holiday fair originated in the 1920s, when women would get together to knit, quilt and make an array of handcrafted items that would be sold at the fair. "We went retro about five years ago and restarted that tradition," says Linda Kinney, the administrator. Experienced teachers lead a class of

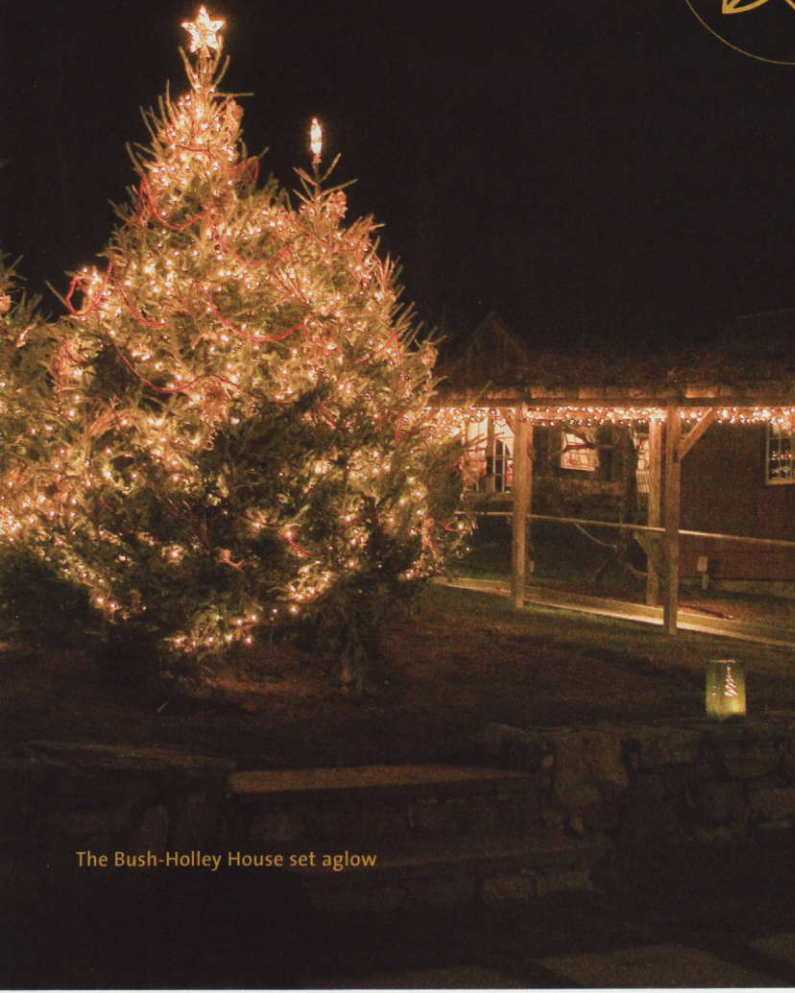
The Nutcracker at SUNY Purchase



The Audubon Center



The Bush-Holley House set aglow



First Congregational Church

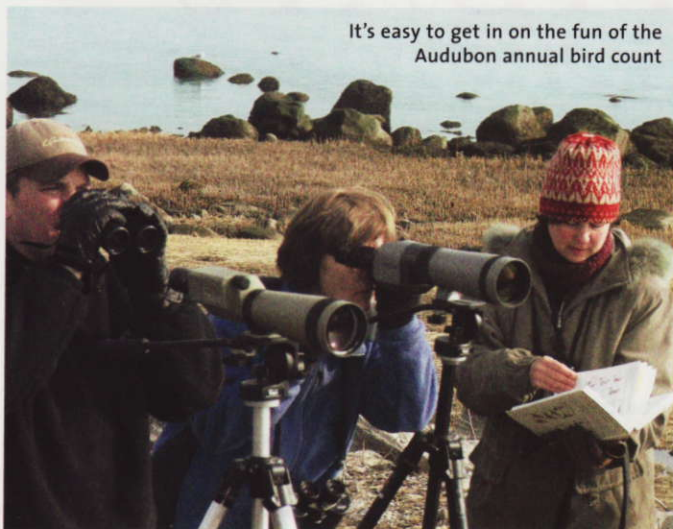


enthusiastic volunteers each week. This year's results include wooden wastebaskets, animal-shaped kids' stools, and Negoro Nuri-laquered picture frames. At the fair, kids will love the free magic shows (at noon and 2 p.m.), photos with Santa in his sleigh and train rides on the Round Hill Express. "A clever former sexton built the train using a tractor engine," says master crafter Alice O'Gorman. "It lasted thirty-five years and was only just refurbished."

