

THE BUFFALO NEWS

One-Tank Trip/Finger Lakes

Finger Lakes region is festive holiday destination

By MARIA CERAULO
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In Watkins Glen, the Lake Country Players will re-enact scenes from "A Christmas Carol" on Dec. 4 in a 100-year-old Victorian house.



Photos by Maria Ceraulo The 2,500-square-foot Christmas House in Elmira is full of lovely holiday decorations and gifts.

The museums, wineries, restaurants and shops in the quaint towns of the Finger Lakes offer a nearby holiday wonderland for Western New Yorkers. Virtually every area of the region is alive with seasonal excitement.

The Finger Lakes region offers unusual gifts and holiday decorations, such as grapevine wreaths and hand-blown glass Christmas ornaments, dining in unique settings and hands-on activities at local museums. Here's a quick guide to some of the regional holiday happenings in the Finger Lakes.

Holiday shopping

For shoppers tired of the mall scene, the Finger Lakes area is a welcome change.

Corning's Gaffer district on historic Market Street is a browser's paradise with antique stores and specialty shops selling distinctive gifts. The Glass Menagerie (37 East Market St., Corning, 617-962-6300, www.corningmenagerie.com) offers fine glass objects, Judaica and hundreds of kaleidoscopes.

Wags & Whiskers Gifts (24 E. Market St., 866-498-9247, www.wagswhiskersgifts.com) has, as the name suggests, all things for cats and dogs, including handmade coats and hats and bakery-made gourmet treats. Connors Mercantile (16 E. Market St., 607-937-4438) is a treasure trove of Christmas decorations, candles and gifts.

In Elmira, the Christmas House, a Queen Anne Victorian built in 1894, is filled to the brim of its 2,500 square feet with Christmas items collected from around the world by owner Julie Delgrosso. Don't be surprised to be served soda or champagne while you shop.

The colorful painted lady (16 colors) has an extensive collection of Santas, more than 20 uniquely decorated Christmas trees, ornaments, Yankee candles and gifts. (Football widows gather on Super Bowl Sunday for the annual Super Bowl Party.)

The Christmas House, 361 Maple Ave. in Elmira, is open late June through mid-January. Information: (607) 734-9547, www.christmas-house.com.

Wind Mill Farm and Craft Market has 250 vendors spread out on 26 acres. Three large buildings and numerous smaller cottages display everything from Amish and Mennonite furniture and baked goods to numerous juried crafts. Plan on returning in summer, when all buildings are open and outdoor activities include horse and buggy rides and a small petting zoo. Wind Mill Farm and Craft Market is located at 3900 State

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Route 14A, Penn Yan. Information: (315) 536-3032, www.thewindmill.com. It is open from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturdays from mid-April to Dec. 11..

Nearly all wineries and inns offer gift shops with unusual items including clothing, books and, of course, wine and wine-related merchandise. Allow some time if eating or staying at Esperanza Mansion to browse its excellent gift shop containing whimsical items, such as decorated tooth fairy boxes, porcelain tea sets, toys, books, DVDs and clothing.

Family fun

Three separate family-friendly weekends of holiday activities begin this month in Corning.

The "Parade of Lights" weekend, Nov. 26-28, includes a tree lighting ceremony at 6 p.m. Nov. 26 and a parade of lights on historic Market Street, also called the Gaffer District, at 6:30 p.m. Nov. 27.

Corning's Market Street, registered as a National Historic District, celebrates 30 years of Sparkle, the holiday's biggest celebration, Dec. 3-5.

Then, Dec. 10-12, the city celebrates "Sounds of the Season."

On all three weekends, food, music, entertainment and crafts can be enjoyed. Families can visit with Kris Kringle's "live" reindeer or, for a fee, take a horse and carriage ride. Open skating will be available at the Civic Center.

For more information, contact www.gafferdistrict.com or call (607) 937-6292.

Events, attractions

It's free admission for all at the Corning Museum of Glass on Dec. 4 and 5 (children age 17 and under are always admitted free). Festivities include musicians, local school choruses, caroling groups and magicians.

Plenty of low-cost, hands-on activities are planned, including "make your own" ornaments, icicles and flowers. Guests can also help create a hand-blown ornament with a master glass blower for a reduced fee of \$10. Breakfast with Santa will be available both days at 9 a.m. for \$5. (Advance reservations required.)

That same weekend, CMOG's the Studio offers a Glass Sale and Open House, where artists sell their original glass works to support the Studio. The CMOG's Marketplace offers hand-blown glass objects in all price ranges, jewelry, books, toys and home dinnerware. While you're at the museum, check out the popular exhibit, "Beyond Venice: Glass in Venetian Style, 1500-1750," which has been extended through Jan. 2. In five exhibit islands, visitors "travel" through Renaissance Europe to see how Venetian stylistic elements were altered to reflect local tastes and glassmaking skills in Austria, Spain, France, the Low Countries and England.

