

# Hillcrest Times



ELA 8



CHRISTMAS EDITION



DECEMBER 2025



WRITTEN BY THE  
8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE CLASS



## EDITORS NOTE

In this unit, 8th-grade students were given the task of reporting on a local Christmas event for a class newspaper. The student journalists conducted interviews, engaged in research, and went through the full article writing process. I am very proud of the work they have done and am happy with the excitement I have seen to report about real things happening in the world around them! Most importantly, I am grateful for the work that these students have done and the ways they have been able to connect their articles to the love of Christ and the true meaning of Christmas. I pray everyone has a blessed Christmas this year.

Merry Christmas!  
-Lauren

---

***SO, WHETHER YOU  
EAT OR DRINK, OR  
WHATEVER YOU  
DO, DO ALL TO THE  
GLORY OF GOD.  
1 CORINTHIANS  
10:31***



# CHRISTMAS AT HILLCREST

## Our School Spirit: The Inside Scoop By Grey Miller

School spirit often circles around Christmas cheer. Many people know school spirit as a fun thing to spice up their school, where you do special things and special events. Most schools do different things and events for school spirit, so I will be talking about our school spirit. Everyone is welcome or not welcome to dress up. You have different events each day that are fun. It is usually around the Christmas season. It happens all over America, but in our school, this is what I'm talking about. It happens to spread Christmas. The teachers and y-co start this and put it on the calendar so people can see it, and they email them.

For a long time, people have celebrated school spirit as a way to make school more enjoyable. Often, School Spirit is focused on school activities and the kringle jingle. Many websites that I used say that "School spirit not only affects academic success, but also their health and wellbeing"(Kimberly High School). This is important because school spirit makes them do well in academics and well being. "Representing your school can have an exciting feeling"(Varsity.com). So many people are or feel excited when they participate in school spirit.

People like to have fun while at school. It makes school more enjoyable and exciting, and makes them have lots of fun, and makes them look forward to school and think of a fun thing or event while at school. People like to be social and be with their friends. Well, most of them anyway.

Dressing up as your favorite character or just being in the spirit of Christmas cheer helps people function in school. The culture of our school is nice because our group is really small and we basically know each other and everybody, even if we are not the greatest of friends. "Having a sense of school spirit allows a sense of belonging and being valued"(Kimberly High School).



## The Amazing Performance of the Hillcrest Academy School Choir By Peyton Gray

On December 14, Hillcrest Academy, a school in Kalona, Iowa, hosted a choir concert for a night of worship of the Lord through song. It opens the people's and singers' hearts when they sing and listen to the songs being sung. When Students take time out of their Sunday to come and perform for the community, they get to enjoy the worship in ways parents and family members can enjoy watching their children.

The Hillcrest choir event is a fun and uplifting event for middle school and high school students. It was an amazing, memorable experience with hymns that people got to sing between the middle school band and the middle school choir, and the great performance of the choirs with their lovely voices.

Sunday was a night of worship for God through song that brought people together. Mikalya Tackaberry, the Hillcrest choir director, explained, "The choir concert songs are for the true meaning of Christmas. It's a good way to bring people together for song worship." The night was followed by an amazing performance of the high school touring choir and the school choir. It was heartwarming to watch



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

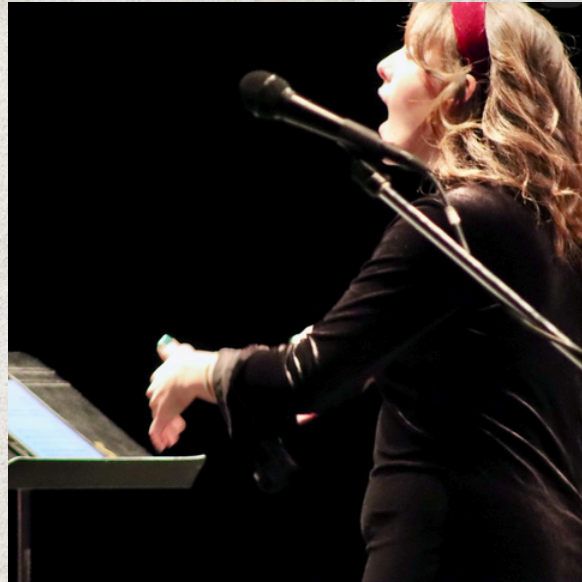
ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# CHRISTMAS AT HILLCREST

the students joyfully sing praise to Jesus. You could tell that the community that came to watch the concert was thoroughly enjoying it.

Mikalyla Tackaberry, the Hillcrest choir teacher, explained why she picked the Christmas music she did out of all the Christmas music there is. She said, It fits the grade's skill level, it's fun, and well known to the listeners. The fun gathering of the Christmas concert was a way to take a small portion of the day to God and to just let all the stress go away. It is also a way to talk to people you have not seen in a long time after the show.

Although there was a great performance from the Hillcrest choir, it sadly had to come to an end. The praising of Jesus before Christmas was a great way to set the tone for December. It was a reminder that you can take just one hour out of your day to praise Christ, even if that means reading the bible, praying, or even singing. Hillcrest Academy wanted to take one hour of your time so you can remember that Christ is the one who died on the cross for you. So that on Christmas Day, you can remember that he was born to die for your sins. Hillcrest had a Christmas concert every year in December, so if you missed this exciting event, you can always come next year to enjoy this amazing holiday show.