DATE & TIME: Preview Party on December 4, 6 to 9 p.m. Fair on December 5, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

PLACE: Round Hill Community House, 397 Round Hill Road

INFORMATION: 869-1091, roundhillcommunitychurch.org



It's easy to get in on the fun of the Audubon annual bird count

Audubon Festivities

ANNUAL BIRD COUNT

In 1911, the year this tradition began, counters utilized a straightforward method of tallying birds: they shot them. "Whoever brought in the biggest pile of dead birds won the competition," says naturalist Brian O'Toole at Audubon Greenwich. The bird count has evolved over the years. No more guns or contest. "Now we just use binoculars," says O'Toole. One of the largest bird surveys in the country, the Christmas Bird Count will take place on Sunday, December 20, from midnight to midnight. The results help track changes in population and migration patterns. Participants can join a field team or just observe their backyard feeders. Different shifts accommodate both early birds and night owls.

INFORMATION: 869-5272, greenwich.audubon.org

WINTER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

If you'd prefer to count your blessings, Audubon, in conjunction with Musica Plenti, is hosting a feel-good festival during the first two weekends of December. "The solstice is a time for hope, for celebrating God's creations and nature," says Musica Plenti cofounder Joe Humphrey. "The music will reflect the theme of the birth and rebirth of the Earth. Also, let's face it, we've gone through incredibly tough economic times, which can make Christmas difficult. We want to remind people that not everything is wrapped up in material goods." Performers include the Greenwich Performing Arts Studio, Musica Plenti, the Bows and the Good News Gospel Choir. The sponsors hope this event will become an annual one. "We love the idea of bringing in the arts to celebrate the season and nature," says Karen Dixon, Audubon Greenwich director.

DATES: December 5, 6, 12 and 13

PLACE: Kiernan Hall at Audubon, Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road

INFORMATION: 637-3058, musicaplenti.org

Music in the Air

CHORAL SOCIETY CHRISTMAS CONCERT

This tradition dates back some eighty years. "We do festive music and serious classical music interspersed with carols and audience participation,"



Carols by Candlelight at Christ Church

JOANNE BOKKNIGHT



Professionals and amateurs alike sing together at the First Congregational Church.

BOB SMALL

says longtime Choral Society singer Anne Low. "This year we are doing a work by Stephen Paulus ["So Hallow'd Is the Time"], which we commissioned him to write for us in 1980. I have the original, autographed, handwritten score, so the song is nostalgic for me." The program also includes Libby Larsen's "Canticle of Mary."

DATES & TIMES: December 5, 4 p.m.; December 6, 4 and 7 p.m.

PLACE: Christ Church, 254 East Putnam Avenue

INFORMATION: 622-5136, greenwichchoralsociety.org



A packed house for the Stanwich Congregational Church's Messiah

SCOTT GREENLEE

STANWICH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH MESSIAH

This will be the fourth annual *Messiah* here, thanks to the spacious new church built a few years ago to replace the one built a few hundred years ago. "The old church was just too small. Sometimes modernizing fosters tradition," says Randall Atcheson, director of

music. Atcheson has conducted the *Messiah* in the area for the past twenty-five years, so it's certainly a longstanding personal tradition. He conducts the choir, soloists, and chamber orchestra, while also accompanying on the piano. "My hands are flying, my feet are flying," says Atcheson. "I love it!"

DATES & TIME: December 5, 3 p.m.

(followed by a Christmas tea)

PLACE: 202 Taconic Road

INFORMATION: stanwichchurch.org



Carols take on an international theme this year at St. Barnabas Church.

A CAROLER'S CHRISTMAS AT ST. BARNABAS CHURCH

This year the Concert Choir at St. Barnabas celebrates the joy of the season with international flair. Carols will be sung in French, Spanish and English. Conductor and Music Director Michael Roush explains: "As we know, the lovely traditions that we think of as an 'American Christmas' have actually come from other cultures and countries." Audience participation is a big part of the concert and all voices are welcome.

DATE & TIME: December 13, 5 p.m.

