

### *City hosts 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony*

Ceremony takes place for final time on Main Street, to move to new municipal complex in 2024

“We’ve got a good crowd here tonight, and I’m very pleased to see that,” Simpsonville City Councilman Lou Hutchings said behind the podium outside City Hall. “One of the reasons why we wanted to do this in the beginning was to create a sense of community, bring everyone together and have something we could all unite behind and feel simply home in Simpsonville.”

Hutchings was introduced to the crowd by Mayor Paul Shewmaker, who emceed the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony. Held on Dec. 7 at

“The way this started, I sent a survey out back in 2019 and asked people what they thought about having a tree lighting in Simpsonville, which we hadn’t had one as far as I know or as long as I’ve been living here,” Hutchings said just feet from the Christmas Tree in front of a crowd of hundreds that stretched across the City Hall lawn and North East Main Street. “We got a tremendous response. We got over 500 responses back, and they were all positive and all good ideas about how to do that.”

At the business meeting in September 2019, Simpsonville City Council approved the purchase of an artificial tree to be the official City of Simpsonville Christmas Tree.

“The Council at the time and Mayor (Janice) Curtis and all the Council members were fully behind it, so we moved forward with that,” Hutchings said. “Our City Administrator (Dianna Gracely) found the money for it.”

The City of Simpsonville used hospitality and ac-



*The 26.5-foot City of Simpsonville Christmas Tree was officially lit at the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony Dec. 7.*

commodations tax funds “(Administrator Gracely’s) to purchase the decoration. always able to find funding when we need it that doesn’t



*Simpsonville City Councilman Lou Hutchings speaks at the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony.*

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Simpsonville City Hall, the Tree Lighting Ceremony featured the lighting of the 26.5-foot City of Simpsonville Christmas Tree, the attainment of which began with Hutchings and a Facebook post four years ago.



*Local musician Stephen Eager led attendees of the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony in a Christmas carol sing-along.*

affect your precious property tax dollars,” Hutchings said to the crowd with a bit of a laugh and wink.

The Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony has featured music since the first one in 2019, and local musician Steve Eager has been leading a Christmas carol medley sing-along since 2020. Eager said he “greatly look(s) forward to” each year.

“My wife grew up here, and we absolutely love the town and it’s people!” Eager said. “There’s so much enthusiasm that surrounds the ceremony, and it’s a real

privilege to be a part of an event that focuses on the true meaning of the season.”

Since the 1st Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony, the City has added four feet in height and ornaments for a better daytime effect to the City of Simpsonville Christmas Tree. The Simpsonville Public Works Department assembles the tree after Thanksgiving Day and disassemble it after New Year’s Day.

The Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony has continued to evolve over its life span of five years. In 2020 Council-

woman Sherry Roche joined the festivities by providing a “Letters to Santa” station, where kids could write letters to be delivered to Santa Claus. The Letters to Santa Claus station was made possible by Sherry Roche of Weichert Realtors, Shaun & Shari. Roche said the tree lighting ceremony is a “Hallmark movie moment” in the “blessed” City of Simpsonville.

“Seeing the families gathered around our City Hall tree, hot chocolate in hand, and singing

Christmas carols invokes a sense of unity and common joy that is such a blessing,” Roche said. “Reading the letters to Santa as I package them for the North Pole Express has been

a wonderful experience each year. Some children ask for toys or clothing, but some ask for deeper things like healing for a sick family member or for items for their moms and dads. I feel honored to provide the Santa table year after year and watch these children grow.”

The Tree Lighting Ceremony for 2023 was special in an additional way to it being the fifth tree lighting. Hutchings explained to the crowd both the future of the ceremony and City Hall.

“We’re going to move our

City Hall to the new municipal complex pretty soon, so this we’ll be the last year we’ll have the tree at this location,” Hutchings said, referring to the multi-million dollar project to construct a new municipal complex housing city hall, Council chambers and the Simpsonville Police Department on top of a reimagined Simpsonville City Park. “We’re going to have a living Christmas Tree on campus at the municipal complex, which we will be celebrating there from then on.”



