

An Old-fashioned Christmas in Cottonwood

A hometown parade and handmade chocolates are highlights of a nostalgic yuletide tradition in Cottonwood—the biggest little town in Arizona. On the first Saturday in December the community stages its version of the Macy’s Parade. At 11 a.m. floats, bands, old cars, marching groups and, of course, Santa Claus start from the Verde Valley Fairgrounds and wind their way through town along Cherry and Main Streets to Old Town Cottonwood.

Later in the day, a Chocolate Lover’s Walk takes place in historic Old Town between 4 and 8 p.m. The Chocolate Walk is a ticketed event limited to 400 participants.

Since 1993, Old Town shopkeepers have gotten into the spirit of “the most wonderful time of the year” by decorating their shops inside and out with poinsettias, lights and holiday finery and making a chocolate treat to share—one item per ticket holder from each participating merchant.

Many businesses make truffles, but some offer hot chocolate, cocoa-rolled brownies and other goodies that include milk, white or dark chocolate.

To begin the walk, ticket holders gather at the Cottonwood Civic Center at 885 Main Street. They get a map and a hand-decorated bag to collect their chocolates as they walk in and out of shops, galleries and restaurants along Old Town Main Street—from the Manheim Gallery at one end and Avatar Tat2 at the other. Along the way, they pass strolling musicians and carolers, who fill the streets with song. As the sun sets, the shops and their holiday windows light up with the soft glow of luminaria.

“It’s a warm, lovely, joyous event,” says Patt Manheim, owner of the Manheim Gallery, who, like many of the merchants, looks forward to visiting with people as they come in and out of her gallery. There is also a raffle associated with the walk, featuring great holiday gift items, and an audience-favorite competition for the most festively decorated store.

Tickets for the Chocolate Lover's Walk are \$15 each and are available from some of the participating merchants. (For a list, call the Old Town Association at 928-634-9468.)

It's wise to purchase the tickets ahead, because once they are gone, no more are sold. All the proceeds go to the Old Town Association for maintenance and beautification projects.