## The Joyfilled Y-Co bake sale at Hillcrest Academy By Myka Widdel

On December 12, at Hillcrest Academy the Middle School Y-Co hosted a bake sale, featuring lots of wonderful homemade Christmas treats made by Y-Co members. This was done following a usual school day and brought a ton of joy for attendees going into the weekend. Y-Co had tables displaying the desserts at both

entrances of Hillcrest Academy building, ensuring that everyone could see the treats that had been prepared. This bake sale was done to create joy and bring in money for Y-Co and funding future Y-Co events.

In past years, Hillcrest hasn't had a middle school Y-Co, so this year, when they did, there were tons of students excited to join. Alongside the normal Christmas traditions at Hillcrest, the Middle School Y-Co was thrilled to share the bake sale idea, and as we heard from many, it was amazing, and the desserts were delicious. So it was a success!

Nataile Silabah said, "Because they (people) are receiving treats, that makes them more likely to give treats and spread Christmas joy to others." We see here that not only was the bake sale made to provide people with Christmas treats, but also to fill everyone with joy that they can share with others this holiday season. King Arthur's baking company refers to the joy that follows sharing and receiving Christmas treats, and we found this to be more than true at the bake sale.

King Arthur's baking company also talks about how baking strengthens a community, which is why bake sales can be so important. During a season that can be stressful, this bake sale was the perfect ingredient to lift up the attendees' spirits and again strengthen our community at Hillcrest. The culture and joy that followed the bake sale was something



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# CHRISTMAS AT HILLCREST

that everyone should experience. Alongside the way, it impacted and enlightened everyone's moods and made for extra fun and joy going further into this Christmas season.

## **The Joy Of Hillcrest Academy Christmas Chapel** **Reghan Good**

On December 15-18, Hillcrest Academy invites all to come to their Christmas chapel. This is a very special event, teaching children about the good news of Christ and reflecting on his life. Hillcrest Christmas Chapel is located at Hillcrest Auditorium or the foyer during hymn sing. Anyone and everyone is allowed to attend, with chapels planned by Corban Boshart. Hillcrest Academy's Christmas chapel is an amazing opportunity for kids who have not yet heard about the good news of Christ, giving them a chance to hear about his birth for the first time or learn more about it.

Christmas Chapels at Hillcrest Academy attract people of all ages, with this year's chapels featuring scavenger hunts, journal reflection, and speakers. Corban Boshart, the Chapel coordinator, explained that Christmas Chapels help bring people closer together and give us a better understanding and relationship with God. With Andrew University saying, "Around the world, Christmas is known as a season filled with joy, happiness, and generosity. Everyone genuinely seems to be happier at Christmastime." Hillcrest Christmas chapels bring joy and happiness to all who listen.

Though the chapels have fun games and are very enjoyable, events like these are very

important at Christmas time to teach people about the good news of Christ. A lot of the time, we like to think about Christmas as just presents and food, but at Hillcrest Academy Christmas Chapel, it's not just about the presents and food; you can learn about why Christmas is really important to Christians all around the world and how it affects their daily lives in everything we do. So this Holiday, think about coming to one of Hillcrest Academy's amazing chapels to learn about your Savior!

## **Alumni Basketball Game** **By Tripp Carolan**

On December 19th at Hillcrest Academy, the JV and Varsity basketball teams will play Pekin in a very special outing dedicated to Hillcrest alumni. This is the one game each season where Hillcrest invites alumni to come to the games and support the current student athletes. Hillcrest puts on special activities before and during the games. They have a bake sale, a merch table, and a putting contest during halftime. This event is meant to bring back memories of when they were in high school, and maybe they even played basketball themselves!

In the past, this event has brought many people to the games. The Hillcrest website noted, "Last year, over 150 alumni and their families were in attendance." Maybe this year there will be even more and all

the seats at Hillcrest Union will be full. Each year, they keep track of how many alumni come back from each graduating class. There is also a map of the United States of America in the foyer that shows how many Hillcrest alumni live in each state.

This alumni event is important because it brings together many people from the Hillcrest community. Some still live close by, but some travel from very far away to be at this event. A guy came from Kansas last year, and his name was Jub. This event is also important because many businesses support Hillcrest to make this event successful. They sponsor the event by donating money and prizes for the different activities.

I think it's important for the alumni and the current students to be together and to have that connection, and basically be like family again, and have a little fun in the community. Many generations have passed through Hillcrest, and this night brings together people of all ages for fun, food, and basketball!

## **Hillcrest Locker and Door Competition** **By Kellen Miller**

At Hillcrest Academy, it was announced that there would be a locker and door decorating competition. Everyone would participate and vote on the four winners. There were 4 different winning people/groups, 1 individual middle school locker winner, and 1 individual high school locker winner, while the



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# CHRISTMAS AT HILLCREST

homeroom teachers and the students would compete for the best decorated door, with 1 winning middle school homeroom and 1 winning high school homeroom. The competition would happen in December to try to bring more Christmas cheer throughout the school. Everyone would decorate during homeroom time, and then proceed to vote weeks later on their favorite from each category.

The goal was to bring more Christmas cheer to Hillcrest, and it seemed to work, with one middle schooler saying, "I felt a sense of rushing emotion coming over me," and it "Brought out the Christmas cheer in people." But not everyone had to decorate their locker like this middle schooler, who had an excuse for not decorating: "I didn't decorate it because I had work to do." Many people didn't decorate. As the student also said, "Only a couple of joyful lockers."