*Mayor Paul Shewmaker was the emcee for the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony.*

Hutchings noted that the City planned to keep the current City of Simpsonville Christmas Tree at a to-be-determined location.

“This to me has always been like a Hallmark moment when we get everyone together like this,” Hutchings said in closing. “... The biggest thing to me about this is the turnout of the people and the good feelings and the holiday spirit that we get from this. This is exactly what we hoped to do, and we’re so proud of all of you for coming out every year.”



*The 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony featured the Letters to Santa Table by Sherry Roche of Weichert, Realtors.*





# SIMPSONVILLE DEBUTS SEASON 1 OF THE SIMPLY SAID. PODCAST

Simpsonville Community Relations Specialist Justin Campbell was rolling back and forth between his computer and some kind of recording device, adjusting sound levels and tweaking settings while talking about the latest tool in the City of Simpsonville’s communications toolbox.

“Podcasts are ubiquitous and have become a part of people’s daily lives,” Campbell said as he realized the source of the problem he was trying to solve was that he indeed had not plugged in the microphone from which he could not produce sound. “If you are trying to get some kind of message or information out to the public—whether you’re a business, entertainer or government entity, a podcast is crucial.”

After Campbell had plugged the mic into the audio interface that then plugged into his desktop, he breathed a sigh of relief (and possibly self-loathing).

The City of Simpsonville started season 1 of The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast in October to “help connect commu-

nity members with their local leaders, decision-makers and public servants,” as Campbell says at the top of each episode.

“I’m a bit of a podcast nerd and have been wanting to do some kind of podcast for years, and then I realized that a podcast would be a great way to reach more people and add to the growing Simpsonville brand,” Campbell said. “So I went into City Administrator Dianna Gracely’s office and said, ‘I’d like to do a podcast,’ to which she replied, ‘I’ve been thinking the same thing.’”

While looking for furniture for the City’s new municipal complex under construction, Gracely checked out a model recording studio and got the idea for the City to create its own podcast.

“By the following week, I started recording,” Campbell said.

The format of the bi-weekly released SIMPLY SAID. Podcast is simple: a host with a guest. For Episode 1, Campbell talked to Mayor Paul Shewmaker, who was re-elected in November. Campbell credits Shewmaker with the podcast’s title.

“The podcast’s first title was ‘Simply Connected’



*Simpsonville Community Relations Specialist Justin Campbell is the writer, producer and host of The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast.*

before remembering it was the Simpsonville Area Chamber of Commerce’s tagline,” Campbell said while trying to figure out why sound was coming out of only the left side of his headphones. “We switched the name to ‘Simply Connect,’ but close friends and relatives made clear that name was boring, and the next day, Mayor Shewmaker nonchalantly dropped his idea on his way out of my office, and I was like, ‘Yep. That’s it.’ My wife confirmed it.”

So far the SIMPLY SAID. Podcast has featured Shewmaker, Gracely, Simpsonville Arts Center

Manager Melissa Sturgis and City Council members Ken Cummings of Ward V and Jenn Hulehan of Ward III, whose terms and stints on Council end in January. Not to be outdone by the podcasts to which he listens, Campbell has endeavored to include bonus content and a “mini series” recapping Council meetings. Aside from playing podcaster, Campbell said that he feels honored to produce the podcast not only because he would likely do it for free—the podcast is a valuable tool for improving communication with the public, one of Shewmaker’s priorities in his next term.

“A frequent piece of feedback from residents is the need for better communication, and The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast is a direct answer to that feedback,” Campbell said. “If you have a smartphone, computer or tablet, then you can learn more about Simpsonville and the decisions by its leaders.”

In addition to policy, news and votes by Council, listeners can learn more about the Simpsonville community. At the beginning of each conversation, Campbell asks the guest a Simpsonville trivia question, which the guest answers at the conclusion of the episode before Campbell provides the correct answer.

“That was also the Mayor’s idea,” Campbell said with a laugh. “The idea is to grab the lis-

tener’s attention even more so and keep them listening until the end.”

