

Trimming Chrismon tree a labor of faith and love

By Margaret Miller
staff writer



Dora McBride (left) and Vera Davis put finishing touches on one of the chrismons that are a tradition at Rice Memorial United Methodist Church of Redford.

community calendar

• LIVE NATIVITY SCENE

Thursday and Friday, Dec. 23-24: Live Nativity Scene staged by the junior and senior high school members of Covenant Baptist Church, 7-9 p.m. Thursday and 6-7 p.m. Friday. On the grounds of the church, Maple Road, west of Orchard Lake Road.

• OLD-FASHIONED CHRIST

MAS Friday, Dec. 24: "Old-Fashioned Christmas Eve Service" at 5 p.m. led by Dr. Robin Meyers of Bushnell Congregational Church, in Northville's historic Mill Race Village.

• CHRISTMAS CAMP

Monday to Thursday, Dec. 27-30: Christmas Day Camp for 6-12-year-olds runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily with an optional Wednesday overnight stay at Mercy Conference Center, 28600 11 Mile Road. Inquiries are taken by calling the center 476-8010.

Christmas Eve

service offered

An old-fashioned Christmas Eve is planned by Bushnell Congregational Church for 5 p.m. Dec. 24 at Northville's historic Mill Race Village.

Sunday school children will perform Christmas carols, Christopher Broderick will sing "O Holy Night," Dr. Robin Meyers will give a brief meditation and candles will be distributed to everyone who attends.

The early service is specially planned to include children.

For more information, call Molly Dailey at 477-1621.

• CESAREAN BIRTH

Monday, Dec. 25: "The Cesarean Birth Experience" film and program sponsored by Lamaze Childbirth Education Association of Livonia at 7 p.m. in St. Matthew United Methodist Church, 30900 Six Mile Road. Fee of \$3 asked at the door.

• CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Tuesday and Thursday, Dec. 28 and 30: "Charlotte's Web," movie suitable for all ages, shown at 2 p.m. Tuesday in Farmington Branch Library and at 2 p.m. Thursday in Farmington Hills Branch Library. No charge.

• WASSAIL DINNER

Wednesday, Dec. 29: Authentic 17th century wassail dinner with entertainment furnished by wandering minstrels served at 7 p.m. in Balford Inn's Coach House to benefit Oakway Symphony Orchestra. Reservations at \$25 taken by calling the symphony office, 476-6544.

• CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

Monday, Jan. 3: Children's Story Hour at 10:30 a.m. in Children's Book Shop, in Applegate Square, Northwest Highway and Inkster. No charge.

• LOW-CALORIE COOKING

Tuesday, Jan. 4: Low-calorie cooking demonstration given by Weight Watchers executive chef Larry Janes at 10 a.m. in Farmington Community Center, 24705 Farmington Road. No charge.

It was 13 years ago that a young minister was leaving a parsonage's home just as several women from his church were arriving.

What was going on, the Rev. Jim Barnes asked Vera Davis.

She explained that the women were coming for a craft workshop, and asked if he would like to see some of the crafts she and Dora McBride, another member of the Rice Memorial United Methodist Church of Redford, had made.

Indeed he would, he replied. So Barnes followed the group to the Davis' basement to view some beautifully made floral decorations.

"He told us: 'You have talent — use it for your church too,'" Davis remembers.

And that was the start of Rice Memorial's annual Chrismon project, which blooms each December as the Hanging of the Greens and a chrismon tree, every year more respondent in Christian-symbol decorations.

CHRISMON MEANS Christian monogram, the women explained, so the work of decorating a chrismon tree involves more than putting pearl and gold ornaments on a tree.

"It's the biggest thing we do all year," said Davis as she and McBride took out rows and rows of chrismons for this year's traditional event.

"Not just these," she added, waving a hand toward the white and gold creations. "It's mainly the fellowship, in making the chrismons and in the participation in the Hanging of the Greens and the beautiful tree we always have afterwards."

The big event took place Sunday, and members of the church at Beech-Daly and Eight Mile will have the rest of the Christmas season to admire the tree filled with lovingly-furnished ornaments.

