



Building on Tradition

by Tracy Holmes

An event rooted in a desire to – for just a day a year – transform uptown White Rock into a Victorian-esque Christmas village returns to the town centre on Nov. 24.

Marking a milestone – this will be the event's 10th year – organizers say the Christmas on the Peninsula Festival is a much-anticipated affair.

"There's some kind of special spirit that people enjoy," festival founder Liv Butow said.

"It's just fun – just to dress up, to see old friends. Sometimes you see them just (that) one time a year.

"All the people that take part, they seem to enjoy themselves."

Butow, who calls South Surrey home, created the event in 2009, after pining for the traditional celebrations of her childhood in Norway – complete with carollers, fresh evergreen, candles and a Christmas parade.

It has been held on the Peninsula on the last Saturday of November ever since.

This year, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., festival-goers can enjoy more than two dozen events and activities at the Town Centre Walk-about, Five Corners and Central Plaza.

Among them, White Rock Community

Church will host mini-gingerbread-house decorating, Semiahmoo Arts will host crafts at the Landmark Pop-up Art Space, Arthur Murray Dance Studio will teach a Victorian dance and Star of the Sea Hall will be filled with a charity fair, where visitors can hunt for the perfect Christmas gift while supporting local charities.

On the way to the fair, there'll be nativity scenes to check out at The Living Room Thrift Store, and favourite Christmas stories will be told at Laura's Coffee Corner. Butow said carollers in Victorian costume will be sharing their voices throughout most of the day, singing on and off Johnston Road, at Central Plaza and in the Five Corners district. Other highlights lined up include opportunities for a behind-the-scenes look at the Coast Capital Playhouse, a ride through Bryant Park on a trackless train, and, of course, *Mystique* the donkey.

Butow said *Mystique* is always a popular



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Held by her father Doug, 20-month-old Lily Preston eats a cookie at the White Rock Community Centre during the 2015 Christmas on the Peninsula Festival. (File photo)

draw, particularly for the festival's younger guests.

"There are people that come specifically to see the donkey," she said.

As usual, the White Rock Community Centre will be bustling with a Christmas Market, entertainment, children's stage and more. Butow said, for her, a highlight of the festival is always the parade, and she is holding on to her dream of one day seeing it on a scale similar to those from her childhood.

Starting at 4 p.m., it is the lead-up to the day's grand finale events: the mayor's tree-lighting ceremony, featuring the voices of the Stella Maris Concert choir, followed by Carols by Candlelight at St. John's Presbyterian church.

Butow also dreams that one day more of the festival, including the market, will be held outdoors. Cold weather shouldn't be a deterrent to celebrating the season, she said.

"The markets in Europe are spectacular," Butow said. "They're so beautiful.

"Yes, you can still go to outdoor events. You just dress up and then you enjoy winter."

Butow said thousands of people have attended the White Rock festival every year, and she expects no different for the milestone-

anniversary edition.

More than 60 South Surrey and White Rock organizations are also taking part, she noted. Volunteers are also critical to its success, and Butow invites anyone who would like to get involved to contact her at 604-542-3776 or liv@butow.com

For Butow, it's been a particularly busy year getting ready for the festival, as she is also preparing to eventually pass the torch for its organization.

"I'm starting to think about it," she said, of stepping back from her central role. "This year, I've worked a lot. I want to make sure we have all the different lists, timelines, job descriptions... when somebody takes over.

"But I will still be part of it."

She said she is looking forward to a chance to enjoy more of the festival as a guest. As an organizer, "I don't really have time."

But she does have a bit of a wishlist, for when that time does come.

"Arthur Murray dance studio teaches people Victorian dances. That's the one I want to go to one day, when I have time."

For more information on the festival, visit christmasonthepeninsula.com

■ **Volunteers needed** for the 2018 Christmas on the Peninsula festival taking place Nov. 24. Street signs set up a week before the event as well as transportation, decorating and marshalling. Some jobs need to be done the day before the event and some on festival day. Contact Liz at 604-542-3776 or email liv@butow.com