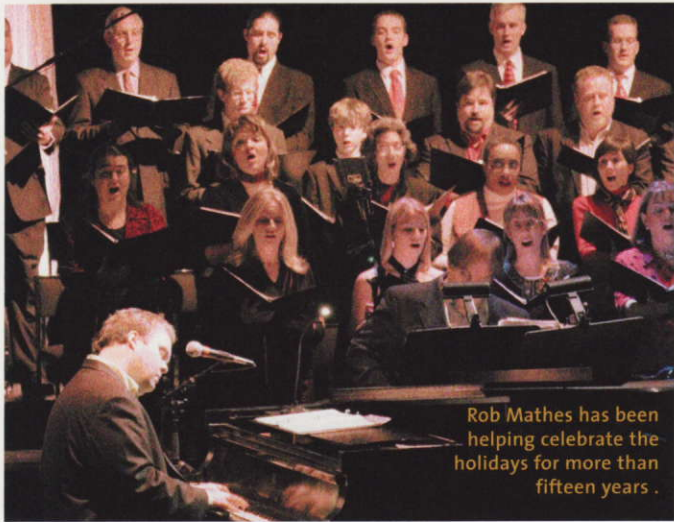
(followed by a post-concert reception)

PLACE: 954 Lake Avenue

INFORMATION: 661-5526, stbarnabasgreenwich.org

ROB MATHES CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Since 1993, Rob Mathes has made his Christmas concert an annual tradition. A documentary of the 1993 event, *I Want to Hear the Bells*, and another PBS TV special, *Christmas Is Coming: Rob Mathes and Friends*, have contributed to the Old Greenwich



Rob Mathes has been helping celebrate the holidays for more than fifteen years.

JOSEPH DERUVO, JR.

native's reputation as a legendary musician (not to mention his role as music director of this year's inaugural "We Are One" concert for President Barack Obama). "It's a real mix of styles and traditions—not your typical sing-along-to-carols concert," says T.D. Ellis, Rob's cousin, and owner of The Music Source in Old Greenwich. "The musicians playing with him are top rate: Will Lee from the David Letterman show is playing (bass); Shawn Pelton, the drummer from the *Saturday Night Live* band; guitarist Billy Masters; and a six- to eight-piece horn section." The concerts will benefit the Making Headway Foundation and the Max Scotti Fund in support of brain cancer research and treatment.

DATES & TIMES: December 18 and 19, 8 p.m.; December 20, 3 p.m.

PLACE: The Performing Arts Center at SUNY Purchase, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, New York

INFORMATION & TICKETS: 914-251-6200 (box office), 698-0444 (*The Music Source*), artscenter.org, robmathesmusic.com or robmathes.com; \$40 and \$55

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH MESSIAH

This performance, in its forty-third year, combines the talent of a twenty-piece professional orchestra, professional soloists, a community chorus of 100 singers, and former Greenwich Symphony concert master Dorothy Happel. "Everyone who comes thinks it's magical," says John Stansell, director of music. "The orchestra returns year after year and many say it would not be Christmas without this *Messiah*."

DATES & TIMES: December 19 and 20, 4 p.m.

PLACE: 108 Sound Beach Avenue

INFORMATION: 637-1791, fccog.org

CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT AT CHRIST CHURCH

This year marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the choir at Christ Church. Since their inception, the choir has carried on this tradition based on the Christmas Eve Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, first introduced in 1918 at King's College Chapel at Cambridge and broadcast live by the BBC since 1928. (So cherished was this tradition there that the concert went on even during World War II, in the freezing cold chapel that had neither glass in the windows nor heat.) The concert includes music by Handel, Tavener, Tallis, Stanford and Weir.

DATE & TIME: December 20, 5 p.m. (prelude at 4:30 p.m.)

PLACE: 254 East Putnam Avenue

INFORMATION: christchurchmusic.com, 869-6600



No Strings Marionette Company rings in the season at the Bush-Holley House.

Staged Fun

TOWN PRODUCTION

For the past decade and a half, the town of Greenwich has presented a children's Christmas show, such as a puppet show, movie or live play. The Hampstead Stage Company has performed for the last several years, and this year they will warm hearts with the Dickens' classic, *A Christmas Carol*.

DATE & TIME: December 1, 3 p.m.

PLACE: Bendheim Western Civic Center, 449 Pemberwick Road

INFORMATION & TICKETS: \$5 at the Civic Center or greenwichct.org

SCROOGE AT BUSH-HOLLEY

In a tradition that has developed in recent years, No Strings Marionette Company brings *A Christmas Carol* to life with a cast of eighteen large-scale marionettes. Seasonal refreshments will be served.»

