



2026 Auction Item Donor Guide

The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees

Thursday, November 19 – Saturday, November 21, 2026

Interstate Center, 1106 Interstate Drive, Bloomington, IL 61705

About The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees: The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees is Central Illinois' premier holiday celebration, held annually the weekend before Thanksgiving. 100% of proceeds support life-changing programs for children and families, including foster care, adoption support, special education, autism services, early childhood intervention services, and more. Visit FestOfTrees.org for more information.

About The Baby Fold: Since 1902, The Baby Fold has been providing life-critical services to children and families throughout Central Illinois. The Baby Fold's healing-centered programs include foster care, adoption support, special education, autism programs, early childhood initiatives, crisis intervention, and more. The Baby Fold cares for our youngest citizens so they can be blessed with the loving homes, stable lives, and the futures they deserve. Visit TheBabyFold.org for more information.

Thank you for sharing your creativity and generosity with The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees fundraiser! Every item you create helps fill the venue with holiday magic while raising critical funds for Baby Fold programs that serve local children and families! (foster care, special education, autism services, healthy start and more!)

We're grateful for every creation—from spectacular 7-foot trees and cozy centerpieces to wreaths, gingerbread creations, and unexpected treasures.

This guide has everything you need to create, submit and deliver your auction item.

What Can I Create?

Auction items should be designed or hand-crafted by the donor rather than simply purchased for resale. Choose a theme with broad bidder appeal. We welcome holiday and winter-themed items in these categories:

1. Large Trees - 6 to 7.5 feet tall (*tree must be pre-lit; including the topper, height cannot exceed 8'; large trees are the only items that may be decorated onsite*)
 2. Medium Trees - 4 to 5 ½ feet tall
 3. Small Trees - Under 4 feet tall
 4. Wreaths & Hanging Decor
 5. Other Holiday Décor (centerpieces, tabletop décor, quilted items, stockings, porch pots, chairs, ladders, decorated sleighs, benches, and other creative pieces that do not fit another category.
 6. Gingerbread Creations
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Submit Your Auction Item

Just one form! Complete a separate Auction Item Commitment Form for each item you create. Forms are due by 11:59 p.m. on October 31, 2026.

The form gives us everything we need to list your item in the online auction: its name, description, estimated fair market value, photos, and your contact information.

If you are donating more than one auction item, submit one form for each item.

Before You Submit Your Form:

1. **Estimate Your Item's Fair Market Value**

Give us your best estimate of its retail value, regardless of what you spent or whether materials were donated, reused or purchased on sale. No receipts needed.

For a tree, consider everything included: Artificial tree • Tree skirt • Ornaments • Ribbon • Tree topper • Picks/floral décor • Accessories • Gift cards/certificates • Additional items

Example:

Artificial tree: \$175

Ornaments & décor: \$250

Tree skirt: \$40

Gift card: \$100

Additional accessories: \$75

Estimated Fair Market Value: \$640

2. Give Your Item a Great Name (30 characters max)

A fun, memorable name helps your item stand out! Think “Christmas at the North Pole” instead of “Christmas Tree” or “There’s Gnome Place Like Home” instead of “Gnome Centerpiece.”

3. Write Your Auction Description (900 characters max)

Help bidders know exactly what they’re getting. Enter exactly as you’d like it to appear in the online auction.

Include: dimensions, theme/style • colors • everything included • major features • gift cards/experiences • handmade or unique elements • dimensions, when appropriate

Example: *Winter Woodland Christmas:* *Bring the beauty of a snowy forest indoors with this 7-foot illuminated Christmas tree featuring white, silver and natural woodland décor. Includes snow-covered owls, woodland animals, oversized ornaments, silver ribbon, pinecones, coordinating tree skirt and a \$100 Jeffrey Alans gift card.*

4. Take Great Photos

Festival bidding is online, so great photos matter! Upload 1–3 clear photos. We may take or replace photos during Festival setup if needed. Since 6 to 7.5 foot trees are decorated onsite, please upload a placeholder photo of any subject. Photos of 6 to 7.5 foot trees will be taken onsite.

