Festival of Trees

A KENNEDY KRIEGER EVENT

MARYLAND STATE FAIRGROUNDS | NOVEMBER 27–29

Designer Guidebook 2026



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Festival of Trees
A KENNEDY KRIEGER EVENT

Designer Registration 2026

	Registration Opens	Registration Closes
General Public	Tuesday, September 8, at 9 a.m.	Wednesday, October 14, at 11:59 p.m.

What is a Designer?

Designers are the creative minds behind the stunning trees, wreaths, and gingerbread displays showcased at the Festival of Trees. They include individuals, community groups, local businesses, and larger organizations who share a passion for the holiday season and giving back. At Kennedy Krieger, our commitment is to treat everyone with civility, dignity, and respect. We welcome designers of diverse backgrounds and abilities.

As a Designer, you select which item(s) you'd like to create and donate for the event. You'll develop a theme, gather or purchase materials, and bring your vision to life by decorating a tree or holiday display that will be seen by more than 33,000 attendees during the Festival of Trees weekend.

During the festival, your one-of-a-kind creation is sold to a holiday enthusiast to enjoy in their home or business, with proceeds directly supporting Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Designers truly are the heart of the Festival. This incredible event would not be possible without your creativity and generosity.

Why Become a Designer?

Not only will your work bring joy to others, but you will have the heartwarming satisfaction of knowing you're helping to support **nearly 30,000 patients and students served by Kennedy Krieger each year**.

As a token of appreciation, Designers receive tickets to the exclusive **Festival of Trees Preview Party on Friday, November 27, from 9–10 a.m.**

This special event offers:

- Early access to view and purchase trees, wreaths, and gingerbread houses.
- A first look at all designer creations.
- Free rides, games, and activities for children.
- All day admission to Festival of Trees.

The number of Preview Party tickets you receive is based on the item(s) you decorate. If you're unable to attend the Preview Party, your tickets may be used for general admission instead.



What Can You Design?



7-Foot Tree

- **Registration Fee:** $65 per tree
  Limit **2** per designer
- **Provided:** An **unlit**, 7-7.5-foot tree
- **Lights:** Required
  Battery operated lights not permitted

- **Maximum Design Size:**
  - Width: 4 feet by 4 feet
  - Height: 9 feet (including topper)
- **Preview Party Tickets: 10 tickets** per tree designed ($250 value)



4-Foot Tree

- **Registration Fee:** $45 per tree
  Limit **2** per designer
- **Provided:** An **unlit**, 4-foot tree
- **Lights:** Required
  Battery operated lights not permitted

- **Maximum Design Size:**
  - Width: 2.5 feet by 2.5 feet
  - Height: 6 feet (including topper)
- **Preview Party Tickets: 6 tickets** per tree designed ($150 value)



2-Foot Tree

- **Registration Fee:** $10 per tree
  No limit
- **Provided:** An **unlit**, 2-foot tree
- **Lights:** Not required, but strongly encouraged

- **No size restrictions**
- **Preview Party Tickets: 4 tickets** per tree designed ($100 value)



Wreath

- **Registration Fee:** $10 per wreath
  No limit
- **Provided:** Wreaths **NOT** provided
- **Lights:** Not required

- **No Size Restrictions**
  It is recommended that the wreath fits on a standard size door
- **Preview Party Tickets: 4 tickets** per wreath designed ($100 value)



Gingerbread House

- **Registration Fee:** $10 per house
  No limit
- **Provided:** Materials **NOT** provided.
- **Lights:** Not required

- **Maximum Design Size:**
  - Total structure should **not exceed** 2 feet by 1.5 feet
- **Preview Party Tickets: 4 tickets** per house designed ($100 value)

NOTE: Must be **placed on a sturdy base** such as plywood (posterboard bases will not be accepted).

Please carefully review the Designer Rules and Guidelines on the following pages.

