

Arts & Entertainment 

Milbridge Christmas celebration a success

by Johanna S. Billings

Milbridge's Christmas on Main Street Dec. 3 was so successful that organizers are already planning one for next year.

The second annual Christmas on Main Street will take place either Dec. 2 or 9, said event coordinator Elaine Mathiason, who described this year's event as "awesome." It included caroling, a tree lighting, breakfast with Santa, a memory tree, a tree auction, a parade, book signings and craft sales.

"We have planted the seed. It's all about kids, family and our community," Mathiason said.

"I think it was an amazing success, especially for this being the first time doing such a large undertaking," said Richard Bondurant, another Gateway: Milbridge board member. "It takes a lot of people to pull off something big like this and make it a success."

"So many people have said how much they enjoyed Christmas on Main Street, and that they thought it was the best celebration the town has seen in many years," said Danielle Woerner, president of Sunrise County Arts Institute (SCAI) and vice-chair of the Gateway: Milbridge board.

Woerner said she spent most of the day indoors at the Women's Health Resource Library running gift and fundraising tables for SCAI and the theater project.

"The faces of the people who came in — lots of kids, and a fair number of adult elves, too — were glowing, and not just from the cold," she said.

People sounded especially excited about the number of children who were part of the parade, she added.

Later, on the lawn of the Milbridge Theatre, Woerner led holiday caroling at the lighting of the town Christmas tree, along with Mathiason and deejay Clyde Merrill of Cherryfield, who had been providing recorded music outdoors throughout the day.



The Milbridge Christmas event Dec. 3 included a memory tree with tags bearing the names of loved ones who have died. Among them was this tag in memory of Dave Parsons, former owner of the Milbridge Theatre. Photo courtesy of Amity Chipman



Decorated trees await the opening of the Fifth Annual WHRL Christmas Tree Festival and Auction Dec. 3. The event, which featured more than 50 tabletop-sized trees and wreaths decorated by area businesses and community members, was a part of the Christmas on Main Street event in Milbridge Dec. 3. The event raised \$5,200.

Photo courtesy of Susan Jordan Bennett

"A collective 'ooh!' of wonder went up from the whole crowd when the tree lights came on," Woerner said. "It was a spontaneous magical moment for kids of all ages."

The memory tree ceremony, which included the reading of the names of loved ones who had died, was another highlight, according to Cathy Chipman, Gateway: Milbridge secretary. She initially anticipated it being a fundraiser for the group and the theater project.

"As people started to contact me with names of their loved ones, it quickly morphed into so much more," she said. "Any funds raised became secondary as I listened to people express their need, want and desire to remember loved ones in this way. And, on Saturday morning when we got all the tags hung

and I had a chance to step back and see them all — over 160 — it was a tearful and heartwarming moment. Watching the faces of people when they were read and being able to tell they were choked up with many wiping away a tear was a sight I won't forget."

Gateway: Milbridge volunteers Rhonda and Dave Pinkham said they were a bit surprised, but pleased, to see so many floats in the parade. They also enjoyed seeing how many people came out to the event and knowing that those commemorated on the memory tree would be proud of the community for coming together this way.

"I have heard nothing but compliments around town about the entire day and how much enjoyment it brought to people," said Chipman.

"I am surprised just how well it all went and the broad support from across the community," said Bondurant. "I think it really demonstrates a pent-up desire for community events and opportunities to celebrate and do things as a community."

"I think it was a great day for the community," said town Manager Lewis Pinkham. "Everyone was working together for the community and the community came out to enjoy all of the events. I keep hearing how much fun they had and how great the lights look each night. The tree lighting was great."



Illuminated elf Randy Beal stops in at the holiday vendors' sale at the Women's Health Research Library in Milbridge Dec. 3 after the parade down Main Street. The parade, sale and many other activities were part of Milbridge's first Christmas on Main Street.

Photo by Danielle Woerner



Event organizer Elaine Mathiason directs the parade during the Milbridge Christmas on Main Street Dec. 3.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Seavey



Santa (Roy Stanwood) and Mrs. Claus (Jackie Jellison) ride by on a float in parade during the Christmas on Main Street event Dec. 3 in Milbridge.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Seavey



The Grinch (Chris Rolfe) rides by in the parade during the Christmas on Main Street event in Milbridge Dec. 3. In the back seat is Santa (Rolfe's daughter Tori). Photo courtesy of Kim Beal