Families can combine the entertainment of this classic holiday story with a historical tour of the Bush-Holley House and gallery.

DATES & TIMES: Puppet show December 11, 4 and 6 p.m.; Tours from 5 to 6 p.m.

PLACE: Bush-Holley Historic Site, 39 Strickland Road

INFORMATION & TICKETS: 869-6899, ext. 18, hstg.org; \$15 or \$10 for Historical Society members

during the holidays,” says Brett Rafael, artistic director. “That tradition was in jeopardy at The Palace, but we’re resurrecting it.” This performance features “all the bells and whistles, including falling snow,” he adds. Many kids from the Greenwich area are involved.

DATES & TIMES: December 5, 7 p.m. (opening night followed by The Nutcracker gala party) and December 6, 1 and 4 p.m.

BALLET TICKETS: 325-4466, scalive.org

GALA TICKETS: 964-1211, connecticutballet.com

Tea Time

GARDEN EDUCATION CENTER

HOLIDAY TEA

In its eighth year, the GEC Holiday Tea promises gourmet goodies, punch, champagne and tea along with a silent and live auction. “Daughters, granddaughters—everyone can participate, whether they make a two-dollar or two-hundred dollar investment,” says Adrienne Parker, GEC managing director. “It’s a nice way to give back to the community. Through Neighbor to Neighbor, we donate gently used books and pajamas and food.” A hot cup of tea and the opportunity to feed a family for a month sounds like a perfect way to take the chill out of December.

New this year will be a morning of family fun the following day: breakfast with Santa, holiday trimming workshops (wreaths, holiday greens, pinecone bird feeders and miniature Christmas trees) and horse-drawn carriage rides.

HOLIDAY TEA/AUCTION: December 4, 3:30 to 6 p.m.

TICKETS: Adults, \$25; Children, \$5

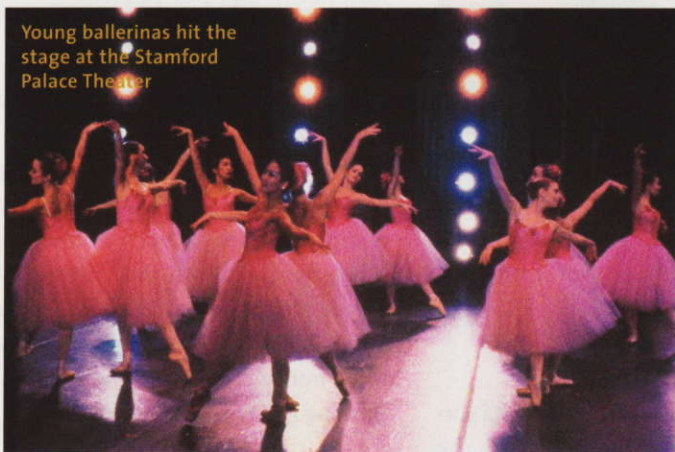
BREAKFAST WITH SANTA:

December 5, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

TICKETS: Adults, \$5; Children, \$3

COURTESY OF CONNECTICUT BALLET'S NUTCRACKER AT THE PALACE, STAMFORD CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Young ballerinas hit the stage at the Stamford Palace Theater



On Point

THE NUTCRACKER, SUNY PURCHASE

In their sixteenth production of *The Nutcracker*, the Purchase Dance Corps will perform along with guest artists from the Pennsylvania Ballet, and about 250 kids—many of them from Fairfield County. Greenwich youngsters Sarah Better and Lily Cosgrove will play Clara. Lily’s mother, Marie, used to be a professional dancer in New York. Little sister Esmé gets in on the act as well, as a mouse. Area boys fared just as well in the auditions. Vladimir Reed of Greenwich and Jack Eschricht of Old Greenwich both landed the role of Fritz. Numerous local children—eight from the Country Day School alone—will be performing.