General Guidelines

- **You will provide all the decoration and display materials for your design (except for the tree)**. Your item is a donation to Kennedy Krieger Institute and will be sold at Festival of Trees. All included elements are considered part of the donation and will go to the purchaser.
- If your design requires electricity, **you must provide an extension cord** (approx. 8 feet). If you need to use more than one outlet, please also bring a power strip. Extension cords & power strips cannot be returned. Use **UL-approved wiring** that plugs into standard 120V Edison outlets.
- **Oversized tree designs will be required to purchase an additional space.** Please note if you will need extra space in your Designer Survey.
- Please secure all decorations, lights, and trim to the tree. Glue ornaments to their caps.
- Ensure that your **entire design:**
  - Can be moved/transported.
  - Can be lifted into and out of a vehicle by two people of average strength/build.
  - Can stand up to being bagged, strapped down, and transported.
  - Can fit through a regular sized door.
- If you include **items of value** (gift cards, merchandise, tickets, etc.) with your design:
  - Include this information in your Designer Survey.
  - Complete a **Valuable Items Form** and bring it to Designer Day.
  - **Hand items of value to event staff upon check-in.**
  - To prevent theft, **please secure any items of value placed under the tree to the display**. This can be done with zip ties, string, cling wrap, etc.
  - Place only **photocopies** of gift cards, empty boxes, etc. on or under the tree.
- Be mindful that the **display will be visible from all angles,** including the back. Backdrops are highly discouraged.
- Designs should be **creative but broadly appealing** to help ensure they sell.
- **You must complete your Designer Survey.** Failure to submit the survey may result in non-acceptance of your design (see page 16 for additional details).



Restrictions

- Registration fees are due at the time of registration and are **non-refundable**.

- **Do not place any loose items under or around your design**. To prevent theft, all items must be securely fastened using string, zipties, or similar materials, or enclosed within cling-wrapped baskets. Unsecured items **will be removed** and stored in the FOT office.

- **Do not glue or wire your tree stand to the plywood base.**



- **No spraying of aerosols** is allowed inside the Cow Palace under any circumstances. This includes spray paint and snow flocking.
    - Please **spray your Gingerbread House with sealant <u>before</u> dropping it off.**

- **Do not write on**, **decorate, tamper with or place stickers on signage**. A $100 fee will be charged for each damaged sign.

- **Tree signage may be branded by Kennedy Krieger with Festival of Trees sponsor companies**. Designers may not alter this portion of the sign.

- Items should be designed with **longevity** in mind. Please **do not use** the following in your design:
    - **No live plants or greenery.**
      This includes live trees and wreaths.
    - **No balloons.**
    - **No perishable items**, wrapped or unwrapped, on or around the design. This includes dried fruit, popcorn garland, and bird seed ornaments.

      **Gingerbread Houses are an exception to this rule.*



- **Themes including social/political commentary, violence, profanity, or non-child-friendly content are prohibited and will be removed.**

All designs will be reviewed by the Festival of Trees Committee.
If a design does not meet the above guidelines, the Committee reserves the right to make adjustments. The designer will be notified prior to the event.

The Festival of Trees Committee also reserves the right to refuse any item it deems inappropriate for acceptance or display.

Help Us Prevent Theft

Please Do Not:



Place loose items under your design.



Place loose candy under your design (this can also attract rodents/bugs).



Place active gift cards or scratch offs on your design.

Instead, Do This:



Place a sign on your design listing the items that are included. Check in valuable items at Designer Check-In.



Place all items in a gift basket and wrap it with cling wrap. Secure the basket to your design with wire or string.



Make a copy of the gift card or lottery ticket, then turn in the original items at Designer Check-In.

A Look Back: Popular Holiday Designs

We encourage designers to bring fresh, creative ideas to every piece, while ensuring that each design effectively advances the shared goal of raising funds and support for Kennedy Krieger Institute.

The following pages highlight fan-favorite designs from previous years. These selections showcase what has captured attention and driven success in the past.

We hope these examples inspire your own creative process as you develop new and exciting designs.

Festival of Trees
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“The Holiday Hi-Fi Tree”



“The Paper Pine”



“Let It Pour, Let It Pour, Let It Pour...”



“Crabs for Christmas”



“Sharknado!”



“The Very Hungry Holiday”






'Tis The Season
To Be Jolly
MRS. CLAUS


WHOVILLE






BEST IN SHOW


BATH




BALTIMORE
RAVENS
BEST IN SHOW
THIRD PLACE


MOST UNIQUE
THIRD PLACE


SECOND PLACE
BEST IN SHOW


MERRY MERRY
CHRISTMAS


MERRY
Christmas


Grinch




SECOND PLACE
RIBBON






Merry
Swiftmas
I can make Christmas
Shimmer


DESIGNED BY
Corey Grimsley
MARYLAND ZOO


Gingerbread Café
Hot Cocoa
Today's Specials
Ice Skating




SAGE




THE KRUSTY KRAB

What's Next?

Complete Your Designer Survey

- The Designer Survey will be emailed out on **Wednesday, October 14, at 9 a.m.**
- The survey must be submitted by **Wednesday, October 28, at 11:59 a.m.**
- Failure to submit the survey may result in non-acceptance of your item.

