

## Christmas in the Country – A Grand Holiday Experience for All

*By Denise Schultz – for the Spirit of Geneva Lakes, December, 2006*

Experience the magic of this holiday season at nearby Grand Geneva Resort & Spa. The 2006 season of “Christmas in the Country” may be the most magical yet. This year’s theme is based on “The Nutcracker Ballet.” The entire resort has been transformed into the enchanting dream of Clara Stahlbaum and her beloved nutcracker, a special gift from Herr Drosselmeyer.

Once again the creative team made up of Kristi Johnson and her parents, Bonne and Arn, have outdone themselves. The spectacular décor begins in the lobby with a towering Christmas tree, regal nutcracker and large storybook open to the first page of the classic holiday story.

Colorful nutcrackers adorn the registration desk as thousands of twinkling lights illuminate the holiday glow experienced throughout the property. Rich and vibrant purples, blues and greens dance throughout the foyers from beautifully woven boughs, garlands and embellished trees to breathtaking packages that can only have been wrapped by magical fairies. The lower level also features playful woodland pixies with a special sparkle in their eyes. Walking through the lodge is like drifting through Clara’s dream.

As you approach the stairway to the upper level, you’re likely to stop in your tracks at the sheer beauty of flocked Christmas trees surrounding a pink castle, the home of the Sugar Plum Fairy. A horse-drawn sleigh seems to know the way through the white and drifting snow, as seemingly endless white lights draw you up the stairs through this winter wonderland.

Once again the display of gingerbread houses is astonishing. Local adults and children, from amateurs to professionals have brought their confectionary creations to the Grand Geneva. Be sure to see the impressive collection of masterpieces, on display through the entire holiday season.

Near the Evergreen Ballroom, two displays will captivate you and draw you into Clara’s fantasy. The first is an ice crystal fantasy with Dancing Snowflakes that dazzle your imagination. The second is a colorful display featuring toy soldiers and a troop of whimsical mice that are likely less intimidating than Clara’s original dream.

The Evergreen Ballroom is the heart of the holiday magic at Grand Geneva. This second floor space is the home of “Hooray for Holidays!” – an action-packed live theatre performance which brings the joy of the holidays alive through song and dance. Talented performers and stunning costumes provide 90 minutes of heartwarming holiday spirit. From energetic dance numbers to peaceful vocal features, the amazing show takes you through a range of holiday thoughts and feelings. While experiencing “Hooray for Holidays!” you are likely to forget the world outside (as well as cell phones, shopping lists, traffic and deadlines) exists. Allow yourself to escape this holiday season.

The Phoenix Rising team of Kevin Raymond, Keith Hardy and Angie Arnold have produced and directed holiday shows at Grand Geneva for seven seasons. The trio has been inseparable since Kevin noticed Angie and her mother as regular audience members in his Opryland days and they established a lifelong friendship. The team has definitely become members of the Grand Geneva family. Their relationships with people throughout the property are as admirable as those among their cast each season. Those reading this article who have experienced previous shows will see some familiar faces, and some new (and extremely attractive) ones! Just as the show changes each year, so does the makeup of the cast – which keeps it interesting for everyone.

“We have mixed feelings about the changes from year to year,” reflects Kevin Raymond. “Of course we are excited when we bring in new energy, but we also miss our friends who have moved on to other ventures.” For example, Pam Atha, long-time choreographer and friend, was not able to return with the cast this year due to her teaching commitments. Several of the performers I’ve come to know over previous seasons have moved on to wonderful career opportunities, and the producers share their stories much like I would share those of my sons. With pride and admiration they run down the lists of accomplishments, and with excitement they tell me about the promise of their new protégées.

Returning performers this year include Ann Teisher from Nashville, and Megan Kelly from the Quad Cities area. It’s always inspiring to hear Ann’s voice flow from her soul as her amber hair flows over her graceful shoulders. Megan’s energetic spirit is evident from the moment you look into her eyes and she flashes her brilliant smile. Jason Weitkamp, from St. Louis is thrilled to be back for his second season.