This year there were more than 60 ornaments to hang on the tree. The first year, though, there were only four, made by women Davis and McBride invited to a special workshop to use their talent.

The rest of the tree that first year was trimmed in gold bows and white lights, and each year more chrismons were created.

TWO ARE NEW this year, and a couple more have been started for Christmas of 1983. The tree

now uses 13 strings of white lights.

"We're on our third tree," McBride noted, "and it isn't nearly big enough."

The Rice collection includes a variety of symbols, the Chi Rho, Greek letters for the first two letters of Christos or Christ; the cross; the anchor; the Jerusalem cross; a triangle for the trinity; the candle; the lamb; the chalice; and the crown.

Then there is the lamp of learning; the bell; the fish; the symbol used by the Christians; the hill of God; and the descending dove.

"Somebody called them Rice's jewels," McBride commented.

"We research each chrismon we make," said Davis. "Nothing goes onto the tree without biblical backing. And when it is placed on the tree during the Hanging of the Greens, the passage from the Bible is read."

Recently some different designs, still biblical, have turned into chrismons.

One was taken from a bulletin the church used one Christmas. It depicts a circle representing the world, with a cross and a crown inside. Another is an adaptation of a picture that hangs in the study of the present Rice Memorial minister, the Rev. John Ferris.

VERA DAVIS' husband Bill cuts out the styrofoam forms for the chrismons.

"Takes me about five minutes," he notes modestly as the hot wire slips through the thick sheet around the symbol's form.

After the form is complete, the women in the workshop begin the decoration.

Gold and pearl and crystal beads are used, along with gold braid and gold and pearl sequins.

Women participating this year in the workshops included Bev Jarrell, Vi Chaffee, Isabel Dobson, Grace Myers, Norma Lee, Deb Ferris, Nancy Komar, Ruth Bone and Wendy Roe.

"Some have been coming every year," said McBride.

The women who make the ornaments are the ones who hang them on the tree during the reverent and traditional ceremony each year. The program also involves telling the history and biblical reference of each chrismon.

THE ANNUAL EVENT ends with another church tradition.

"It's the same every year," said Davis. "we like the idea of an old-fashioned tea."

Food for the tea, prepared by a committee headed by Chaffee, always includes tiny tea sandwiches, chicken, ham and egg salad, and salmon salad, the hit of each year's tea.

"And we always have the same little sandwiches, for tea," said Davis. "but theirs are peanut butter and jelly."

This year, more than 200 attended Rice's Hanging of the Greens.

It was a great satisfaction to the two women who were asked 13 years ago to "use your talent for your church."

"We believe," said Davis, "it's a service we were supposed to do."

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This cross always tops the Rice tree.

'I'm dreaming of a white Christmas'

Continued from Page 1

While Jacobson's fashion coordinator, Lynn Morrison, and our photographer, went to the top of the staircase to create a snow queen scene complete with fluttering snowflakes, the Saks Fifth Avenue contingent gathered at the fireplace to test the temptation of gaily wrapped gifts.

Next came Anna Bassett of Claire Pearone with her new fashion coordinator, the intrepid Rosemary Bannon, who brought along a breathtakingly beautiful white ensemble by Bernard Perris.

"You really should look fabulous for the holidays or not bother at all," is Bassett's fashion philosophy.

"White is very refreshing and cheerful, sort of a mood-elevator and so feminine," she added.

Hudson's brought enough models to make up an entire family including father, mother, daughter and twin boys dressed all in white, combined with muted pastels. And, later, we sent mom outside to one of those wonderful ice-handicrafts.

Gretchen Snow, speaking for Hudson's, said: "We like winter white because it is romantic, flattering and very special. When it's combined with soft pastels, you can create a wonderful soft look of classic elegance."

Hattie babbled on a white-hand-embroidered silk gown by Chloe. "White is pure elegance and can be a basic in the wardrobe that goes on forever," she said. "White is very special."

As we grouped the "something special for the holidays" gowns for one smashing photo, Saks Fifth Avenue fashion coordinator Annie Bower and Jacobson's Lynn Morrison exchanged thoughts on white.

"Our favorite way to use winter or Christmas white is to mix it with black or ice-cream colors," said Bower.

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