

Seasonal sensations

by Megan F. Salch, contributing writer

Happy holidays, Houston! Celebrate with these seasonal sensations.

1. Bellaire sparkles with its **Centennial Holiday in the Park** celebration. Ring in the season with snow, food, and games at Bellaire Town Square December 4, 6-8:30 p.m. Don't forget to get your photo taken with Santa. There is no charge for this event. For more details, visit www.ci.bellaire.tx.us.

2. Cool off with **The Ice at Discovery Green, Holiday Skating on the Lake** in downtown. Through January 19, Houstonians welcome winter on the 7,200-square-foot ice rink. A toddler ice rink is also available. Check out the special performances by regional figure skaters, jazz music, film and DJ nights, and skating with Santa. Price per person is \$10, which includes skate rental. Monday-Thursday, 4-9 p.m.; Friday-Saturday and school holidays, 10 a.m.-11 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m. For details, visit www.discoverygreen.com or call 713-400-7336.

3. Mark your calendar for the **Mayor's Holiday Celebration** on December 5, 5-8:30 p.m. at Herman Square in front of Houston's City Hall. Kick off the month with mini-performances by the Houston Ballet, choirs, and the lighting of the Christmas tree. Admission is free. For details, visit www.houstonspecialevents.org or call 713-247-3500.

4. Galveston was hard hit by Hurricane Ike, but the tradition of **Dickens on the Strand** continues. Held December 6-7, families appreciate the Victorian Christmas. Don your Victorian garb and listen to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Story* amidst cheerful hand bells. Children delight in the Royal Menagerie Petting Zoo, pony and elephant rides, "Snow on Sunday," Scrooge's Scavenger Hunt, and crafts. Proceeds help revitalize the historic downtown. Adult \$12; child \$6. For details, visit www.dickensonthestrand.com or call 409-765-7834.

5. Introduce magic and splendor to your family as the Houston Symphony performs *The Polar Express* on December 6. The orchestra creates the sounds of this thrilling train ride as youngsters dance in their seats. Performances begin at 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. with pre- and post-concert activities in the lobby. Adult \$54; child \$28. For details, visit www.houstonsymphony.org or call 713-224-7575.

6. Capture inspiration for holiday cooking at the third annual **Home Sweet Home Gingerbread Bash** on December 6 at the Children's Museum of Houston. Celebrity chefs showcase their amazing gingerbread houses, full of sweets, and tasty décor. Bid on your favorite to bring a succulent sweet to your home, while supporting the museum. Children may craft their own gingerbread houses, dance, and enjoy the exhibits. \$100 per adult; \$50 per child. For details, visit www.cmhouston.org or call 713-535-7233.

7. Bundle up for a trip to the **Old Time Christmas Tree Farm**. Enjoy a hayride to the tree fields, while sipping on cocoa or apple cider. Roll up your sleeves to choose and saw down your tree. (The staff will bale your tree for easy transportation.) Kids can ride the train, tackle the obstacle course, and glide down the giant slide. Weekend trips also offer barbecue lunches and a chat with Santa. The farm is open 9 a.m.-6 p.m. For details, visit www.oldtimechristmastree.com or call 281-370-9141.

8. Stroll paths of Christmas past lit by candlelight at the Heritage Society's **Annual Candlelight Tour** December 12-13, 6:30-9:30 p.m. at Sam Houston Park. Tour historic structures decorated to portray various eras in Houston's history. Visitors relish the musical and theatrical performances on a

nearby stage. New this year, children may build snowmen in 40,000 pounds of snow. Adult \$10; student and senior \$5; Children under 12 are free. For details, visit www.heritage-society.org or call 713-655-1912.

9. Join the **River Oaks Chamber Orchestra** at Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens December 8, at 9:30 a.m. for sounds of the season. Enjoy coffee and pastries during an intimate morning featuring Suzanne LeFevre, ROCO viola soloist, as the orchestra explores classical music and the holiday season. Advanced ticket reservation is required. For more information, call 713-665-2700 or visit www.rocohouston.org.

10. The Jewish Community Center celebrates the **fifth day of Hanukkah** at 3 p.m. December 25 with crafts, games, and a dreidel spin-off contest. At 4 p.m., singer Shira Kline and her band ShirLaLa kick off a concert, followed by a tasty feast of latkes and eggrolls. JCC member \$8; nonmember \$12. For details, visit www.jcchouston.org or call 713-729-3200.



Galveston may have been hard hit by Hurricane Ike, but the Dickens on the Strand tradition is set to continue this year.