The survey will collect the following details for each item:

- **Tree Title** (7-foot & 4-foot trees only)
  If no title is provided, **"Happy Holidays"** will be used.
- **Designer Name**
- **Design Description**
- **Electricity Needs**
- **Any Special Requirements**
- **Sign Up For A Designer Day**
  (select one date & time per item)
- And Additional Details

Interested in buying back your tree, wreath, or gingerbread?

Please indicate this on your survey! Otherwise, we cannot guarantee the opportunity to buy back your item.

Information provided will be used to create on-site signage,
so please ensure that all entries are accurate and complete.



Designer Weekend

Decorating Dates & Times

Designer Days will be held at the **Maryland State Fairgrounds Cow Palace** on the following days:

Saturday, November 21	Sunday, November 22	Monday, November 23
10 a.m.–4 p.m.	8 a.m.–4 p.m.	8 a.m.–12 p.m.

You are **required** to select a date and time to decorate your tree and/or drop off your pre-decorated wreath or gingerbread.

7-Foot, 4-Foot and 2-Foot Trees



Should be decorated **ON-SITE** at the Cow Palace during Designer Weekend.

Wreaths and Gingerbreads



Should be decorated **AT HOME** and **dropped off** at the Cow Palace during Designer Weekend.

Know Before You Go

- Time slots will be filled **first come, first served.** We will not be able to add more designers once a given slot is full.
- Time slots will be **four hours** long. At the end of the four hours, you must finish your design and exit the Fairgrounds. Plan to allow **2-4 hours** for set up.
- **You cannot enter the building or check-in before your scheduled time slot.**
- **Wreaths & Gingerbreads will not be placed on the final display until all have been received.** Do not plan to help hang your wreath when you drop it off.
- If you would like to **decorate your tree early or off-site**, trees will be available for **early pick-up at the Cow Palace** on **Thursday, November 19, and Friday, November 20, from 9 a.m.–3 p.m.**
- Please **do not bring valuables** (e.g., purses or wallets) into the Cow Palace during Designer Days, as lost or stolen items are not the responsibility of Kennedy Krieger Institute or the Maryland State Fairgrounds.



Judging & Awards

- **Judging is subjective and final**. **No changes** will be made once winners are selected.

- Awards will be given for **1st, 2nd, and 3rd** place in the following categories:
  - Best in Show
  - Holiday Flair
  - Most Unique
  - Traditional Christmas

- Awards will also be given for **Honorable Mentions.**

- **Ribbons will be mailed** to winners after the event. Please **do not** take your ribbon with you.

Sale of Your Design

- All proceeds benefit **Kennedy Krieger Institute**.

- Pricing is set by the **Festival of Trees Committee** and may not reflect your costs.

- If you are interested in buying your design back, you must indicate this in your survey.

  - You'll be contacted on **Tuesday, November 25 (between 12–5 p.m.)** with the price. You have **24 hours** to confirm and pay for your items via credit card.

- **Wreaths and 2-foot trees are sold as cash-and-carry items.** Once a wreath or 2-foot tree has been purchased it will no longer be on display.

- **Unsold items** become property of the Institute and may be reused or donated.

Important Dates 2026

- **Registration Opens:** Tuesday, September 8, at 9 a.m.
- **Registration Closes:** Wednesday, October 14, at 11:59 p.m.
- **Designer Survey Opens:** Wednesday, October 14, at 9 a.m.
  (Surveys will be sent to the email provided during registration.)
- **Designer Survey Deadline:** Wednesday, October 28, at 11:59 p.m.
- **Early Tree Pick Up:**
  (For those who want to decorate their tree at home before designer day.)
  - Thursday, November 19, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
  - Friday, November 20, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
- **Designer Days & Times:** You will select a 4-hour shift on one of the dates below to decorate your tree on-site or to drop off a pre-decorated item.
  - Saturday, November 21, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
  - Sunday, November 22, 8 a.m.–4 p.m.
  - Monday, November 23, 8 a.m.–12 p.m.
- **Tree Buy-Back Phone Calls:** Tuesday, November 24, 12–5 p.m.
  (Designers will have 24 hours to call or email back and purchase their tree; otherwise it will be on sale for the public.)
- **Designer Preview Party:** Friday, November 27, 9–10 a.m.

Thank you for donating your time and effort to help Kennedy Krieger make Festival of Trees a TREE-mendous success!

For any questions, please reach out to:
FestivalOfTrees@KennedyKrieger.org