New performers this season include several Wisconsinites - Alyssa Seifert from Sheboygan, Tiffany Spears from Jackson and Brent Buechel from Milwaukee. Casey Kilroy from Pittsburgh (PA) was a welcome referral from a director friend. Wesley Fruge from New York City was recommended by Ann and Megan, who worked with him at the Wolfhart House in Virginia this year. Wesley recommended James Lane from Houston (TX) and this year’s “Hooray for Holidays!” family was formed. The producers enjoy seeing the Grand Geneva experience anew through the sparkles in the eyes of the new performers.

This year’s show will again have a variety show format with unbelievable energy, costume changes and character transformations. Co-Producer and costume designer Keith Hardy promises “even more glitz and glamour!” Some of the favorites which are expected by audience members include the soul-inspiring Nativity pageant and the hustling shopping number. “Some favorites are back, but the show is 75% new this year!” says Kevin Raymond.

The producers don’t want to give away too many secrets, but a few of the new numbers include an Amy Grant medley, a silly spin-off of a favorite 70’s sitcom, an amazing 40’s medley featuring swing dancing and a Catholic school concert scene. Audience members

will be glad to hear Kevin Raymond's original "Our Wisconsin Christmas" song return. If you've seen the show before, you know why many of us say, "The Christmas season officially begins once we've seen the holiday show at Grand Geneva." If you haven't experienced the production yet, be sure you do. With over 40 shows this season, there's sure to be one that fits into your holiday plans. Whether you come with a friend, your family or a social or corporate group, "Hooray for Holidays!" is a delight for people of all ages and backgrounds. There are matinees every day but Monday, and evening performances on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Shows may include lunch or dinner, or show only. **Call the box office at (262) 249-4741** for details.

Other holiday activities occurring throughout the 2006 "Christmas in the Country" season include Brunch with Santa and Mrs. Claus every Sunday from November 26 through December 24. The jovial couple will be found strolling the lobby, visiting the restaurants and posing for pictures throughout the Grand Geneva and Timber Ridge Lodge on Sundays from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Grand Geneva's lobby lounge, with its roaring fire and welcome atmosphere, is the center of holiday happenings for many local residents and resort guests. Evenings feature an extensive cocktail menu and live performances by Kathy Fry at the piano. Daily Holiday Teas are a favorite tradition and are served in the lounge from 1:30-3:30 daily, from December 1-30 (with the exception of December 25.) Step back in time and share some quality time with the special people in your life.

Be sure to catch "Snap, Jingle, Pop!" – a delightful cross-cultural performance by the talented cast members mentioned earlier. At 4:30 Tuesday through Sunday, celebrate the joy of Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa through song.

Children and adults enjoy "Tom's Holiday Song-Fest", an interactive children's show by lively local entertainer Tom Stanfield. Every Saturday in December, from 10-11 a.m. children can enjoy singing, dancing and even playing along during this interactive holiday show.

As always, the restaurants at Grand Geneva offer a variety of delicious dining options. Café Gelato, just off the lobby, features Starbucks Coffee and other specialty drinks, pastries, and just about anything to satisfy a sweet tooth or caffeine craving. The Grand Café, adjacent to the lobby, features open and airy seating and delicious breakfast, lunch and dinners. The daily breakfast buffet is a favorite among locals and resort guests. Geneva ChopHouse is contemporary, urban and trendy. Watch your meal being prepared in the open kitchen or enjoy the panoramic views overlooking the golf courses and grounds. Ristorante Brissago takes your dining experience to a whole new level, with truly authentic Italian cuisine made from the freshest ingredients, flown in weekly from Italy. For a more casual experience, enjoy the Timbers Bar and Grill as you watch skiers on the Mountain Top, or visit Smokey's Bar-B-Que House or the Hungry Moose snack bar at the Timber Ridge Lodge and Waterpark (also on the 1,300 acre Grand Geneva property.) After dinner enjoy the night life in Evolve – adjacent to Geneva ChopHouse.

Of course there are special packages for overnight stays, gift-giving, pampering spa experiences and more. “Christmas in the Country” is truly a holiday experience offering something for everyone, and gift cards are the perfect gift for anyone on your list. Visit the resort’s web site to learn more about the amazing annual traditions we’ve just begun to cover here. See: **[www.GrandGeneva.com](http://www.GrandGeneva.com)** or call **(800) 558-3417** or **(262) 248-8811** for more information on how you can enjoy the most Grand Holiday ever!

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