



NEWS

Utica Children's Museum Holiday on Main Street celebrates several cultures Sunday,

Nov 27, 2005 Renee Gamela, Observer-Dispatch

UTICA — Two days after Thanksgiving, it felt a lot like Christmas at the Children's Museum. It felt a lot like Kwanzaa and Hanukkah, too. The museum's annual Holiday on Main Street drew throngs of revelers Saturday for cookies and cocoa, face painting and holiday crafts. Even Santa and Mrs. Claus made the trek from the North Pole to participate.

Marlene Brown, executive director of the museum, said she expected more than 500 people to participate. The event was formerly called Christmas on Main Street, but Brown said the name was changed this year to encompass all seasonal celebrations. "The reason we do Holiday on Main Street is because we live in a multicultural community," Brown said, "and we like to celebrate that fact in the museum."

Chelegat Misiko displayed and sold African art and artifacts at the event. She said she also celebrates more than one holiday. The native of Kenya moved to the Mohawk Valley five years ago, and hosts a Kwanzaa, Christmas and winter solstice celebration in her Ilion home. "We celebrate all the holidays with a big dinner," Misiko said. She explained her 7-year-old daughter, Chebet Too, loves Santa Claus, while her husband, Brian Stefanec, recognizes the pagan celebration of the shortest day and the longest night of the year. Misiko said the museum exposes children to a variety of cultural beliefs, that's important because "the holidays are a time for children. We live as a diverse culture, when you have diversity, you're able to accept everybody as they are."

The Children's Museum wrapped up its annual Holiday on Main Street event in a finale of color and sound as fireworks exploded over the city to usher in the holiday season. Ryan Byrne, 2, of Utica, watched the 15-minute display. Last year, Ryan was too scared by the sights and sounds, his mother, Julie, said. "Last year, he hid inside because he didn't like the noise," she said, holding her well-bundled son. "He liked it this time."

The fireworks followed the lighting in Bagg's Square Park. Visitors also were treated to Christmas carols by the 16-member New Horizons Chorus. Buck Buckley, master of ceremonies, said the event was for people of all faiths and backgrounds. "This year it's inclusive," Buckley said. "It's Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanzaa." Although the caroling and fireworks went off without a hitch, some of the tree bulbs did not light. Standing near a holiday display of the nativity scene, a Torah scroll and singing mice, Matt Ryan of Utica said "I didn't even notice. It was a great day," said Ryan, who came with his wife, Mary, and 4-year-old son, Corey.