Even if there were a couple of joyful lockers, it was still worth it to have the competition because having Christmas decorations helps people enjoy the school day a little bit more. Another reason it is important, according to a Middle school student, is "I feel like we have come together as one great community." Which was one of the goals of the competition.

Now there were 4 winners, and the two individual winners received a special prize. Those two special winners were Sophia Avendo-Cruz for middle school and Ruth Witthoft for high school. The two homeroom winners received a pizza party. The two groups were Jess Hart for middle school and

Ashlee Miller for high school. When asked who did the best in high school or middle school, Noah Coblentz said, "I think high school." So congrats to all the high schoolers who decorated their lockers.

Through all this, the mission was accomplished to share Christmas cheer and to decorate Hillcrest Academy during the Christmas season. Should it have taken bribes? I don't know, but the bribes worked. The goal was also to have fun with it and to have a break from all the work, especially since finals are coming up for the high schoolers. Now, anyone who walks into Hillcrest Academy will be able to see all the Christmas spirit people put into the school during this special season.



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**  
ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# CHRISTMAS AT HILLCREST

## Hillcrest Academy's Christmas Concert By Jaimee Helmuth

On December 15th, Hillcrest in Kalona, Iowa, warmly welcomed the community with a delightful Christmas concert, featuring performances from both middle school and high school students. They played a variety of festive Christmas pieces, spreading joy and the holiday spirit throughout the community.

Myka Widdle, an 8th grader who plays the bass clarinet and the original Clarinet at Hillcrest Academy, shares joyfully that she enjoys "Sharing her talents with others because it inspires them to try new things." She also happily mentioned that "Her mom made her join the band, but now, looking back, she really loves it because she enjoys the friendly environment, the support of her band teacher, Mr. Adam Von Unruh, especially the way he encourages everyone."

Hillcrest is a Christian private school known for its warm and welcoming environment, dedicated to imparting the teachings of Jesus Christ to its students. Through its inspiring musical programs, Hillcrest effectively spreads the message and shares it throughout the community.

Make sure to put the next concert on your calendar for 2026



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL HOLIDAY EVENTS

## **The Christmas Tree Walk and how it relates to Jesus** **By Kenneth Flores-Calix**

On the first Saturday of December, there will be a Christmas tree walk in Kalona, Iowa, where you will be able to see the Ornaments by Hillcrest Academy. Everyone is welcome to come and view the trees and vote for their favorite. It's really fun and a great way to celebrate the Christmas season. This way, everyone can celebrate the spirit of Christmas with a lovely Christmas tree.

This is important for the Christmas spirit, and I'll tell you why, Troy Yoder says, "Everyone is included, and we all get to make ornaments." This is great because it shows how everyone was included, even students! Another way everyone is included is like this: "Your business, organization, friends, or family can decorate a tree together at the Kalona Historical Village." (Kalona Chamber) This relates to culture because Christmas is a time to celebrate the birth of Christ with many people, and this is a good way to do it. Another reason this event is important is because of the history of the trees: "Even before Christ's birth, trees that stayed green all year long carried special meaning for people." (The Church of Jesus Christ) We can see from this that trees resemble something special and signify the new hope Jesus has granted us. In conclusion, this event truly

celebrates the essence of Christmas and brings everyone together.

I believe that the culture of Christmas is to celebrate Jesus's birth and what he has done for us. This event truly celebrates this by bringing everyone together and using trees to resemble the everlasting life Jesus has given us. I have lots of hope in this event, and I think that it really is a great celebration of Christmas. The Christmas Tree Walk happens every year on the first Saturday of December from 4-7 PM, and I would really recommend going and seeing the trees.

## **Ice fishing is Bringing People Together for the Holidays.** **By Brooks Meyer**

When the water is frozen, lots of people go out and ice fish. Any pond that is frozen over with thick ice can be fished. People go ice fishing because it is a good bonding time. It is a great father-son bonding time.

I am here investigating how people are getting closer together for the holidays, from ice fishing. Sources say that "ice fishing is bringing people closer together for the holidays by creating a peaceful and relaxing environment for loved ones to talk and bond together" (Pawan Naidu, Madison Commons). My friend Marc says, "You would want to fish with a safe, reliable friend or family member if you want to have a great day on the ice". He also said, "The best place to ice fish is Lake of the

Woods". Sources also say that the "target species when ice fishing are pike, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, perch, muskie, and walleye." (Guidesly).

Now it's time for some fun questions. What is your favorite fish to eat?, he says, "My favorite type of fish to eat is a walleye". What kind of gear do you use?, he says, "I use small rods and reels, and I use small spoons and jigs". When is the best time to ice fish? "I normally go out in the early morning and go to 9 am". And there you have it.

And we must remember that ice fishing isn't just for the fish; it is also for bonding with family and friends, but you still can enjoy the fish you catch. Remember to make sure you are safe when on the ice and have a great time out there, even if it is cold. Man, I wish I could go ice fishing now.

## **The Nutcracker** **By Ellen Rempel**

Each year for the past 20 years, Nolte Academy has put on the Nutcracker at the beginning of December at the Iowa City Englert Theater. They always do this so they can spread Christmas cheer to the community and beyond. The Nutcracker Spreads Christmas Cheer because once you leave, you start feeling more joyful and happy.