Startup was a learning process. The first problem that Campbell ran into was the inability to record two mics simultaneously into the audio editing software. Apparently recording with more than one USB mic is at most nearly impossible and at least a massive technical headache. Through research Campbell learned that XLR mics are better for recording podcasts with more than one mic.

“I still have no idea what an XLR mic actually is,” Campbell said.

Once the two XLR mics were secured, Campbell had to figure out how to record both mics at the same time into the audio editing software with the output being the two



headphones. Needless to say, doing so was another technical headache.

“One mic would record, and the other wouldn’t, and then the sound would come out of one of the headphones and not the other,” Campbell said. “As soon as one issue was addressed, another would pop up. Case in point was the latency or delay in sound in the headphones that has to do with sample rate and buffering. I made it work, but I still have no idea what sample rate and buffering are.”

Episodes released by The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast in addition to Shewmaker, Gracely, Cummings and Hulehan are recaps of the October Committee of the Whole and November

business meetings and reading of the City of Simpsonville Brand Statement. The next episode planned for release after the publication of the newsletter is a holiday special about the 5th Annual Simpsonville Tree Lighting Ceremony that was held on Dec. 7.

Campbell said he is excited to see where the podcast goes. Campbell and Mayor Shewmaker have been talking about how to make the Council meeting recaps more interesting and engaging with them as co-hosts discussing particularly interesting or important agenda items.

“What I’d really like to do is video the podcast sessions, which appears to be a must in the podcasting world,” Campbell said. “Regardless, The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast is here to stay.”



Mayor Paul Shewmaker was the first guest featured on The Simpsonville SIMPLY SAID. Podcast. One of Shewmaker’s priorities for a second term is improved communication.

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## MAYOR'S PRIORITIES FOR NEW TERM

Mayor Shewmaker places emphasis on completing current construction projects, communication and new Council

**1. New Council Member Orientation:** My plan is to get our three new council members oriented and ready to work prior to their swearing in. I am not interested in influencing their agenda, but I want to get them started on how to get things on the agenda. I plan to offer a review of council rules, provide some orientation materials from the Municipal Association, and just have a general discussion of how business is handled by the Council.

**2. Stormwater Issues:** We have several residents of the community who are severely impacted by stormwater flooding. While we haven't had an intense rain event since June, it's not a matter of if, but when. I have been working with City Administrator Dianna Gracely on how we can help the worst off in the nearer term, and for a long term view, I joined lobbying group American Flood Coalition. The Flood Coalition has invited me to visit the U.S. Congress along with 50 other mayors from the Southeast in May to build a relationship with our legislators and work on securing funding for flooding infrastructure improvements. The Flood Coalition is also working in South Carolina with the South Carolina Office of Resiliency and is lobbying the General Assembly to fund SCOR in their efforts to reduce the impact of flooding.

**3. Finish the Municipal Complex and City Park:** This project is on schedule, and I'm staying in close contact with the city administration and contractors on the progress. The completion of this project will be a revelation to our residents. It's going to be absolutely beautiful. The dollar investment is large, but that is exactly what it is, an investment in our city's future. Our existing facilities are inadequate and worn out, so now is the

time for this project. One impact with the completion of this project will be freeing up the current city hall property on North East Main Street for development into something more appropriate for our downtown. I will be working alongside Council to be sure our City gets the very best. If the current plans work out, everyone will be delighted with what it brings to our downtown.

**4. Complete the downtown "amplification:"** The vision for this project started almost six years ago. When I came into office, I threw my full support behind this plan. We will see improvements to traffic flow, way-finding, walkability, and general aesthetics. The project will take almost two years, and I ask our residents and visitors to be patient, share in the imagination of what it is to come, and remember we have to break some eggs to make an omelet. If you don't like omelets, well, eggs are broken to make waffles too!



Mayor Paul Shewmaker speaks at the beam and topper signing ceremony for the under-construction Municipal Complex in November. One of Mayor Shewmaker's priorities for his second term is completion of the Municipal Complex and City Park.

