

CHRISTMAS ON THE SQUARE

brings people together for a one-of-a-kind celebration



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It's around 4 p.m., and, as late afternoon fades into early evening, downtown Talladega simply dazzles. The decorations add touches of festive color, the Christmas lights sparkle in the darkening air and bounce off the architecture, and children try to keep their balance on the skating rink just steps away from the Talladega County Courthouse, all making The Square the perfect setting for a Christmas celebration.

Seriously, as you walk around streets, which have been closed for pedestrian-

only traffic, you would swear The Square is being staged for one of those ridiculous but infuriatingly popular Hallmark Channel Christmas movies.

(Not really, but you get the point.)

Launched in 2026, Christmas On The Square has been the City of Talladega's premier community event, bringing people of all ages and backgrounds for a weekend of food, fun, and fellowship. It's also a chance to present the city in the best possible light, according to Mary Sood, the city's public information director, and Tena Turner, owner of T.D. Turner Interior Design.

"It's the highlight of the season for the entire community," says Sood, who begins initial planning on Christmas On

The Square in February before kicking into high gear planning the fine details as soon as summer arrives.

"We adopted this eight years ago because we wanted to give back to the community, so what better way than Christmas On The Square," says Turner. One of the primary organizers of the annual event, she says it's important for city leaders and the business community to offer as many free activities as possible so parents can bring their entire families to enjoy their time together without spending an arm and leg.

"Because everything is free, it means parents don't have to say 'I'm sorry, kids, we can come this week because we don't have the money,'" Turner explains.





"Instead, they can come and everybody can have a good time."

The free activities were plentiful: ice skating, bungee jumping, bouncy houses, and train rides through the Square. The Historic Ritz Theatre held showings of many modern Christmas classes, including *Elf*, Tyler Perry's *A Medea Christmas*, *Christmas Vacation*, and *Polar Express*, and an accompanying Best Pajama Contest. And, of course, a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus, all offered on the house.

To present Christmas On The Square each year requires hours of volunteer work, vendors, and, most importantly, corporate sponsors who step up year after year. "I can't tell you how much



we appreciate our sponsors,” Turner says, “because without our sponsors this wouldn’t happen.”

As you walk around the streets of downtown Talladega, it’s easy to get caught up in just how picturesque The Square actually is. The Ritz Theatre (one of the last remaining Art Deco theatres from the 1930s), Michael’s Men’s Wear, and (across from The Square on Battle Street) the Talladega Bottling Works provide an enticing backdrop for this celebration. Like many downtowns throughout the nation, The Square has suffered its fair share of problems. However, the thousands of people who have come through The Square would indicate a pent-up desire to have a downtown experience. Sure, nostalgia is part of the draw, but is that really such a bad thing? Not if you ask Billy Davis, a long-time Talladega resident and educator at Evelyn D. Houston Elementary School.

Walking around downtown decked out in Jacksonville State gear - his alma mater - Davis spends much of his time





at the event shaking hands and talking with students he encounters. He says Christmas On The Square gives Talladegans and others coming downtown from other locales a chance to experience the city's history while also imagining what is possible for its future.

"We're trying to get back to the great Talladega we used to have in the past," says Davis. "When I was a little kid coming to Talladega from Lincoln, this place was packed on Saturdays, so this is good for the community and for bringing people together."

While preparations are being made for the official lighting of The Square's Christmas Tree, Turner takes a moment to answer one last question: How successful has the 2024 Christmas On The Square been?

"Have a look around and look at how many faces you see smiling," she says. "I think that says it all right there."