Every year, the Nutcracker has 5 different shows, which lots of people come to. They put on the Nutcracker to bring joy to the



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL HOLIDAY EVENTS

community and to promote young dancers to keep dancing or start dancing. The storyline is that a young girl gets a nutcracker on Christmas Eve, then during the night, when everyone is sleeping, it comes to life and fights the mouse king. Then Clara, who is the main character, and the Nutcracker King, who is the person that comes to life, go to the land of the sweets. This year was the 20th anniversary of the Nutcracker by Nolte Academy dancers. At the front of the stage, when they are performing, the live orchestra is playing instead of having a soundtrack.

The first Nutcracker was actually called "The Nutcracker and Mouse King." When the story was originally told, it was scary for most people, but later the story was simplified and became less scary for children. Going to the Nutcracker helps me get into the Christmas spirit and helps me see how much work and commitment it takes to do dance.

The dances in the Nutcracker really express the culture behind the performance. Each one of the dances, when they are in the land of the sweets, shows something different about culture. There is a dance about Spanish, Arabian, Chinese, and Russian. Each one of the dances shows something different about the culture there.

## CHRISTMAS IS NOT JUST DECEMBER 25TH!

By Joey Miller

This year, on December 6th, the city of Kalona hosted a huge city-wide

Christmas celebration, known as Christmas in Kalona, which featured local businesses and vendors creating a Christmas market, a walking stocking activity with hot cocoa, Christmas trees, golf cart parades, and much more. Townspeople, vendors, and local businesses all participated in the city-wide Christmas celebration, selling, buying, and giving away a wide range of goods, and celebrating the Christmas season with friends and the community.

Christmas in Kalona features a large Christmas market housed in the Kalona YMCA, a walking, stocking, and caroling activity found in downtown Kalona, including hot apple cider at The Shop and Kalona Chocolates, a Christmas tree walk, and a lighted golf cart parade at the Kalona historical village. Even Santa shows up at the YMCA for pictures with children from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. "I really liked seeing the Christmas trees and having hot chocolate," says Gabriel Miller, a young participant in Christmas in Kalona.



Gabriel Miller taking pictures with Santa

And the winner of the annual Christmas sled raffle. He isn't the only one with an opinion on the Christmas season, though. Dennis Bratcher from The Voice says, "The traditions surrounding the celebration of this season are almost as numerous as the people who celebrate it." Meaning there is definitely more than one way to celebrate

The season of Christmas, and this is how the City of Kalona Celebrates every year.

Christmas in Kalona is one of the biggest and most widely known celebrations here in Kalona, and holds a special place in the season of December for a wide variety of people. Christmas in Kona builds a spirit of sharing, community, and friendship. I genuinely hope you will come to celebrate the spirit of giving next year at Christmas in Kalona.

## Chocolates Confections for Christmas Celebrations

By Isabelle Vigeron

At Kalona Chocolates, we are lifting the Christmas spirit with Assorted Chocolates and many more with special Christmas hours that start with Christmas in Kalona and end a couple of days after Christmas. Kalona Chocolates has a heart-touching past, beginning in a certified basement and leading to a store in downtown Kalona. The love that Kalona Chocolates put into their chocolate has gotten them so far and will keep getting them farther. Kalona Chocolates always and will always bring the



HILLCREST ACADEMY

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL HOLIDAY EVENTS

community together with their chocolates.

When we look closer at the history of Kalona Chocolates, it's the same reason that got them started that keeps them going: their love for handcrafted chocolates that bring joy to their customers' faces. Their website says: "The core mission of Kalona Chocolates remains the same: to add value to life's special moments through handcrafted chocolates. The store has kept its values and has thrived in being a haven for all who walk in. When talking to Lyndon, one of the founders, he said that they view Kalona Chocolates as a supplement to other stores in Kalona.

Kalona Chocolates is more than a supplement to the community; it brings the community together in a way that could not have been possible without Kalona Chocolates. The Christmas Chocolate Gifts- Ultimate Holiday Gift explains, "Chocolates have a way of bringing people together." This doesn't explain the half of it, because chocolate does more than bring us together: it forges friendships, makes holiday fun, it's a need at Christmas and other holiday parties, it's more than a piece of chocolate; it's a piece of gold!

## **Santa Saturdays** **By Noah Coblentz**

On November 29-December 20, Santa Saturdays will take place at two exclusive locations in Iowa City: Film Scene at the Chauncey, hosting Santa, and Hawkeye Downs, hosting Santa and his Village. There will be Free

admission, Concessions, and Putt-Putt, photos with Santa, and a Craft station. The Elves will also have inflatable fun. All families are welcome to come and enjoy the Christmas Spirit.

For the past couple of years, Santa Saturdays have consistently drawn a large crowd. Kids and parents alike have enjoyed the entertaining and likable atmosphere of the Santa Saturdays crowd. In a quote from 'Tis the Season, "Santa is gearing up for...visits... and he can't wait to meet all the good boys and girls." There were lots of happy children at the film scene at the Chauncey when Santa came rolling around. Many more were filled with cheer when the village took place at Hawkeye Downs. Just because children are having fun doesn't mean parents can't have fun, either. Concessions were good, and everyone stayed refreshed. Everyone became unified with Christmas cheer, and no one had trouble finding what they were looking for. It will change Christmas forever.

I think it was a great connecting experience for everyone of all shapes, sizes, and ages. It was a powerful cultural event for everyone who needed a great Christmas time. I think it will keep on going for a while. It brings people together who would like to have a great time. Christmas is more than just presents; it brings people together for all of them to connect. Those people will celebrate together for once; you don't know who you're helping when you have the best time.