## PRIORITIES FOR NEXT 4 YEARS

NEW COUNCIL MEMBER ORIENTATION

STORMWATER ISSUES

FINISH THE MUNICIPAL COMPLEX AND CITY PARK

COMPLETE DOWNTOWN "AMPLIFICATION"

COMMUNICATION

**5. Communication:** An ongoing priority, always, is to improve communication. I am always looking for ways to do this. I was instrumental in getting the ordinances changed to improve communication to affected property owners when we have new developments. We can always find better ways to communicate.



# *He came to town | Breakfast with Santa*

Families, kids attend the annual Breakfast with Santa event by Parks & Rec



## 'Behind the Scenes:' A Series on the 5 Public Works Divisions

### A 'WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET IT DONE' ATTITUDE 'Citizen service' a top priority for the Sanitation Division

"Like all employees in the Public Works Department, these guys come to work everyday with citizen service as a top priority," Simpsonville Public Works Director Andy West said about the Sanitation Division. "They work no matter the weather and a lot of holidays that most other City employees have off."

The Sanitation Division of the Simpsonville Public Works Department was formed in 2021 to bring sanitation services back in-house. As the contract with a private vendor came to an end, City employees delivered 7,856 roll carts or trash cans to residents in September 2021. The number of trash cans has increased to 8,843 since Public Works began picking up and hauling residential garbage on Sept. 7, 2021.

"Before 2021 the City of Simpsonville relied on a private contractor to service the sanitation needs of residents, and the only accountability was a contract," West said. "The City had no control over personnel, equipment conditions and

returns for missed cans." After she was hired by Simpsonville City Council as city administrator in 2018, Dianna Gracely heard the need for better sanitation service and developed a plan to fund sanitation services in-house.

"In the years 2020 and 2021, the Public Works staff was tasked with making that transition happen," West said. "The transition in September 2021 wouldn't have been as successful as it was if the guys and staff in Public Works weren't so dedicated in meeting the established departmental goals."

The Sanitation Division is overseen by Sanitation Supervisor Roy Koehne and comprised of the four sanitation truck drivers: Tony Ellison, Charlie Elmore, Josh Newman and Robby Reed and crew members

Hugh Hill and Rob Ruvolo. The drivers pick up trash weekly from 8,843 cans and last year hauled 7,992 tons of household garbage from the curbs of Simpsonville. The other half of the Sanitation Division pick up brush, leaves, bagged yard waste and bulk items, totaling last year 1,700 tons of brush; 1,000 tons of leaves; and 940 tons of bulk items and bagged yard waste.

But that is not all that the Sanitation Division does.

"When the need arises, the

Sanitation guys have also worked all night clearing roads of storm debris," West said. "This is where their true 'whatever it takes to get it done' attitude comes into play as they assist other divisions and City departments in helping Simpsonville get back on its feet after severe weather has moved through the area. Without these guys and their dedication, Simpsonville residents would not have the accountability, customer service and high expectations from the City that the residents deserve."



*Tony Ellison, a technician III for the Simpsonville Public Works Department, is a drive in the Sanitation Division of Public Works. Ellison and his co-workers Charlie Elmore, Josh Newman and Robby Reed pick up trash weekly from more than 8,800 roll carts throughout the city limits of Simpsonville.*



# TRASH, SEWER & HOLIDAY DECORATIONS



*Simpsonville Public Works Sanitation Supervisor Roy Koehne connects a holiday light into a power pole near the corner of South East Main Street and Fairview Road in November.*

The Simpsonville Public Works Department has several invaluable responsibilities to ensure residents and visitors can enjoy the benefits of the great City of Simpsonville: sanitation, sewer, streets and beautification, building maintenance and fleet services.

And holiday decorating! Yes, the Public Works Department is in charge of installing 93 Christmas decorations across the Simpsonville city limits. Driving from power pole to power pole, the Streets & Sewer Division uses a bucket truck to ascend to the top of each pole and hang and connect light decorations. The process to install all 93 pieces

and replace any burnt-out bulbs is three days.

Public Works Director Andy West acknowledges that most members of the public are probably unaware of this responsibility for his department and therefore wants to put a spotlight on the process and the guys in charge.

“I think most people see these lights as reminders of what’s truly important,” West said. “I hope the decorations encourage reflection as the year winds down and we begin planning for the year to come and all that we hope to accomplish in it.”