DATES: December 4 through 6 (5 performances, times vary)

PLACE: The Performing Arts Center at SUNY Purchase, 753 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, New York

INFORMATION & TICKETS: 914-251-6200 (box office), sunypurchase.edu; \$25-\$35

THE NUTCRACKER, STAMFORD CENTER FOR THE ARTS (THE PALACE THEATRE)

The Connecticut Ballet has done hundreds of performances all over New England, but this year’s *Nutcracker* will be their first in their home theater. “Going to *The Nutcracker* is an American tradition

Carolling at the Bush-Holley House



WORKSHOPS: December 5, until 1 p.m.
TICKETS: \$5–\$75 depending on workshop (*pre-registration required*)
INFORMATION & REGISTRATION: gecgreenwich.org
PLACE: 130 Bible Street

Home Sweet Home

BUSH-HOLLEY CANDLELIGHT TOUR
 Since 1987, the candlelight tour of the beautifully decorated circa-1730 Bush-Holley House has been taking visitors back to a time of simpler, electronic-free Christmases. Costumed guides, children's crafts, entertainment and refreshments make this a great family outing. "There's nothing like a historic house in candlelight," says Barbara Freeman, former program coordinator. "It glows. It touches everybody."

DATE & TIME: December 13, 4 to 6 p.m.

PLACE: Bush-Holley House, 39 Strickland Road

INFORMATION & TICKETS: hstg.org;



Great gifts can always be found at the Breast Cancer Alliance holiday boutique.

Free admission for Historical Society members; non-members: \$30 per family or \$10 per adult, \$8 per child

HSTG HOLIDAY HOUSE TOUR

Continue a walk through the past and gorgeous homes of Greenwich with the

Historical Society's twenty-fourth annual Holiday House Tour. The tour is part of Antiquarius, a fifty-two-year tradition that also includes the Greenwich Antiques Show, art/design events and a holiday boutique.

DATE & TIME: December 9, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

INFORMATION & TICKETS: 869-6899, ext. 14, hstg.org; \$100 per person; reserved club luncheon: \$45 per person

Shopping with Heart

BREAST CANCER ALLIANCE HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE

First held in 1998, this event offers great Christmas finds with twice the feel-good potential—as shoppers will not only be filling their bags with gifts, but also giving 15 percent to the Breast Cancer Alliance. Forty to fifty vendors attend, selling everything from cufflinks to cashmere sweaters, sporting goods to stationery.

DATES & TIMES: December 1.

MAY THE HOLIDAYS
 FIND YOU IN GOOD SPIRITS!



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OUT OF THE BOX



Where did you get that?

73 Greenwich Avenue
 Open Daily
 203-625-9696

6 to 9 p.m., and December 2,
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

PLACE: Greenwich Country Club,
19 Doubling Road

INFORMATION: 861-0014,
breastcanceralliance.org

SHOPPING NIGHT AT RICHARDS

To round out your Christmas shopping (or your personal wardrobe) add this night to your calendar. A percentage of every sale will be donated to the Breast Cancer Alliance.

DATE & TIME: December 10,
6 to 8 p.m.

PLACE: Richards, 359 Greenwich
Avenue

ANTIQUARIUS HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE

A decade-long tradition benefiting the Historical Society, this holiday boutique promises "a fabulous array of one-of-a-kind gift items by a selection of well-known, specialty vendors." The social set can go on Tuesday evening, when a cash bar is

available. Those seeking a day of history mixed with holiday shopping can combine the Holiday House Tour with a visit to the boutique on Wednesday.

DATES & TIMES: December 8,
6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and December 9,
9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

PLACE: Greenwich Country Club,
19 Doubling Road

INFORMATION: 869-6899, hstg.org

Greening the Holiday

BASKETS OF GREENS FOR ST. LUKE'S LIFEWORKS

Volunteers at this annual event arrange over 200 baskets of greens to bring some holiday cheer to the rooms of St. Luke's Lifeworks residents. No talent required, just bring "a good heart and some clippers and come for fifteen minutes or two hours." A light lunch will be served.

DATE & TIME: December 8, 11 a.m.

PLACE: Garden Education Center,
130 Bible Street

INFORMATION & TICKETS:

869-9242, gecgreenwich.org;
\$20 donation requested

Bells Will Be Ringing


THREADS AND TREADS JINGLE BELL JOG

"We started this tradition in the late '80s, when the running boom was in full swing," says Mickey Yardis, the owner of Threads and Treads. "Most of our events are at the beach, so it's nice to have a run from the store." The store provides long-sleeve T's and jingle bells. After the three-mile race, runners warm up at the store's Christmas party. The Jingle Bell Jog has never been canceled. If roads are icy, Mickey will call the highway division and they graciously run a spreader around the course before the race.

DATE & TIME: December 13, 9 a.m.

PLACE: starting and finishing
at Peabody Garage,
23 Church Street

INFORMATION & TICKETS:

661-0142, threadsandtreads.com;
pre-entry \$15 or \$20 on race day 



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