## **The Washington Candlelight Home Tours** **By Eden Nachtigall**

This December, fifth and sixth, the Washington Chamber of Commerce is hosting its 34th annual Tour of Homes, where you get to experience beautifully decorated homes and businesses and learn a little bit about the town. Tickets are \$12 online and \$15 at the door; children 10 and under are free. The proceeds will fund Christmastime lights on Washington Square.

This event is about much more than Christmas lights and pretty decorations; it's also about culture. While you are walking around homes and businesses, you will get to learn about the history and people of Washington, as they like to highlight the old homes and homes with fun stories. The Chamber started this event 34 years ago to fund the lights on the square, and the event keeps growing with more people wanting to support it every year!

Putting up lights on the square is important because it makes things more festive or, as BISM puts it, "These lights not only brighten our homes and streets but also illuminate our hearts, reminding us of the deeper spiritual meanings of the holiday. As we celebrate this festive season, let us embrace the light within and around us, spreading joy and warmth to all." Overall, is a great way to spend time with your family during the



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL HOLIDAY EVENTS

---

holidays, while supporting the community by funding the lights on the town square, and connecting with your community and learning more about it and its people.

## **Kalona Coffee House Christmas Edition By Dani Swantz**

The day after Black Friday, the Kalona Coffee House hosts their annual Christmas menu to celebrate with the town of Kalona about the special holiday with what they do best, drinks and food.

Usually, holiday events have always brought everyone closer together, whether it is for a holiday or just a normal day, they always bring people in with a kind smile and a warm drink.

They have 6 amazing Christmas items, including food and drinks. They get the ingredients from Joyce Phillips, Hannah Chalupa, and Rhonda Yoder, some of the favorites, cinnamon streusel scone, Jack Frost, and the eggnog latte. It's really nice for the community and lets people come in and connect with others.

The Coffee House is a great study and meeting place for the community; it's also a great and fun experience for tourists, due to the connections that everyone has and the kindness of the workers and people in general. "Kalona Coffee House has the perfect blend of friendly, laid-back, relaxing atmosphere."  
(Kalona Coffee House)

In conclusion, the coffee house is one of the best places to study, hang out with friends, see old friends, and just meet up with other people.

**Sofia Acevedo-Cruz conducted an interview with a family friend regarding the trip her family is taking to celebrate Los Posadas this Christmas:**

**Who is part of this tradition?:** Anyone and everyone, but it's mostly the whole community.

**What is the point of it?:** It is to celebrate the life of baby Jesus and to tell the story of when Mary went to Bethlehem and all of the struggles they had when they went door to door.

**Where do they do this?:** Depending on what part of Mexico you are in, some do it based on religion, and some do it as they celebrate Christmas.

**When do they do this?** They do this from the 16 -24 of December.



# CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

## Lively Lights and Family Fun

By Celie Shelter

What is more fun than a summer walk in the park? A Christmas light show in the winter. Come through the biggest light show in Iowa any time between November 26th and December 31st, 2025, from 5:30- 9:00 pm at the Midwest Old Threshers grounds (405 E Thesaurus Road, Mount Pleasant, IA).

This is a fun and interactive way of celebrating Christmas and making fun family memories while celebrating culture and Christmas. All you have to do is come to the light show, pay a \$5 fee for ages 5 and up, then go through the light show to make some of the best Christmas memories.

A recent interview with a person who went to the show states that one of his favorite memories is getting pizza with his family, then laughing and having a fun time driving through the light show. The owner of Old Thesaurus Reunion stated. "Since 2013, this enchanting holiday tradition has delighted visitors with a spectacular array of festive lighted scenes, from gingerbread men and tractors to candy canes and Santa Claus." Each picture made by lights is sponsored by different companies or individuals.

Many people wonder why we celebrate with lights or why we have Christmas lights. The

reason is that back in the 16th century, Germany started to put candles on their Christmas trees because of Martin Luther. Martin Luther put candles on a fir tree to symbolize the brightly shining stars on Christmas. This shows that we can see God through the seasons, maybe bright.

This is a celebration of culture in a fun, interactive way. It shows us how different cultures celebrate in different ways. When driving through the show, you can see different ways that people celebrate because of the many people and cultures that help build the light displays.

## Community Lights By Mason Schneider

Christmas lights are bringing the community together in Wayland, Iowa, with the Wayland lights display. For some, it's a tradition; for others, it's their first time. Every year on Dec. 10-12 and again Dec. 17-19, the city puts on a lights display with each night starting with a soup supper at the Wayland community center at 4:30 pm with a freewill donation. There will also be plenty of events for the kids, including photographs with Santa at the Main Street Gallery from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. There will also be Sheep drives through town and horse-drawn rides for visitors.

Christmas lights relate to culture in many ways. "During Christmas, lights symbolize the

victory of light over darkness, reflecting the birth of Jesus Christ, who is often referred to as the 'Light of the World'. Christmas lights also remind us of our inner light. They serve as a metaphor for the divine spark within each of us, encouraging us to let our own light shine brightly in the world." For many people, it's also a tradition to have Christmas lights and to put them up with their family. "Decorating Christmas trees with lights is a beloved tradition. The lights symbolize the star of Bethlehem and the light of Christ." Lights represent lots of things in the Christian bible.