DO: Good lighting • Fully assembled item • Simple background • One full-item photo • Detail shots if helpful • Clear, focused images

DON’T: Photograph items in boxes • Use website screenshots • Submit dark or blurry photos • Include people in the main photo

Designing Your Auction Item - Requirements

We welcome creativity! Traditional or unexpected, your auction item should be well-crafted, generously decorated and ready to wow bidders. Artificial trees of all styles are welcome—from classic green and flocked trees to colorful, skinny, palm, cactus and other unique designs.

If you’re new to designing for the Festival of Trees, we recommend starting with a centerpiece or wreath, rather than a large tree.

1. Make It Full & Festive

Trees must be generously decorated rather than sparse. Designers often underestimate how much décor it takes to create a full, auction-ready tree. Use this guide for planning:

Tree Height	Decorations	Garland
2 feet	30–50	15 ft.
3 feet	50–60	25 ft.
4 feet	60–75	50 ft.
7 feet	175–225	100 ft.

2. Make it Safe and Display Ready

All items other than large trees must arrive finished and display ready. Use artificial materials only.

Hanging Décor Requirements: All hanging décor must have a sturdy hanger or loop to indicate the top of item and for ease of hanging.

Tree Requirements: Medium and tall trees must be pre-lit • Purchase trees pre-flocked rather than flocking them yourself • Decorate all sides • All trees must light up • Pre-lit trees are strongly preferred • Do not add light strands to pre-lit trees • One main plug should operate the entire tree • No battery-powered décor • Include a tree skirt and storage bag large enough for the decorated tree • Large trees, including the topper, cannot exceed 8’.

Prohibited Items:

No live/fresh greenery, florals, food-based items, perishables, or materials that shed, deteriorate, attract pests or create a safety concern. *(Gingerbread Creations are the exception for food-based materials.)*

Lit candles • Fast-food toys • Stuffed animals as primary décor • Items marked with a year • Spotlights • Most logo/branded items* • Profanity • Sexual or drug-related content • Political or divisive social/advocacy messaging • Offensive or discriminatory content *See *No Advertising Policy*. Sports teams and similar themes are permitted.

Gingerbread Requirements: Gingerbread Village is one of the Festival’s most-loved traditions, featuring more than 100 charming creations each year.

- Use primarily edible materials. Small nonedible props are permitted.
- Use a sturdy base such as wood, a cake plate or seasonal plate—no cardboard. Bases should not exceed 24" x 24".

- Smaller creations often attract more bidders because they are easier to display at home.
- Fall themes are welcome; Halloween themes are not permitted.
- Store-bought gingerbread house kits are allowed, but do not use the plastic tray provided. Add additional edible decorations beyond those included in the kit.
- Do not use hot glue to assemble the structure.
- Do not spray creations with varnish or clear coat.

The Gingerbread Village Committee also hosts an invitation-only workshop in September with building tips and tested gingerbread and icing recipes.

For additional Gingerbread Village information, including forms, guidelines and deadlines, contact Jean Kaufmann: display5454@aol.com | 309-827-7421 or Linda Park: park3032000@yahoo.com | 309-824-7052.

3. Secure Everything—We Mean It!

Items are moved several times, so all decorations must stay attached during lifting, rolling, packaging and transportation. Wire all ornaments and toppers to branches, glue ornament caps and securely attach ribbon, picks, stems, signs and toppers. For wreaths, centerpieces and other décor, glue, wire or tie all pieces securely.

If you wonder, “Is this secure enough?”—add another wire or dab of glue!

4. No Advertising Policy

Auction items should be designed to delight bidders—not advertise a business. Branded items tend to receive fewer bids, which means less support for local children and families.

Do not include: Company logos • Business names • Promotional products as primary decorations • Advertisements • QR codes • Business cards • Promotional signage • Designs primarily intended to market a business, organization, club or service

Want to promote your business at Festival? Become a sponsor! Sponsorships include designated recognition and promotional benefits. Contact festival@thebabyfold.org or 309-451-7235.

