

# Suburban Life



(F11C)

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## Holiday tour embraces many cultures

By Louise Okrutsky  
staff writer

**V**ISIT 20 COUNTRIES in 60 minutes.

That's about the time it'll take to browse through the second annual Heritage Holiday Tour, a collection of decorated trees and displays set to the theme, "It's a Small World." The tour, sponsored by the Friends of Heritage, is scheduled for Dec. 5-8 at the Heritage Park Visitors Center on Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile roads.

Local businesses sponsored the more than 20 trees decorated by 18 community organizations and several scout troops. Three trees are outside of the former Spicer house and are laden with birdseed and other natural ornaments.

At 10 feet, the artificial tree bought for the visitors center by the Friends is easily the tallest one in the old house. This year it serves as the setting for a montage of more than 175 dolls representing different countries. Garlands of glitter-covered and painted dolls representing children around the world will circle the big tree.

"We wanted the 10-foot tree to tie everything together," said Barbara

McConn, Friends of Heritage organization coordinator.

Amassing dolls for the international tree allowed Pat Gallagher and Toni O'Farrell, co-chairwomen of a five member committee to enjoy other people's collections. Pat Nunari, a Friends member, allowed them to use 36 dolls and became the biggest contributor.

"I'm not a doll person," confessed Gallagher, mother of three sons. That didn't stop her from picking two favorites — a Spanish senorita dressed in a black dress with tiers of white lace sewn onto its voluminous skirts and a sweet-faced French doll dressed in an embroidered Provencal print skirt.

Attaching the dolls with wire to the tree looms as the biggest challenge for the committee in charge of the international tree. The committee estimates it'll take five people two days to attach all of the dolls and hang the brightly colored ornaments and bows.

They have plenty of company when tree-trimming time comes around. Women from the Japanese Cultural Group are folding enough origami birds to cover a 4-foot tree. Farmington Garden Club presents a crystal covered tree to represent

Iceland. The Finnish Club celebrates its members' heritage by decorating another tree.

Hill and Dale Garden Club salutes Austria and the 100th anniversary of Mozart's birth with its tree. Farmington Women's National Farm and Garden Club decorate a tree in the German style.

ONCE AGAIN, Gloria Clark sets up her three-story miniature house with its handmade furniture and decorations. There's a traditional Hanukkah display.

Cub Scout troops are preparing mesh bags filled with sweet balls to hang on trees outside the visitors center. Last year, tour-goers watched the antics of birds and squirrels vying for the food.

New on the tour is Ellen Abdou's collection of antique Santa Clauses. Her collection runs the gamut from post-World War II Japanese felt and celluloid Santas to late 19th century German-made papier-mache figures called Belsnickels. Pull off the boots of some of the older Santas and discover a hollow hiding place for Christmas candies. Many of these Santas hold trees or once held turkey feather twigs.

Not all Santas are valued alike.

The late 19th century figures wearing lavender or pink coats are the most desirable to collectors because they're the less common.

SOME SANTAS aren't even Santas. In the corner of one of Abdou's crowded shelves of Santas stands a worn figure in a faded green coat. He's really Santa's beardless alter

ego, Knecht Rupprecht, (Servant Ruppert) who handed out lumps of coal to bad children.

"Someone bought him and put a beard on him," Abdou said. "When I got a chance to get him, I got him and took his beard off."

She began collecting years ago when antique Santas weren't the big ticket item they are today. Even the

Japanese figures, original cheap dime-store items, can be pricey.

"The first Santa I bought was probably one of the Japanese figures. I probably got it for a quarter or 50 cents from a house sale," she said.

"That doesn't happen anymore."

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Dolls by the dozens are strewn across Pat Gallagher's sofa. The Farmington Hills resident helped collect dolls for the Heritage Holiday Tour's international tree.



Ellen Abdou shows off a small part of her prized collection of antique and contemporary Santa Clauses. She holds in her hand a contemporary Claus crafted by June McKenna. Part of her collection will be on display during the Heritage Holiday Tour.

## Group provides singular fun

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

In the Farmington Single Professionals, wallflowers can play wallyball, study may go horseback riding and those wanting to take the plunge can go whitewater rafting.

"If they meet somebody and they go out that's good, too," said Dave Hurlbert, 35, activities coordinator for the group.

But, match-making is not the group's primary objective, although an estimated 75 couples have met and later married. These things just happen when Cupid's arrow goes flying.

Professionals started five years ago as a social outlet, a place to have fun and meet friends.

Members range between 25 and 40 in age and Hurlbert estimates three-fourths of the members have never been married. And like the name indicates, they represent a wide variety of professions, including teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, social workers as well as those who are self-employed.

"But we don't want that to intimidate anyone," said Hurlbert, 35, who lives in Farmington and is a licensed builder.

Actually, the informal nature of the Farmington Single Professionals allows people to feel a little more at

ease, and thus, easier to socialize.

Things such as whirlyball, feather bowling and hayrides elicit laughs rather than war stories of past relationships gone awry.

OTHER ACTIVITIES can appeal to the bicep as well as the intellect. Trips to Red Wing and Piston games as well as to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and to the Detroit Institute of Arts' "Dinner with Bach," a weekend in Las Vegas as well as a one-day junket to the Bahamas are in the works, too.

On this night, 30 people have turned out for wallyball at Racquet Ball in Farmington. For an hour, the singles mingle on a hardwood court where the only thing being hit on is a blue playground ball.

"The thing I like about it is they do fun things," said Cathy Racicot, 40, who lives in Livonia. "The group is dedicated to having a good time."

Racicot is like many members of the singles group. She was transferred in her job as a sales manager of Ryder Truck from Miami, Fla. to this area and didn't know anyone.

While watching Metro Cablevision, Racicot heard about the Farmington Single Professionals.

Racicot's been involved in the group since. In nearly three years, she's participated in a myriad of activities such as feather bowling and white water rafting as well as wallyball. And she's made friends along the way like Suzanne Crowley, who figures she's met 20 friends since joining the group two years ago.

"It's more or less like friends," said Crowley, 31, who lives in Livonia. "Most of these guys are friends"



Donna Conley of Waterford gets a laugh out of a mistake by a fellow player during a Farmington Professional Singles' wallyball get-together.

BILL HANSEN

ADDED JOE Bielaska, who lives in Canton: "You make friends, men and women. There's no pressure to go out."

The Farmington Single Professionals

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