The Christmas lights are a big part of Christianity, but lots of people don't know how. I think it's important to know that Christmas lights are basically to light up the world, and that's what Jesus did when he came to the world. That is what we all need to remember this Christmas season. Fun fact: David Richards, an Australian lawyer, had over 1.1million lights that covered over 75 miles of lights. He used these lights to rap 3 large gifts for a display.

## Christmas Light Displays in Johnson County By Paxton Wilson

In Johnson County on December 11th, 2022, anyone is invited to come see the Aisle of Lights on Holiday Road in Coralville. Across town, white paper sacks filled with sand



HILLCREST ACADEMY

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

and a candle will be lit to create a stunning display. You can walk or drive, and you can also make your own paper lantern and participate in the display. Free sacks and sand will be provided by Coralville, but bring your own candles. Anyone is able to come, so please do come see these fluorescent light displays. My neighbor, Drayce Miller, said that he and his family put up lights for Christmas on their shed, red and green lights. He also said that Johnson County has really cool light displays and is very decorative and festive. Johnson County has many other light displays across the county that you can also go see.

“If you like to see inflatable Santa Clauses, some particularly extravagant Christmas décor and twinkling lights, the Johnson County community has you covered.” That is one of the quotes from Paris Barraza, who wrote for the Iowa City Press Citizen, talking about interesting light displays. Light displays are really good for bringing Christmas cheer to a community; it has always been a tradition to set up lights. The real question is, why do we decorate with Christmas lights? “I don’t know about your neighborhood, but mine is brightly lit with an amazing variety of Christmas lights, holiday displays, and inflatable figurines.” Light displays are very important for spreading Christmas cheer across communities, and for

some, it can be considered an aspect of competition to see who can get the best house display. Lots of people every year decorate their houses with Christmas lights.

Decorating with Christmas lights is important to culture because it symbolizes the day that Jesus was born and the cheerful days for Christians and those who celebrate it. Christmas lights are one of the best ways you can spread cheer to someone you have never seen. You never know what the dazzling lights will bring to someone's day, so I highly recommend decorating your house and seeing light displays in your county. Christmas lights are a very good way of spreading Christmas spirit to those around you and to symbolize Jesus' birth.

## **Christmas Tree Lights of Love, Washington** **By Addison Gordinier**

During December, the Washington Town people in Washington, Iowa. Host the Lights of Love, where numerous lights are displayed throughout the town square for everyone to enjoy in the community. The whole town is helping to put lights on the building.

I interviewed Myka Widdel (Local) about the Washington town square lights and what they did. What she was talking about was that you go there and they have a big christmas tree in the middle, and the town gets together to see the lights of the tree turn on. They also do this thing where they buy a small Christmas tree and have a

carved sign of the name of your loved ones who have passed, and decorate the tree to commemorate them. I thought there was lots of culture in this event. Myka said that when you go to the square, the trees are all decorated, and it tells you you're not the only one who is missing a loved one during the Christmas season. She also talked about how when you go, you see lots of people that you haven't seen in forever, and you see the community coming together to celebrate the Life of Jesus Christ.

According to Bloomington International Ministries, “Hope and Illumination: In many spiritual traditions, light represents hope and spiritual illumination. During Christmas, lights symbolize the victory of light over darkness, reflecting the birth of Jesus Christ, who is often referred to as the “Light of the World.” What they are saying is that Christmas lights are the symbol of Jesus, our savior. In my mind, that means that Jesus is looking over their families' loved ones.

## **Mount Pleasant Festival of Lights** **By Lia Rocha**

The Mt. Pleasant Festival of Lights is a light display in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, that runs from November 26 to December 31. It has been happening every year since 2013 and is extremely popular. This beautiful light display spans two miles. The Mt. Pleasant



# CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

---

Festival of Lights is a non-profit organization sponsored by around 252 people. People can donate to them, and the donations go to the old threshers' reunion grounds and facilities

The Midwest Old Threshers has been around for 75 years, and that's where the festival of lights takes place. It's one of Iowa's largest drive-through light parks, spanning two miles. There are over 180 light displays there. They have a lot of fun stuff to do, some of which includes a horse wagon ride. And you can also take your kids to meet Santa Claus. The festival of lights has something called the Avenue of Honours, which is they have light displays that mean different things. There is a cancer awareness ribbon, a gingerbread man in honour of children and grandchildren and much more.



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**  
ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# GIVING AND DONATIONS

## The Coat Drive By Troy Yoder

Hillcrest Academy recently held a coat drive to get as many coats donated as possible to give to those in need. They did this all within the Christmas holiday. People could donate by giving the coats to Sheri and the small group. It was a really good thing for the Hillcrest small group to do for the community.

In the past, the coat drives have really helped out the community because they help the people in need get a coat for the winter season. And Sheri's small group did a great job at helping out the community and the people in need. Now they made their own coat drive but if you want to you can make on to, this is a very important charity drive because over over 75% of low-income families do not have the money for basic needs, and so to donate to a coat drive your giving these people the freedom to spend their hard earned money on other things such as food, water, shelter, etc. And on top of that, 75% of low-income families can't afford necessities. The poverty rate has been up from 2010 to the present. They do the coat drive so that people in need can get a coat for winter. The people who participated in the coat drive are the people in Sheri's small group and some parents, if they have coats they don't need anymore. I think this relates to the Christmas spirit because Christmas is all about Jesus

being born, and so to try to do good like Jesus always did, a good way to do that is to give to the people in need.