Information: www.cmog.org, (800) 732-6845 or (607) 937-5371.

- Corning's Rockwell Museum of Western Art lights up the holiday season with Junior Sparkle, from 2 to 7 p.m. Dec. 4. Children are invited to create a "farolito," a holiday illuminary in a paper bag, which is a Southwest holiday tradition. Storytelling in the Remington & Russell Lodge will bring the farolito display to life.

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Although this museum, also owned by Corning Inc., is not as well known as its sister property CMOG, it rightly calls itself the "Best of the West in the East." It is the only Eastern U.S. museum that is part of Museums West, a consortium of museums exhibiting Western U.S. art. Free and frequent shuttle service runs between the two museums. Ask for pickup/drop off locations.

While special attention to detail has been given for younger visitors, this site is sure to please all.

L.L. Bean interactive artpacks, colorful backpacks chock full of information for children, are available at the door. A "scavenger hunt" of information, aimed at kids ages 8 to 13 or younger children working with an adult, is available in a three-ring binder. Each pack has something unusual, such as Buffalo hide, to touch.

Housed in Corning's former city hall and built in 1893, this museum was completely and spectacularly refurbished four years ago. The exhibits are spaciouly laid out, and displayed by themes: Wilderness, Cowboy, Indian, Horse and Buffalo. Old and new objects are placed side-by-side to inspire comparison and curiosity. Family activities include "Kids West," a miniature town complete with dress up clothes, a teepee, trading post and educational materials. In better weather, there is an outdoor lodge.

Exhibits change three times a year, so even those who have been here before will have something new to see. The current exhibit, "The Legends of Spider Woman: Traditional Navajo Weavings" includes exquisitely hand woven Navajo rugs.

Kids age 17 and under are always admitted free. The museum is located at 111 Cedar Street, at the corner of Denison Parkway. Information: www.rockwellmuseum.org, (607) 937-5386.

- Watkins Glen's Village Christmas takes place from noon to 6 p.m. Dec. 4. There will be music, holiday treats and crafts throughout the day. A chili cook-off will be held from noon to 4 p.m. at the Fourth Street sidewalk next to Chemung Canal Bank. From 3 to 5 p.m., Santa

Claus will visit Lafayette Park, where there will be a parade at 5 p.m. A lighting of the Christmas tree takes place afterward. Information: www.schuylerny.com, (607) 535-3003.

As part of the Village Christmas celebration, Lake Country Players will present a live re-enactment of "A Christmas Carol" from 1 to 4 p.m. Dec. 4. Continuous performances of 10 scenes, totaling about 15 minutes, from the classic story will be presented in a 100-year-old Victorian house at 601 N. Decatur. Visitors will be served refreshments such as hot cider while waiting for the start of the next show.

Tickets are \$3 per person or \$5 per family and can be purchased at the door. Parking is available on the street and in a nearby church parking lot. Information: www.lakecountryplayers.com, (607) 535-3029.

On the trails

Wine trails in the Finger Lakes are also hosting a variety of holiday events.

- Sample wine and holiday treats at 14 wineries during the 11th annual "Holiday Shopping Spree" taking place from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Dec. 4 and noon to 6 p.m. Dec. 5 on the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail.

Visitors can collect a "country kitchen" ornament at each winery (collect all 14 ornaments by Dec. 31 and receive a free 12-inch Christmas tree). A souvenir wineglass, recipe book and coupon book are also included in the admission price.

"Most people are eager to try to do the whole wine trail," says Cathy Millsbaugh, Administrator of the Cayuga Wine Trail Association. When making reservations, she explains, visitors will be assigned a starting winery. For visitors from Buffalo, that will most likely be Montezuma or Swedish Hill wineries.

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Tickets are \$25 per person, \$40 for a couple, plus handling fee and tax; slightly higher at the door. Information: www.cayugawinetrail.com or (800) 684-5217.

- The 20th anniversary of the Keuka Lake Wine Trail will be celebrated with festivities on Dec. 4-5.

Each winery has created a special Christmas ornament and will offer wine and hearty food pairing. For example, Dr. Konstantin Frank's Winery will provide an Italian feast including pasta and meatballs and Italian cookies.

For \$45 per person or \$50 per couple, visitors receive a blue stem glass and grapevine wreath. Designated drivers' tickets are available for 25 percent off. Information: (800) 440-4898, www.keukawinetrail.com.

"This trail is very popular for Buffalonians because it's very comfortable to do in a day," says Judy Wiltberger, co-owner of Keuka Spring Vineyard and president of the Keuka Wine Trail Association. "It's close to Buffalo and there are only nine wineries."

Previous Keuka Wine Trail visitors should note that Keuka Spring Vineyard has moved across the street and up the hill in a larger and more modern facility with glorious lake views.

Holiday guides

The Finger Lakes Wine Country Association provides a complete guide to the area's activities including holiday events, by visiting www.fingerlakeswinecountry.com or by calling (800) 813-2958.

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