The City of Simpsonville

## ‘Tis the season for Public Works to decorate the city

has been using the decorations that Public Works hung up in November for as long as West has worked for the City—nearly 16 years. Given the age and wear-and-tear on the decorations, new decorations are part of the downtown revitalization plan the City will embark upon in 2024.

“I am excited to see how new decorations that will be part of our downtown revitalization project continue to inspire those same emotions associated with the holiday season,” West said.

Simpsonville Community Relations Specialist Justin Campbell said the installation of holiday decorations across the City is a great example of the kind of public service that the Simpsonville Public Works Department provides.

“Whenever

er I drive by decorations, whether on Main Street or Fairview Road or elsewhere, I think about those employees who helped install those decorations, a job that is a little riskier than sitting in front of a computer and crafting a newsletter,” Campbell said. “I want residents and visitors of Simpsonville to know the employees in the Simpsonville Public Works Department work tirelessly to help make the City run, and that includes spreading some holiday cheer by installing almost 100 decorations.”



*The Streets & Sewer Division of the Simpsonville Public Works Department installs 93 Christmas decorations over three days.*



**SIMPSONVILLE BATTALION CHIEF GULLEDGE RETIRES AFTER 30 YEARS OF SERVICE**

**'There's no other fire department in the state that compares to what we have'**

Simpsonville Fire Battalion Chief Daniel Gulledge retired from firefighting in September after 30 years of public service. Gulledge became a firefighter in 1993 and served a total of five years in the PeeDee region and Spartanburg County before joining the Simpsonville Fire Department as a firefighter in 1998.

Gulledge said "the excitement" of firefighting is the reason that he chose the profession.

"There's certainly a mixed bag of feelings," Gulledge said. "You get that fear and excitement when you're going into an unknown situation and trying to figure out what's going on. You get adrenaline. You get some anxiety and heightened senses about what's going on around you while you're working."

When Gulledge started firefighting in 1993, he still had one year of schooling left at USC Upstate, where he was majoring in interdisciplinary studies, which was effectively a double major in criminal justice and history. Before becoming a firefighter, Gulledge had planned for a career in criminal justice.

"Law enforcement is what I went to college for, but it wasn't my cup of tea," Gulledge said.

Within a few years, Gulledge moved up the ranks to engineer around 2001, lieutenant around 2004 and finally battalion chief in 2006. The battalion chief position in which Gulledge served nearly 20 years is the last step before becoming assistant fire chief.

"As battalion chief, I was tasked with the day-to-day operations of all six fire stations and personnel, taking care of being incident commander on scene and calls," Gulledge said from inside Fire Station 1 on East Curtis Street. "I'm the last step before it goes into administration and the fire chief."

Three battalion chiefs work with



*Battalion Chief Daniel Gulledge retired in September from the Simpsonville Fire Department after 30 years of public service.*

Assistant Fire Chief Harold Nichols and Fire Chief Wesley Williams to ensure fire department operations run smoothly and efficiently. Gulledge has been under the direction of Chief Williams since he joined the Simpsonville Fire Department 25 years ago.

"Chief Williams was my first engineer when my probation period ended and he was still on shift," Gulledge said. "We were on shift together until he moved



*Daniel Gulledge became a firefighter in 1993, joined the Simpsonville Fire Department in 1998 and became battalion chief in 2006.*

over to the administration offices. I've been under his direction for basically my entire career, and that's impressive. [Chief Williams] has high expectations, but he also looks after everybody as well as he can and makes sure folks are taken care of."

Firefighters and public safety officials like Gulledge will often say the friendships and bonds that they formed with their fellow firefighters or colleagues are what they will miss the most in retirement. Gulledge said the firefighters are "a big family" when they are on shift together.

"We probably spend more time [at the fire station] than with our actual families," Gulledge said.

Gulledge said the Simpsonville taxpayers can be proud of their fire department because of the quality of equipment and stations and the training and professionalism of the firefighters.

"There's no other department in the state that compares to what the Simpsonville Fire Department has," Gulledge said.

"We appreciate folks supporting us because without them being behind us and funding, that wouldn't be possible."

