

Ren-Cen Christmas party plans to be a humdinger

By M.B. Dillon
staff writer

Magic, music, fun and fantasy are children who attend "A Renaissance Christmas," a holiday extravaganza set for 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 26, at the Renaissance Center in Detroit.

The fourth annual gala is expected to draw more than 15,000, making this Detroit's largest children's party ever.

"A Renaissance Christmas is a big day for little people. This is a nice public service the Renaissance Center does for children," said Birmingham's Marilyn O'Connor Miller. With her husband John, Miller is lining up the performers and creating the life-sized Renaissance characters who'll entertain.

Reservations aren't necessary, and admission is a smile. Children aged 3-10 and their parents are welcome.

After a parade at 11:30 a.m., Santa Claus will visit with his fans and pose as elves take pictures, for free, of every child who greets Santa.

Puppeteers, fairies, jugglers, singers, jesters, musicians, Poppinjay Holiday Marionettes and even a unicorn will perform as children wait to have their faces painted or caricatures drawn, tour the petting farm, visit "The Children Only Shoppe" or "Make and Take Craft Workshops." Children may watch lace makers, spinners and weavers at work and have their fortunes told.

"This is open to everyone. Anyone can come and enjoy it," said Lee Ann Phillips. For more information, call 568-5600.

Marilyn O'Connor Miller, a professional puppeteer, has worked on the party full time since September, creating garlands and lining up nearly 60 performers, all of whom will entertain in costume.

"You have to put blinders on," she said. "I haven't seen the top of my dining room table for six weeks. I've been making fairy wings. Each year, the Millers adds a new character. This year it's a giant unicorn."

AT 11:30, there'll be a parade for Santa, said Miller. "First will be some mythical characters, a fairy with huge wings, the unicorn man and balloon people. They'll look as if they were great big toys. Then Santa will come out and greet kids. He'll transform the unicorn magically into Rudolph. He'll make his nose light up, put antlers on his head, and away we go."

Puppet shows are set for 12:30 and 2 p.m.

This year's decorations are beautiful, said Stephen Horn, of Renaissance Center Venture, which owns the center.

"This year, we've added more holiday decorations to complement the new Jefferson Avenue atrium and display windows. I think everyone will be very pleased with our festive holiday decor," Horn said.

LAMBS, CALVES piglets, sheep and other four-footed residents of Upland Hills Farm will be around for children to pet in the Jefferson Avenue Atrium.

At the "Make and Take" workshops, kids may create their own holiday crafts to take home.

Inexpensive gifts, and gift wrapping, will be available to children at The Children Only Shoppe.

Two family movies, "Willow" and "Land Before Time," are on tap for noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. in the Renaissance Theater. Admission is \$1 for children 12 and under and \$3 for adults.

There'll be storytelling, a mini merry-go-round and a Ronald McDonald show.

"WALK-AROUND" performers will include mimes who've studied under Marcel Marceau, Mother Goose, the Pied Piper of Norway, Jester Jonathon the Fool, Gibbon the Troubadour, wizard and magician John Osborne, even trumpeters who Miller says "will herald all the events." There'll be professional dancers, flutists, penny whistlers, mandolin players, guitarists and singers with "voices like velvet," she added.

Miller's son, Tom O'Connor, will be "a combination mime, juggler and musician. He'll be dressed primarily like a jester. But he does a lot of juggling, and plays the recorder and tin whistle," she said.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Marilyn O'Connor Miller and John Miller of Birmingham are creating a unicorn, one of the many Renaissance characters who'll help children celebrate Christmas at a holiday extravaganza Saturday, Nov. 26, at the Renaissance Center.



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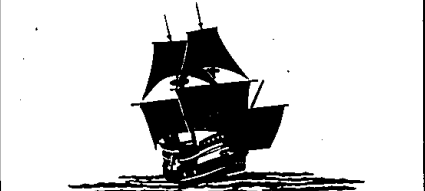
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