

Christmas festival memories,

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Although the Paul Clark Home-McDonald's Family Place did not open until 1992, fundraising began in earnest in 1988, with efforts to raise the money needed to renovate the historic Paul Clark Home at 207 S. Excelsior St. in Butte.

The first Festival of Trees was held at the Copper King Inn in 1990, with nearly 40 Christmas trees were entered that year.

After its tremendous success, the decision was made to hold a second annual Festival of Trees in 1991 at the Paul Clark Home, which was nearing completion. A Teddy Bear Tea for the children was also added that year, and hosted by the nearby First Presbyterian Church on the corner of Platinum and Excelsior.

As the event grew in popularity, it moved the third year to the dome at the Copper King Inn. Sub-zero temperatures made the venue feel as if visitors were touring Santa's personal Christmas tree forest at the North Pole and nearly put an end to the emerging tradition.

Not wishing to entitle the 1993 Festival of Trees "Frosty Returns," committee members decided to search for a different venue in Uptown Butte, and the Knights of Columbus hall became host to the festival for the next four years. At that time, the event was averaging nearly 80 entries, including tabletop trees, wreaths and other holiday items.

With the event held Uptown, participants in the Christmas Stroll now had the opportunity to add the Festival of Trees to their list of things to do during the event, and upwards of 3,000 people would tour the Festival of Trees display.

In 1998, the Festival of Trees moved south to the Copper King Ramada Inn. And in more recent years, the festival has been held at the Finlen Hotel, the Thornton Building and the old Stage store in the Butte Plaza Mall.

The Festival of Trees continues to be a crucial fundraiser for the Paul Clark Home-McDonald's Family Place, having raised more than \$200,000 for operating costs of the home. Much of that money has come from the special visitors who donate their \$1 to see the Festival of Trees display each year.

Scheduling conflicts forced the event to search for a new home in 2000, and the newly redecorated Elks Club in Uptown Butte opened its doors to the festival that year. The smaller facility put an end to the children's activity that year and the gala dinner reverted back to hors d'oeuvres.

In 2004, the Finlen Hotel was host to the event, and the next it moved to the Thornton Building when MERDI donated the use of the building's ballroom to the event.

Trees decorated in international color, style Some of the entries in this year's Festival of Trees, and the countries they represent, include: 7-foot trees t Montana Orthopedics — Switzerland t Montana Abstract and Title — Ireland t Payne Financial — Mexico t Acadia — North Pole t C.C.C.S. Inc. — Australia t First Citizens Bank — Hawaii t Walmart — Antarctica t C.C.C.S. Inc. Women — Italy t JC Penney — U.S.A.