Tourism

So much to do this Christmas season

Gaston County is the place to be for holiday fun this year!

Michael Applegate

**By Michael Applegate, Gaston County Travel and Tourism
Photograph by Steve Rankin**

To say that there's a lot to do in Gaston County this holiday season would be the understatement of the year.

There's always something fun and exciting to do when you "Go Gaston!" And the obvious choice for the start of your holiday fun is surely Christmastown, USA. Building off of the spectacular 62-year history of McAdenville's holiday festivities, each December, hundreds of thousands of lights and dozens of festive events turn all of Gaston County into a twinkling wonderland.

McAdenville is a lot like Mayberry, the idyllic town featured in "The Andy Griffith Show." And each year, McAdenville's 650 or so residents go all-out to convert their homes and downtown into Christmastown for the month of December. These colorful efforts attract some 600,000 visitors from around the world on an annual basis. Along the half-mile route through town, you'll see over 375 trees, strung with more than half a million red, green and white lights. Additional experiences include the Christmastown Five-Kilometer event (just over three miles), the annual tree-lighting ceremony and the Yule log parade.

To learn more, check out the Website at www.mcadenville-christmastown.com.

In Belmont, the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden celebrates the holidays indoors and out with "Holidays in the Garden." This features artfully arranged displays that use plants to set holiday stages. Included are a 16-foot tree, created by more than 300 blooming orchids, more than 100 trees of different varieties from among the grounds, all of them decked in lights and, on the Four Seasons Lawn, a massive Fraser fir, draped with lights and circled by an operating, scaled-down railroad train.

To learn more, see the Website at www.dsbg.org.

In Gastonia, the Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium celebrates "Colonial Christmas," two great experiences in one afternoon! First, celebrate Christmas on the Carolina frontier. Join in the procession of the Yule log, singing traditional carols and English country dancing. At dusk, pause and reflect during the Scripture and candlelight service.

Learn more on the Website at www.schielemuseum.org.

The Stowe Dairy Christmas Tree Farm kicks off its 10th anniversary season, starting on the Saturday before Thanksgiving (Nov. 18). Special events include the Christmas lighting of the farm and caroling. Santa Claus will also be there, welcoming visitors and helping to create a new memory tree tradition at the farm. In addition to choosing and cutting trees and other greenery, there will be plenty of family fun activities.

See the Website at www.stowedairyfarms.com.

The Gaston County Museum of Art and History and the City of Dallas invite you to come see the historic Hoffman Hotel, decorated for the season. Built in the 1840's, the former hotel is now home to the museum. You can visit the museum gift shop for gifts and stocking-stuffers; listen to

The lake in McAdenville is ringed every December with lighted Christmas trees.

carols being sung and accompanied by music on the pump organ, now more than a century old; and decorate Christmas cookies.

After the Dallas Christmas Parade, visitors will get the chance to meet some very interesting traditional characters from early Christmas celebrations that tie in with the German heritage of the hotel's original owner, according to museum staffer Regan Brooks. The Hoffman family (originally "Hofmann," *auf deutsch*) were among the Carolinas' German-speaking Lutheran settlers, just before and after the American Revolution. After the parade, you'll see Saint Nicholas, Krampus and the *Christkindl* (German for "Christ Child").

Learn more about it on the Website at www. gastoncountymuseum.org.

Along with these festivities, all of Gaston County's municipalities will offer Christmas season programming that you won't want to miss. Each town stages a Christmas parade with all of the great attributes you'd expect: floats, bands, clowns, dancers and of course, Santa Claus. Check out each city's Website for details about these fantastic events or see the Website at www.gogaston.org/Christmas.

Belmont gets into the Christmas spirit with a tree-lighting ceremony, a Christmas parade and the Belmont Christmas Village, all taking place in the historic downtown area. The annual Christmas Village also features hot chocolate and s'mores, horse-drawn carriage rides, Christmas Trolley Rides, Christmas carolers, Santa Claus and more!

Learn all about it at www.cityofbelmont.org.

Mount Holly has planned festivities, too. These include the annual Christmas parade in downtown Mount Holly and visits with Santa Claus at the Mount Holly Grand Hall, available multiple times during the month.

See more at www.mtholly.us.

Cramerton captures the holiday spirit with "Christmas in Cramerton" at Centennial Center. Festivities involve the Christmas parade on Eighth Avenue, a tree-lighting ceremony at Centennial Center and breakfast with Santa in the Cramerton Community Center.

See more at www.cramerton.org.

The City of Gastonia is working in partnership with Keep Gastonia Beautiful this year to bring "Christmas in the City" to downtown Gastonia. There will be a Christmas village all afternoon, with a Christmas parade, followed by Keep Gastonia Beautiful's Christmas tree-lighting ceremony.

Learn more at www.cityofgastonia.com.

And Cherryville will once again host the Dr. Seuss-themed "Whoville Christmas on Main Street." The event includes carriage rides and visits with Santa Claus. There will also be a Christmas parade on Main Street on a separate, later date.

Consult the Website at www.cityofcherryville.com. GL

Go Gaston. Get Outside.

For the outdoor enthusiast in all of us, Gaston County offers amazing trails as well as a wide array of other activities. Let us help you unplug this weekend and connect you with our County's numerous natural assets. Stop by our Visitors Center or call us today for a FREE Visitor's Guide.

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Photography by Joseph Bradley for SouthPark Magazine.

GASTON OUTSIDE

GO

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NORTH CAROLINA