The main takeaway about firefighting for Gulledge is the fire department is the "ultimate problem solving" branch of public service. Gulledge stressed that the very dire emergencies to which his colleagues and he have responded become "normal life" for them after running those calls so many times.

"If someone calls 911, and dispatch doesn't know who to send the call to, they send the fire department out to figure out what next steps there are to remedy the situation," Gulledge said. "Just being able to continue to work a plan and come to a solution to anything is the biggest thing. There's always a solution."

With 30 years of public ser-

vice under his belt, Gulledge has plans to enjoy retirement by continuing to enjoy hunting and fishing (which he has been doing since a youngster) and, well, working. Gulledge plans to run his landscaping business that he started four years ago.

Gulledge said that he does not like to be cooped up inside.

"That's the reason I like the fire service: it's something different every day," Gulledge said. "You don't come in and sit down at the same computer, same machine and do the same thing repetitively over and over again. There's always something different. Landscaping is the same way – there's always something different."



*Simpsonville Fire Department Battalion Chief Daniel Gulledge was presented with a shield for 25 years of service with the Simpsonville Fire Department.*





**American Heritage Girls Troop #725 sang Christmas carols to Simpsonville Police Department Bravo Shift officers Jessica Anderson, Sgt. Anthony Waugh and Sgt. Daniel Peninger.**

*Simpsonville Police Department partners with Toys for Tots to provide toys to children on Christmas morning*

**DETACHMENT 1105**



**Simpsonville police partnered with Toys for Tots in November and December to provide toys to children for Christmas morning. The toy drive is part of the annual multi-weekend Stuff-a-Cruiser initiative by SPD at stores in the city.**

### CROWNS MUSICAL REVIEW: NO DREAMS DEFERRED PRODUCTION A 'PART OF THE BEST OF SIMPSONVILLE'

If the debut of Clark Nesbitt's *No Dreams Deferred Productions Unlimited* is a sign of what's to come at the Simpsonville Arts Center, then the future of the Arts Center stage is as bright as the spotlight on a bona-fide Broadway star.

*CROWNS: A Gospel Musical Play* ran for six dates over two weekends in October as the first production by No Dreams Deferred community theater in the Arts Center auditorium. Director and actor Clark Nesbitt said that he cannot say "thank you" to the Simpsonville Arts Center and Simpsonville community enough.

"Having previously produced *CROWNS* elsewhere and now having produced it at the Simpsonville Arts Center was a dream come true," said Nesbitt, whose theater group began partnering with the Arts Center just before the summer. "On the heels of celebrating the one year anniversary of *No Dreams Deferred* as a 'New Community Theatre,' we were able to produce a high quality theatrical experience and introduce a new fan base to the arts in Simpsonville and new patrons to the Arts Center."

No Dreams Deferred is a fairly new community theater started by Nesbitt, who has decades of experience as an actor and director. With the mission to tell stories of the Black community and People of Color, No Dreams Deferred is a great fit for the Simpsonville Arts Center, which endeavors to promote the visual and performing arts with a diversity of productions and storytelling. Nesbitt said that he produced *CROWNS* earlier this year in a rented venue with

only two days to set up and make blocking adjustments, which was a "major stress" with "unwanted production concessions," according to Nesbitt.

"The Simpsonville Arts Center allowed us to create and stage this production with all the bells and whistles at hand: lights, sound, stage - a theatre," Nesbitt added.

*CROWNS* is an exploration of Black history and identity as seen through the eyes of a young Black woman who has come down South to stay with her aunt after her brother is killed in Brooklyn, N.Y. Characters use hats of exquisite variety to tell tales about the etiquette of hats and their historical and contemporary social functioning.

No Dreams Deferred actor and Simpsonville resident Kirsten Brock said she was "so excited" to play Mother Shaw in the "amazing" production.

"I don't think I would have seen myself as her, but I fell in love with the character, who even reminded me of my grandmother!" Brock said.

The story in *CROWNS* is the kind of story that the Arts Center wants told from its stage. Nesbitt said that the part-



*Miriam Burgess and Danesha Dawson perform in CROWNS: A Gospel Musical Play.*

nership between No Dreams Deferred and the Simpsonville Arts Center enables both to reach a constituency from not only the City of Simpsonville but from neighboring cities and counties.

