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NEWS

December
2024



Photo credit: USA Today

The 2024 Rockefeller Center Christmas tree is lit up with more than 50,000 multicolored lights and 5 miles of wire wrapped around it. A three-dimensional star, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind in 2018, is perched on top. The star weighs approximately 900 pounds, has 70 spikes, and is covered in 3 million crystals.

Iconic Christmas tree helps Habitat for Humanity

The season of giving is here and in true community spirit, many will say no one does Christmastime quite like New York City or Habitat for Humanity. Each year, a Norway Spruce is donated, decorated, and displayed

outside of Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. After the tree is taken down in the New Year, the trunk is milled into lumber and donated to Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI) where it will be used for a future build.

The partnership between

Continued on Page 4

Welcome to Habitat, Michael and Pat

Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) Board of Directors recently gained two new members to its team. Michael Clemente, an aerospace engineer who has rental housing development experience; and Pat Huse, an attorney specializing in commercial finance and corporate governance.

Both come to Habitat with a passion to be involved. Michael said he volunteered in college at an event and played in a golf tournament that benefitted the nonprofit housing and construction organization. Later, GSHFH Board President Ray Walsh spoke with him about the mission, his vision for the future, and the plan behind it.

"I nominated Mike to join the board, as he brings a number of key attributes that enhance the board dynamics and improves knowledge in a number of areas," said Ray. "Mike is a resident of Western Massachusetts and has built a portfolio of rental properties in the area, serving a number of individuals and families in need of affordable housing. His commitment to the community and knowledge of home repairs and finance is helping us build a stronger board that is rooted in the local community.

"I am looking forward to both Mike and Pat bringing their unique life and professional

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SPOTLIGHT ON



Michael Clemente
Board member
of Chicopee, MA

Angels or elves? Angels
If you were a vegetable, which one would be and why? I would be a carrot. You need to stay grounded to grow.

If you had your own talk show, who would be your first guest? My first guest would be David Letterman, so he could give me his advice on having a successful talk show.

Would you rather have the ability to speak to animals or speak all languages fluently? All languages. Having recently returned from Italy, I am very envious of those that are multilingual.

If you could invent a holiday, what would it celebrate? I've always thought the Monday after the Super Bowl should be a holiday.

SPOTLIGHT ON



Pat Huse
Board member
of West Springfield, MA

Peppermint or gingerbread? Gingerbread

If you had to live on a TV show for a month, which would you choose and why? Probably "Law and Order" because every trial in that show is exciting. Real life trials are not usually filled with blockbuster moments.

What's the most ridiculous thing you've bought online? I had a whole box of 3D Doritos shipped in from Mexico after I found out they were sold there.

Would you rather speak in rhymes or sing instead of speaking? Speak in rhymes.

What's your favorite winter beverage? Hood eggnog.

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Photo credit: Associated Press

The 2024 Rockefeller Center Christmas tree, before it was cut down, on its property in West Stockbridge. Owner Earl Albert said he and his late wife Leslie planted the tree as newlyweds in 1967.

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Real Estate Company Tishman Speyer, which owns and operates Rockefeller Center, and HFHI formed the partnership in 2007. The collaboration inspired “The Carpenter’s Gift,” by David Rubel, a children’s book that follows the journey of a young boy who wished for a decent home and how it comes true in an unexpected way. Books are available for \$10 each at Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity (GSHFH) by calling (413) 739-5503.

“The heartwarming tale told in ‘The Carpenter’s Gift’ brings together – through beautiful illustrations and a moving, multi-generational story – two great traditions: the Rockefeller Center

tree and the neighbor-helping-neighbor program of Habitat for Humanity,” said President James “Jimmy” Carter in a previous interview. “The tree annually brightens the Christmas season for millions who see it. Habitat houses brighten the lives of families all over the world – for those who live in them and those who build them.”

Since 2007, trees have been harvested from and used in Mid-Atlantic and New England states, with the exception of the first tree. That spruce came from Connecticut, and its lumber was used in Mississippi.

This year’s Norway Spruce is 74 feet tall, 43 feet wide, and comes from West Stockbridge. The tree is topped with more than 50,000 multicolored lights and 5 miles

of wire wrapped around it. A three-dimensional star, designed by architect Daniel Libeskind in 2018, is perched on top. The star weighs approximately 900 pounds, has 70 spikes, and is covered in 3 million crystals.

“That’s so cool,” said Trina Winans, Greater Springfield Habitat volunteer and supporter. “I never knew that.”

GSHFH intern Nate Shlosser agreed.

“That is a very kind and generous thing,” he said. “I’m very thankful for it because it means another family will have the wood needed for a home.”

The tree was found by Rockefeller Center head gardener Erik Pauze in July 2020 as he searched for future New York City Christmas trees. When he found the West Stockbridge Norway Spruce, he knocked on the property owner’s door. Earl Albert answered and agreed to donate the tree in memory of his late wife Leslie, who died just days before Erik’s visit.

“I consider it probably one of the greatest honors of my life,” Earl said in an interview with NBC. Earl said he and Leslie planted the tree as newlyweds in 1967.

The tree was cut down Nov. 7 and arrived at Rockefeller Center on Nov. 9.

The tree is lit daily from 5am to midnight until mid-January 2025 when it’s turned off at 10pm. There are a few exceptions. On Christmas Day, the tree is lit for 24 hours. On New Year’s Eve, it is lighted from 5am to 9pm.

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experiences to the board to help us achieve our goals and aspirations in 2025 and beyond," Ray said.

Ray's pitch worked and Michael said it was a plan he could get behind.

"I hope to help our organization broaden its footprint within Western Massachusetts. With the current state of housing, I think we have an opportunity

to really change the outlook within our community," said Michael, who calls Chicopee home. "As a landlord, a free market with plentiful affordable housing is the ultimate goal as it raises the standard of living for all members within the community."

Michael said he also volunteers for Warrior Barrel Society, a charity that raises money for organizations that support veterans, their families,

cancer, and childhood education.

"I've been involved since day one. It was a passion project started by a close friend of mine and his wife to help veterans and their families," said Michael, who has been involved in the organization for five years doing community outreach, fundraising, and advocacy.

Pat said he learned about GSHFH through an advocate,

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his friend and Greater Springfield Habitat Board Treasurer Ian Coddington.

"I am hopeful that I will be able to integrate my skill set with GSHFH's operations and be a benefit to my fellow directors and the organization as a whole," said Pat, who grew up in West Springfield and

continues to live there.

Ian said he thinks Pat's involvement is what the Greater Springfield Habitat board needs.

"I recommended Pat to the board because I thought his legal background would be beneficial," Ian said. "There was a vacancy on the board for someone in the legal field,

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which is a skill set, we feel is important to have. Given Pat's role as an attorney, he isn't afraid of hard work and I think he will be a valuable asset to the team."

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