

Holiday Tea

An annual Christmas tea serves as both a holiday season kick-off and a way for Mount Vernon, Washington-based Christianson's Nursery & Greenhouse to thank its customers and community.

By Teresa McPherson

HOW DID THE EVENT COME ABOUT?

Toni Christianson, co-owner: After the first six years of owning what was then Hart's Nursery, which we purchased in 1990, we considered we were on our way to success and wanted to share our gratitude with our fellow gardeners. We had recently moved Skagit Valley, Washington's oldest, one-room Meadow Schoolhouse to a corner of our nursery. The schoolhouse seemed the perfect place to hold a complimentary Christmas tea with all the trimmings.



HOW HAS IT CHANGED?

Christianson: From the beginning, we decorated with trees and shrubs from the nursery, lighted candles in the old, wavy glass windows, white linen tablecloths, woodland centerpieces, and my Great Aunt Rose's tea service.

After a few years, we started including two musicians playing 16th-century chamber music, giving a feel of "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. Outside, children visit with Father Christmas and guests learn wreath making while enjoying hot cider and homemade molasses cookies.

Our Holiday Tea takes place the Saturday after Thanksgiving and after 24 years it has become the kick-off to the holiday season for customers and staff alike.

LET'S TALK LOGISTICS.

Stephanie Banaszak, public relations, marketing and events manager: Our staff collaborates with owner Toni Christianson when designing a holiday appearance for the schoolhouse. Supplies are sourced on our seven-acre nursery and antiques are (mostly) borrowed from our own Primrose Antiques & Gift Shop.

This year's "woodland" theme is comprised of handmade rosehip wreaths hung onto multipaned windows; a backdrop of conifers that line a shiplap wall; white linen-draped tables set with a mix of antique porcelain teacups and saucers and topped with a tidbit pinecone and evergreen centerpiece.

It takes a small army of staff and volunteers to accommodate four, one-hour tea times, each seating 36 guests. To accomplish this, three staff members organize food preparations, expedite the prepared menu, and direct volunteers. We also partner with our local library (donations from the event help raise funds for their new building) in exchange for five volunteers. 🌿

HOW DO YOU PUBLICIZE THE EVENT?

Banaszak: Christianson's Holiday Tea & Visit with Father Christmas is marketed as a celebratory act of appreciation for our customers and community and as a fundraising effort for our local library. Our marketing includes both inbound and outbound campaigns: articles published in our printed newsletter and our website create excitement around the highly anticipated event at the beginning of October.

Once the tea is completely booked, we build a social media event, email a newsletter reminding customers of the approaching date, and hang custom-printed posters using Christianson's branding throughout five adjacent cities. Advertisements are then placed in local newspapers the week of the event.