5. Gift Cards & Certificates: Do not attach the actual card or certificate to your design. Bring it to Designer Day/Item Drop-Off and give it to check-in staff for safekeeping. On your design, display a copy, empty envelope, printed description or other decorative representation instead.

Designer Day / Auction Item Drop-Off

Tuesday, November 17 • 8:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m.
Interstate Center • 1106 Interstate Drive, Bloomington

Before You Arrive: Only large trees may be decorated onsite. All other items must arrive finished and display-ready. Large-tree designers should prepare as much as possible at home—pre-cut ribbon, bundle picks and ornaments, glue ornament caps and organize supplies.

When You Arrive: Check in with our committee members. You'll receive a packet with information to review, your complimentary ribbons/tickets, and a numbered inventory tag that you will need to **securely attach** to your item.

Decorating a Large Tree Onsite? Bring everything you might need (tools and supplies are not provided):

Ladder/step stool • Folding table • Extension cords • Zip ties • Glue gun & sticks • Hooks • Floral wire • Wire cutters • Scissors • Tape • Tools • Décor • Tree skirt • Tree bag

Designer Ribbons & Complimentary Tickets

As a thank-you for sharing your time and talent, auction item designers receive a Designer ribbon for free Festival admission, along with complimentary tickets to share with friends and family. Ribbons and tickets are provided based on the type of auction item donated.

Judges also award first, second and third place ribbons in various auction categories, with additional special awards for Gingerbread Village.

Sponsorship Signs Near Auction Items

You may see a sponsor sign displayed near your auction item. These signs recognize businesses and individuals who support The Baby Fold through paid sponsorships and receive promotional recognition in return. The sponsor sign is completely separate from designer recognition and does not identify who created or donated the item. Your designer name will appear with your item in the online auction.

Sponsorships do not affect bidding or the sale of your item.

General Policies

1. Once delivered to the Festival of Trees venue, your auction item becomes a donation and the property of The Baby Fold.
2. The Baby Fold staff and Festival of Trees committee volunteers reserve the right to determine whether an item is appropriate for the auction and to remove items if necessary.

3. Everything displayed with your auction item is included in the sale and will go to the winning bidder. Items are sold “as is, where is.”
 4. The Baby Fold reserves the right to determine item values, starting bids and minimum bid increments.
 5. Designers are responsible for providing and purchasing their own trees, wreaths, décor and other materials.
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A Final Checklist

Before bringing your item to Festival of Trees, ask yourself:

- ☐ Did I submit the online Auction Item Form?
- ☐ Did I upload photos?
- ☐ Is everything securely wired or glued?
- ☐ If it's a medium or large tree, does it light up?
- ☐ Can the tree be turned on with one main plug?
- ☐ Did I avoid extra light strands and separately operated powered décor?
- ☐ Did I include a tree skirt and tree bag?
- ☐ Did I avoid live/perishable materials?
- ☐ Is the design family-friendly?
- ☐ Did I avoid business logos and advertising?
- ☐ Did I provide a reasonable estimated value?
- ☐ If gift cards/certificates are included, did I keep the originals separate to turn in at check-in?
- ☐ Is everything ready to safely move and transport?

If you can check all of those boxes, you're ready!

The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees 2026 – Hours of Operation:

- **Thursday, November 19 - 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. (open only to Gala ticket holders)**
- **Friday, November 20 - 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.**
- **Saturday, November 21 - 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (silent auction closes at 5:00 p.m.)**

Please visit FestOfTrees.org for additional information.

Thank You! Festival of Trees would quite literally not be possible without the creativity, generosity, and countless hours contributed by our talented auction item designers.

Every tree decorated, wreath created, centerpiece assembled, and gingerbread house built helps us raise funds that support children and families throughout Central Illinois. We can't wait to see what you create!

Questions? Contact The Baby Fold at festival@thebabyfold.org or 309-451-7202.