

FINDING MEANING IN TRADITION: THE US CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE AND WEST VIRGINIA



The first Capitol Christmas Tree being planted on the West Front in 1964. Photo from aoc.gov

The holiday season is a time of joy, celebration, and cherished traditions. One such tradition that has captured the hearts of Americans for decades is the lighting of the US Capitol Christmas Tree. Every year, a magnificent tree graces the Capitol's grounds, bringing the spirit of Christmas to the nation's capital. Behind this festive tradition lies a fascinating history intertwined with the beauty and resilience of West Virginia.

According to aoc.gov the tradition of the US Capitol Christmas Tree, not to be confused with the National Christmas Tree, which is in front of the White House, dates back to 1964 when Speaker of the House John W. McCormack placed a live Christmas tree on the Capitol lawn. In 1970, the Capitol Architect asked the US Forest Service to provide a Christmas tree. Since then, a different national forest has been chosen each year to supply the tree, symbolizing the holiday spirit and the nation's natural beauty.

In the history of the event, a tree from West Virginia has only been chosen three times. Once in 1970, then again in 1976. This year will be the third time, 47 years later, that a tree from the Monongahela National Forest was chosen.

The selection process for determining the tree is quite selective. Throughout the summer a committee of National Forest Service staff members nominate dozens of potential options to fill the role of the Capitol Christmas Tree. The ideal tree must be healthy, have good growth and density, and be rich in color. The tree must be straight and perfectly conical in shape and is ideally between 60 to 90 feet tall.



THE MORGANTOWN JOURNEY



The Monongahela National Forest was the first national forest to provide the People's Tree on behalf of the Forest Service in 1970 and the second time in 1976. 2023 will be the third time West Virginia will have the distinction. Photo from aoc.gov

The journey of the Capitol Christmas Tree from West Virginia to Washington, D.C., is a remarkable adventure that takes place over 15 days. The tree travels thousands of miles, making stops in WV communities along the way. People from all walks of life gathered to celebrate the tree's journey, showcasing the unity and festive spirit that the holiday season fosters.

In addition to the significance of the tree, the tree decorations will highlight West Virginia's rich heritage and our community

by having over 5,000 decorations, the majority of which will be made by 4H club members and students attending schools throughout West Virginia. The theme of the ornaments was "Endlessly Wild and Wonderful" in West Virginia. Many of the materials used to make the ornaments utilized natural, recyclable, and repurposed materials.

Created by a team out of The Elkins Sewing Center, in conjunction with the Monongahela National Forest, the official tree skirt is a 15-foot tree skirt. The designers put a lot of thought into the overall concept of the tree skirt. According to their social media, the designers intentionally as a nod to the Mountain State Forest Festival, and the West Virginia tartan, used a lot of patches of dark green velvet fabric, quilt blocks that represent the West Virginia Star, a tree block designed especially for the tree skirt, and stitched photographs provided by the Monongahela National Forest, to decorate the skirt.

While this tree is significant nationally, for the Appalachian community, it serves as a tribute and reminder of the unity of the state and the pride our community has for West Virginia.



THE MORGANTOWN JOURNEY



Pictured is the completed 15-foot tree skirt along with members of the Elkins Sewing Center. Photo from Elkins Sewing Center Facebook.

Don't miss your chance to see the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree in person before it makes its way to the front lawn of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.! This historic event, honoring and welcoming the tree to Morgantown will take place on Saturday, November 11th from 2:30PM- 4:30PM at the Courthouse Square, 243 High Street. The event is great for all ages and families to come and enjoy and be part of a historic moment for West Virginia. Keep up to date on event details by going to the City of Morgantown Facebook page.

Make sure to bring unwrapped toys to donate to our local Toys for Tots program. The Toys for Tots Program strives to collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to needy children in our local community.

2023 U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE EVENT
 HOLIDAY CHEER COMES EARLY THIS YEAR
 Come Support our Community and Celebrate the Holiday Season

Saturday, November 11
 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM
 Courthouse Square, 243 High Street

JOIN US FOR A BLOCK PARTY INCLUDING:
LIVE MUSIC
KIDS CRAFTS & ACTIVITIES
SANTA & OTHER PHOTO-OPS
FOOD TRUCKS & HOT COCOA
FORMAL PROGRAM
 (Starting at 2:45PM)

TOYS FOR TOTS
 Donate unwrapped toys as Christmas gifts to needy children in our local community

The event will be free and open to the public.



The City of **MORGANTOWN**
The Journey Starts Here