



NEWS RELEASE

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New Year Star to rise again over “Star City”; First Night festivities planned for Downtown



Presque Isle - As the famous Times Square ball drops again in New York City on New Year’s Eve, so will The Star City’s star rise to usher in 2010 in northern Maine. In an expanded version of Presque Isle’s first-ever star raising held last December 31st to jump start the community’s 150th anniversary, community organizers are moving the event to the heart of the downtown and adding festivities to a full evening of celebration that will culminate with the rising of an illuminated six foot tall metal star, built by Northern Maine Community College students, beside the city’s tallest building in the moments leading up to midnight.



The second annual Star City First Night celebration is hosted by the Presque Isle Downtown Revitalization Committee and sponsored in part by Key Bank. It will feature activities for the entire family, including storytelling, games, movie showings, musical entertainment, and dance performances beginning at 8:00 p.m. and running through the star rising event at venues in the downtown corridor that includes the immediate area encompassing State and Main Streets. Festivities will conclude after the midnight star rising on the State Street side of the four-story Key Bank building with a New Year toast that will serve as a sneak peek at the new Wintergreen Arts Center on State Street.



“We’re excited about bringing this party Downtown,” said James Francomano, Presque Isle City Planner, who is working with the promotions committee of the PIDRC to coordinate the First Night activity. “It has become clear that we have the capacity to put on a large scale New Year’s Eve or ‘First Night’ event. We hope to use this first ‘First Night’ celebration to be held in the downtown as a model from which to expand over the years to come and picture it becoming as well-known as the annual Presque Isle Holiday Light Parade.”



The Mark and Emily Turner Memorial Library will be the host site of many of the evening’s family centered activities. Storytelling and a special visit by Curious George himself will kick off at the library at 8:00 p.m. with activities such as Wii game playing and children’s movie showings continuing through the night.



Hors d’oeuvres and non-alcoholic beverages will be served throughout the evening with a special toast planned at 9:30 p.m. and hosted by the Presque Isle Downtown Revitalization Committee to thank the organization’s many partners and volunteers during the year 2009. Local acoustical musicians will perform at the library before and after the toast and leading into the “star” event.



"As one of several cultural institutions in the downtown area, Turner Memorial Library is excited to participate in an event that celebrates storytelling, music, and dance through the works of local artists. In the spirit of prior events such as the Balloonfest Street Fair and Main Street Mania, we hope that this will inspire everyone from the community to visit downtown and see what the area has to offer. With so many recent changes, downtown Presque Isle is really becoming a lively place to connect with local vendors, have a delicious meal, and even gain a new perspective," said Dianna Leighton, teen/youth services assistant at the library and a member of the First Night coordinating committee.

Special performances by the Moon Dance Studio dance troupe will get underway at 8:00 p.m. at the Northeastland Hotel in the Ball Room. The dancers will be followed by live music performed by the Aroostook River Band at 9:00 p.m. Moon Dance will return for a second performance at 10:00 p.m. and the band will resume playing at 10:30 p.m. until it is time for the star rising. Refreshments will be served at the Hotel.

Various other businesses in the downtown corridor are also jumping on board and offering special promotions and activities for the evening. Among them, the Bemis and Rossignol Law Firm on the corner of State and Maine Street and the Northeastland Hotel's Red Room will serve as warming stations, offering free coffee and hot chocolate to First Night attendees.

Traffic on State Street in Presque Isle between the intersections with Second Street and Main Street will be blocked off by the Presque Isle Police Department and the city's Fire Department at approximately 11:00 p.m. to prepare for spectators to gather on the street beginning around 11:30 p.m. to watch the star make its rise behind the Key Bank Building (east side facing the Maine Public Service building).

"Through the feedback we have received at public forums from area residents and business owners about how to promote the redevelopment of the downtown area, one of the chief areas of concern we hear is that we need to generate more foot traffic and be more aggressive about enhancing pedestrian safety and convenience Downtown, all towards the goal of re-establishing Downtown as the heart of the City," said Francomano. "The First Night celebration has been identified by the PIDRC promotions committee as a way to address these issues, basically by throwing a Block Party on State Street between Main and Second Streets."

The Star City New Year Star was constructed in December 2008 by a dozen NMCC welding and metal fabrication students at Northern Maine Community College and their instructor, Dennis Albert. The stellar piece is not only imposing in how tall it stands, but in its three-dimensional appearance. The finished product, which was fabricated using 26 gauge galvanized steel and held together with steel rivets, has the appearance of two very large barn stars joined back-to-back. At its center, the star measures a foot and a half wide.

"When we built the star we were hoping that it was the start of something that would begin a new tradition that locally will become as well recognized as what happens at Times Square in New York," said Albert. "We are pleased to see that is happening."

In addition to overseeing its construction, Albert put the finishing touches on the star for its maiden ascent, adding more than a thousand lights to ensure a bright start to the New Year and the Star City's Sesquicentennial Celebration, which ran throughout 2009. Community volunteers have added additional lights for this year's rising, which will officially conclude the 150th birthday.

The idea for the unique and localized take on the Big Apple's time-honored tradition was discussed in late 2008 at a planning meeting for Presque Isle's sesquicentennial. Organizers thought it would be a great way to mark the start of the celebration with a new event that could become a tradition for years to come.

"It is very fitting that our final event of the year is an elaborate expanded version of the event that rang in the new year. On December 31, 2008, Presque Isle rang in the celebratory year by raising the beautiful six-foot illuminated star over the City along Green Hill Drive and Main Street," said Kimberly Smith, chairperson of the Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee. "For 2009, we celebrated Presque Isle's history and we are ending the year with a brand new annual event, thus adding to our story. A perfect ending to a perfectly fabulous year!"

The Star City First Night celebration will not end with the star rising event. Just after midnight, the festivities will move down the street from the area surrounding the Key Bank building to 149 State Street, home of the new Wintergreen Arts Center. The first hour of the new year will serve as a sneak peek for the new facility, which will officially open later in the week in the old Wight Furniture building. A sparkling cider toast and entertainment by the Presque Isle High School Jazz Combo will be part of the festivities at Wintergreen.

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The Star City's New Year Star, constructed by Northern Maine Community College welding and metal fabrication students and instructor Dennis Albert was previewed in the annual Presque Isle Holiday Light Parade in early December. The star, which will be enhanced with additional lights, will make its way up the backside of the Key Bank building in downtown Presque Isle to ring in the New Year.