



Santa arrives on the "Polar Express," a train fashioned from a Bethlehem resident's old truck.

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# Small town, home spun Christmas fun in Bethlehem

■ **Saturday, Dec. 2:** Full day of holiday fun planned for expected crowd of 500.

By **EMILY REILY**  
Special to the Union Leader

Regardless of how much it costs to put together Christmas in Bethlehem, everything, including the food, is always free.

Jack Anderson makes sure of that.

The soft-spoken Anderson, the town's fire chief who founded the annual event, wants the celebration to be something everyone can attend, recognizing that

the holiday season can be a trying time for some.

"A mother of three that might be really struggling; (she) may not go to an event because kids would be asking for money for this and that. She shouldn't have to worry about that here," Anderson said.

Anderson seems to enjoy the entire process that goes into making Christmas in Bethlehem.

"If I sound excited about it, I am. I get excited every year. No matter how busy I am, I'm always looking forward to it. I'm always looking forward to the end of it too," added Anderson, laughing.

"It's all about community and celebrating the beginning of the Christmas season," said organizer Angel Larcom. This is her third season planning Christmas in Bethlehem.

### Activities for everyone

Larcom said a new addition is the "shop local" weekend, where participating business will offer store discounts.

The post office will also provide their annual Bethlehem stamp for those wishing to mail their Christmas cards from the tiny town.

"They always make sure that that stamp is available through the night and through the festival," Larcom said.

During Christmas in

Bethlehem, the names of the town's veterans on two memory trees will be read at the village center. There is also a community dinner and a grant-a-wish tree at town hall.

And at the giving tree, people can pick a boy or girl to send a Christmas gift.

"Kids have a great time. We try to give them some sort of a lighted toy. We've expanded our entertainment. We do bonfires and even fireworks. But it's all done by donations," Anderson said.

Live music will include the Bells of Grace and local talent. A bonfire will warm the crowd, while fireworks will round out activities. About 500 people are expected.

"There will be warm drinks and hot food and fireworks and a bonfire. There will be the reading of the names of the memory tree, the lighting of our town Christmas tree, a children's costume parade. There's different ornament making workshops. There's a holiday bazaar at the church," Larcom said.

At the costume parade, children and their pets can get dolled up in the holiday spirit. "Everybody gets to cheer them on," she said.

Larcom said Santa and the Grinch will arrive on the North Pole Express, a fire truck festooned with lights and specially modified with a train engine, as a sort of motorized "train" that

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Christmas in Bethlehem committee members dress in Victorian-era clothes for the annual holiday celebration.

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Santa and the Grinch share a hug during Christmas in Bethlehem.



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