

Volunteers grow annual tree festival

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Published Wednesday, December 2, 2009



Many wonder just what causes an event to become an upbeat affair. Does it just happen? Are there people who push a button and the magic begins to flow? I think it begins with someone who loves something enough to want to be a part of the cause. And those people who have been leaders pave the road so well that others want to trod that path, too. It also can begin with someone who admires someone else who loves to help others.

Sally Mitchell grew up in a large family helping decorate Christmas trees. It became a holiday tradition to spend time with Beaufort's Festival of Trees, a fundraising event featuring decorated trees. When Mitchell was first approached by Norma Duncan to become a part of making this event happen, even if she wanted to say no, she could not.

"This was six years ago when Norma and her husband, Jack, along with Karen and Bill Harvey were co-chairing the event. I knew that volunteering and working with Duncan would be a learning experience that I could treasure," Mitchell said.

Her admiration for Duncan can be traced to traveling to Europe with Duncan while she was a student at Beaufort Academy. Mitchell began taking care of all the mailing for the Festival of Trees, from soliciting tree sponsors to sending invitations and tickets for the Gala Opening Reception. The next step was to work with the decorators, helping set up before the festival as well as working and donating to the Gift and Gourmet Shop.

It became a family affair as Mitchell asked her mom, Kathy Mitchell, and her sister, Katy Jones, to assist. It turned into a circle of helpers as other family members and friends joined in the volunteering process. For three years Mitchell worked as an assistant to the volunteer coordinator and now she serves as event coordinator with Robin Boozer in the assistant position, learning step-by-step the process of loving to volunteer.

"To me the holiday season means giving to others so they can enjoy the holidays as much as I do when I surround myself with the love of my family. I feel that spirit in the Festival of Trees," Mitchell said.

There are hundreds of volunteers working behind the scenes to make the festival a success. This season of joy, the decorated trees and Gift and Gourmet Shop help provide support to Friends of Carolina Hospice -- not only to those in hospice, but also caregivers, family members and others. Over the history of the festival more than \$700,000 has been contributed to Friends of Carolina Hospice.

This year's Festival of Trees opens Monday. When the Festival opens to the public for five days, one can enjoy lunch prepared by Debbie Covington. The Gift and Gourmet Shop offers crafts, wreaths, handmade items, canned goods and an array of homemade goodies from some of the best cooks in Beaufort.

The following recipes are of some of the items that will be found in the Gift and Gourmet Shop.

Recipes:

Marble Fudge

1 (12-ounce) package semi sweet chocolate

1 (12-ounce) package butterscotch

1 cup peanut butter

1 (10 1/2-ounce) package miniature marshmallows

1 cup salted nuts

Combine chocolate, butterscotch and peanut butter in large glass bowl. Microwave on medium for 5 minutes. Stir until melted. Fold in marshmallow and peanuts. Spread in a buttered 13-by-9-inch pan. Refrigerate for several hours or until set. Cut into squares.

Christmas Cookies

1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
1/2 cup butter, softened
1 1/2 cups sweetened flaked coconut
2 cups red and green
candy-coated chocolate

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a medium bowl combine graham cracker crumbs, flour and baking powder. In a separate large bowl combine condensed milk and butter; beat until smooth. Stir in graham cracker mixture, mixing well. Stir in coconut and chocolates.

Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake in preheated oven for 7 to 9 minutes or until lightly browned. Allow cookies to cool on baking sheet for 1 minute before removing to a wire rack to cool completely.

Brownies

1/2 cup peanut butter
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup brown sugar
4 tablespoons butter, softened
2/3 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup salted peanuts, chopped

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease an 8-inch square baking pan. In a large mixing bowl, cream together the peanut butter and butter. Add the brown sugar, vanilla and eggs and beat until light and fluffy. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt in a separate bowl. Add to the butter mixture and mix until well blended. Stir in peanuts.

Spread batter evenly into pan and bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean. Let cool on wire rack and cut into 2-inch squares