I think that holding a coat drive every year is a great way to help the community and the people in need, because you are giving back to the community you live in, and it is always a great feeling to give back to people. So if you want to help people in your community, even though Sheri's coat drive has already happened, that doesn't stop you from making your own coat drive to give back to the community and do something kind this holiday season.



## Angel Tree Shopping With JYF

By Elise Hartsock

Sunday, 12/7, is a day to remember when the local union JYF was on a mission to go angel tree shopping. Angel Tree is an organization that helps children who need gifts, and you buy them gifts. They started with some burgers and ice cream. They got in groups of five and went off to shop at Walmart. The groups of five each had a \$75 limit. Everybody was filled with

joy while shopping.

JYF has been a light of the community, and helps out with local events, and has brought many people closer to God with after-parties and tears. The events have been a hit this year with all ages from 11 to 14 years old.

This night had a short message to the kids; the adults helped us remember that helping is better than receiving. Some people said it was fun and that they hope the kids who got the gifts will be happy this year with fun toys and cool clothes. The message the kids got was that even if you don't have a big heart outside, you have one inside.

I spoke with Ellen Rempel, class of 2030, who attends Hillcrest Academy. It impacted her because it helped children in need, and it was a fun activity to do with friends. She had a great time and would 100% do it again. She got a girl toy, hats/gloves, pants, and lots of socks. She hopes this kid will have a good Christmas - Ellen Rempel.

I, Elise Hartsock, class of 2030, got to go to the event, and I had a lot of fun picking out socks and toys when we got in the car we did a review sheet, and they had a question about faith and I thought that maybe this kid had never heard of Jesus I prayed for the gifts and hope it meets her well. This was the Union Angel tree shopping experience.



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# GIVING AND DONATIONS

---

## Operation Christmas Child By Braxton Ropp

We sent the gifts to kids in other countries. We sent little toys and hygiene products. We gave the gifts to the church last Sunday. We sent the gifts to them because they are struggling financially. We gave the packages to the church, which sent them to Operation Christmas Child. We try to fit all the things inside a shoe box.

They do this so they can spread the gospel and share the love of Jesus. 24 million boys and girls have accepted Jesus and have enrolled in a 12 Lesson program that they raise money for. At the beginning of this, they packed 28,000 shoe boxes, and now they are packing 232 million.

This means walking into the place where the tribes live and seeking peace with them, after that, they give them the gifts. After they have a little sermon that is about the birth of Jesus. Later, they get even more people to donate money. After sharing the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." This means we are bringing the community together by sharing the gospel. People are also praying over the boxes before they are shipped to the other countries. "There is no shortage of opportunities and numerous requests for donations at Christmastime, and most churchgoers do give charitably at this time of year." The community is supporting the same thing, and they are

covering the cost of shipping the boxes. Eventually, they have enough money to send a large group of people over to the countries where they sent the shoe boxes. The shoe boxes have a tracker so you can track where your box got sent, and then they send you a video of them receiving the boxes. The whole church participated in buying stuff to fill the shoe boxes.



# LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

## **Cheeseball Season has begun at Lower Deer Creek Church** **By Molly Helmuth**

On December 13th, Lower Deer Creek in Kalona, Iowa, had its annual Cheeseball Fundraiser. This includes the preparation, making, and selling of the Cheeseballs. The Fundraiser brought young and old together to serve the church community. The group of about forty gathered there, and within two hours, they had the job done, all while talking and enjoying each other's company.

In previous years, this fundraiser has been something our church looks forward to doing for the community. The people come to serve and build new relationships. It has never been hard for someone to fit in with the church community due to all the smiles, hugs, and continued support through all seasons. Still, Christmas has always been special in the Lower Deer Creek community.

A verse that goes with helping and serving your community is Matthew 25: 35-36 " For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." This fundraiser brings many different emotions to many different people throughout the church community.

Though the Cheeseball Fundraiser was to sell cheeseballs, a lot more was going on than a business opportunity; it brought a whole church community together in one event. Smiles, hugs, and laughs were shared, creating memorable moments for old and young alike. This event focuses on spreading the love and kindness of Jesus Christ throughout more than the church community, but to surrounding areas, including Wellman, Kalona, Washington, Hills, Iowa City, and the Riverside areas. People in the community bought and supported a local church so that Lower Deer Creek can continue to support youth events and send money to the Anabaptist Peace Center in Nigeria. As the holiday season continues, this cheeseball fundraiser will be looked forward to by the community of Lower Deer Creek Church. Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas to all!!

## **Lower Deer Creek Christmas Extravaganza** **By Bria Ropp**

On Christmas Eve, Lower Deer Creek Church hosts a Christmas Eve service, inviting people from the congregation and the surrounding community to join in celebrating the birth of Christ through the service. With animals and people playing parts, putting on the show. Once every two years, Lower Deer Creek Church brings people and major crowds from adults to little kids to celebrate this night. People gather for snacks, hot drinks, and lots of

laughter and fun with the animals. The night starts with people arriving and finding their seats. Then, after that, the speaker talks about the story of Jesus's birth, and then follows with the choir with the angels. After that, people can get up and enjoy the animals and refreshments with friends. This is one of the ways that the Lower Deer Creek church brings together the congregation and community for a night of fun and retelling the story of Jesus. I believe that this is one of the best ways to get together and help people in the Christmas season. "The goal of these church-focused events is more for uplifting members, supporting each other through prayer and fellowship, and, in the case of services, offering worship together." (Next Sunday).