"We are proud to be able to be another reason for more tourism in the City of Simpsonville, a tourist destination," Nesbitt said. "We are so excited to be a part of the best of Simpsonville!"



*Danesha Dawson performs in the production of CROWNS: A Gospel Musical Play for Clark Nesbitt's No Dreams Deferred Productions Unlimited. The theater group will produce A Raisin in the Sun in 2024.*





## THE NUTCRACKER PREVIEW: CORNERSTONE BALLET TO SHOW TALENT IN HOLIDAY PERFORMANCE

sold out as of the week of Nov. 27. Cornerstone Ballet is a local small business located right in the center of Simpsonville on North Main Street.

Cornerstone Ballet Director

Amy DeShong said starting a tradition in Simpsonville for bringing families and community together is an honor.

“We love being able to bring the art of classical ballet directly into the heart of Simpsonville,” DeShong said. “The Nutcracker’ is a rite of passage for ballet dancers, and we are thrilled to be able to perform at the Simpsonville Arts Center.” “The Nutcracker” is a Christmas fairy

tale that follows Clara and toys that come to life and battle an army of mice. Clara and her nutcracker—which is transformed into a prince, travel into the Land of Sweets where they are greeted by the Sugar Plum Fairy and sweets representing nations around the world.

With near sellouts for all three shows as of Dec. 8, DeShong said children and the holidays are “at the heart” of the attraction to “The Nutcracker” as nothing brings community together more than they.

“These dancers have been practicing every Friday since August, and their energy and love for this art is contagious and excites all who hear,” DeShong said. “The Nutcracker’ appeals to all age ranges, and you don’t have to know anything about classical ballet to appreciate this beautiful performance set to the music of Tchaikovsky.”

*All three productions are nearly sold out as of Dec. 8.*

The City of Simpsonville’s newest Christmas tradition begins in December when Cornerstone Ballet holds three performances of Tchaikovsky’s classic ballet “The Nutcracker” at the Simpsonville Arts Center in the heart of the Christmas season.

Cornerstone dancers will perform in “The Nutcracker” in the Arts Center auditorium on Dec. 9, Dec. 15 and Dec. 16.; all three performances are nearly

## Melodies Under the Mistletoe Preview: ‘Relish in the nostalgic charm’

The Simpsonville Arts Center and Hartworks Theatrics invites the public to add a touch of musical merriment to their holiday season with “Melodies Under the Mistletoe: A Simpsonville Christmas.”

On Dec. 19 at the stunning Simpsonville Arts Center, audience members will enjoy an evening immersed in heartwarming joyful melodies and sounds of the season. Led by Upstate theatre veteran Neel Patrick Edwards accompanied by the talented Lance Bastian and delightful surprises from special guests, this cabaret-style fundraising concert for Hartworks promises an intimate cozy setting.

Edwards said members of the public do not want to miss “Melodies” because the concert offers a festive experience that “will undoubtedly enhance” the holiday season.

“Imagine a stage adorned with Christmas trees, accompanied by a live trio featur-

ing the great talents of Lance Bastian on keys, Johnathan Gilstrap on percussion and Wil Johnson on bass—all coming to create an intimate cabaret-like atmosphere,” Edwards said.

The “Melodies” concert will feature a lineup of classics and new tunes including a rich jazzy crooner collection with Tony Bennet’s classic Christmas arrangements, a dash of Elvis and other melodies from Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Josh Groban.

The “Melodies” concert will be the first production by Hartworks Theatrics at the Arts Center. Edwards said he is “so thankful” to launch his nonprofit Hartworks on the Arts Center stage.



*Neel Patrick Edwards of Hartworks Theatrics is producing the holiday concert “Melodies Under the Mistletoe” at the Arts Center Dec. 19.*

“Simpsonville is booming with growth and new opportunities, and I am very honored to be allowed to perform in this beautiful space.”

TICKETS  
at  
[hartworkstheatrics.org](http://hartworkstheatrics.org)