Although this event is not happening this year and will happen next year, it is a fun night full of activities and fun to look forward to. It is also a great opportunity to help people in times of need and struggle.

This event will always help people in times of need and be a great Christmas experience for the congregation and community. This is a very enjoyable evening event that Lower Deer Creek puts on, and I hope it will continue for many years to come, bringing smiles to children and laughs from adults.



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

## UDC Church Christmas By Drayce Miller

On December twenty-first, Upper Deer Creek, located in Wellman, Iowa, is hosting a fun morning of fellowship with the surrounding community, a brunch, and a powerful sermon prepared by Frank Slaughbah. People all around the area are invited to celebrate the gift of Jesus and take part in the UDC church community.

At Upper Deer Creek Church, their goal is to connect, grow, and serve in the community around them. One of the regular attenders, Amber Miller, says, "The purpose of a church Christmas is to celebrate together the remembrance of the birth of Jesus." After the worship service, there will be a skit prepared by Michele Patterson that helps explain and point to the true meaning of Christmas to Jesus. Upper Deer Creek has a long history of getting together to celebrate the holidays, and every month that has a fifth Sunday, we have a potluck where everyone brings loads of food to share with the church body, all well having a good time coming together and taking part with each other in fellowship.

It is important to have a church Christmas because, even though during Christmas there is good food to share and lots of gifts from everyone, we need to remember that Jesus' birth is the best gift to the world from God.

The website "sermoncentral" says that "it is essential to reflect on the true meaning of this sacred time and that Christmas sermons serve as a reminder of the love embodied in the birth of Christ." Please join the UDC church during this holiday season, and remember that Jesus is the reason for the season.

## How Marion Avenue Baptist Church's Christmas show brings people closer to God By Derek Ebersole

Last year, in the month of December, Marion Avenue Baptist Church, in Washington, Iowa, put on a show that would change the lives of many people. With a totally changed auditorium, the people of Marion, fully volunteering, are presenting a show to bring people closer to God.

The Christmas show is still bringing a full house of people yearning to know and have a relationship with God. Through hard work and dedication, the show is bringing people closer to God by featuring live animals, amazing props, and a life-changing production.

The Marion Avenue church explains that, "What started as a simple production has turned into a Christmas event that is changing lives all over the Midwest." Many people, after watching the show, put it on their calendar as an annual family tradition. The show isn't

just about bringing people closer to God, but also about helping them feel joy, hope, and gratitude for all that God has done for us.

Many people ask how they pay for the massive expense of the show. Marion Avenue says that "A free-will offering is taken at the conclusion of each showing; however, the bulk of the cost is covered by the sacrificial giving of the people of the Marion Avenue Baptist Church. They are passionate about showing people the true meaning of Christmas. Many people don't know the true meaning of Christmas, which is why the people at Marion Avenue Baptist Church try so hard to tell everyone about the news that Jesus was crucified on a cross and died for us, and after 3 days he rose, and will someday come again to create a new Heaven on Earth.

Though many people think that the true meaning of Christmas is to give gifts and be with family, those things are important, but the true meaning is to celebrate Jesus and everything that He has done for us. A great way to do that is to go to the Marion Avenue Christmas show. Sadly, there is no



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**

ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.

# LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

---

Christmas show this year, but put it on your calendar for December 8-13, 2026, to celebrate the birth and resurrection of Christ.

## **Children Compelled To Join Christmas Choir** **By Oliver Landes**

On Christmas Eve, December 4th, 7:00 p.m, at Wellman Mennonite Church, the Christmas Eve service will be held. During that service, the children's choir will sing songs about Jesus and Christmas so that the kids can have a part in the celebration of the birth of Jesus. It is led by Connie Ebersole and Lois Yoder. The children singing are Brooklyn, Mona, Zoe, Esther, Reuben, Hazel, and Vaughn.

Brooklyn, one of the choir members, feels as though they should not be forced into this choir and should have a choice. Most of the choir members are smaller and younger, and there is a large age gap, which means that the songs she sings are for children and not older kids like her. She says she feels disrespected by being forced to do this.

The Vice President of Chorus America says that Christmas choirs bring people together, give back to the community, it is also important to the community during Christmas time because is a tradition, and they spread the "Christmas spirit". She feels that Christmas choirs are very important for the community.

This is important because if we want to strengthen our church's community, a choir could bring us together. But if that same

cause damages someone's relationship with the church, is it worth it? That is a good question. I think that we should make this an optional event and that the older kids would not have to do it. But my opinion is probably not going to change anything, because the nurture team members at Wellman Mennonite have made up their minds. But in the end, even if the older kids are forced to do this, I hope this will help the community and church get along better with each other.

## **Christmas Decorations at Grace** **By Merle Cronquist**

At Grace Community Church, they have lights as a celebration at church. I have done my research about charisma lights and why we use them. I learned that Christmas lights symbolize light over darkness. "During Christmas, lights symbolize the victory of light over darkness, Light of the World"(Iubism). What this is saying is we use lights to show light over darkness, which is like Jesus over evil. This is to symbolize Jesus and his brightness and also to let our light shine, the light symbolizes this over darkness. They serve as a metaphor for the divine within each of us. After my research, I concluded that people put Christmas lights up as a reminder of Jesus and his light.



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**  
ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.



# MERRY CHRISTMAS!



**HILLCREST ACADEMY**  
ACADEMICS that INSPIRE. FAITH that LEADS.