Coverdale Farms
The last of the autumn leaves

Inside:
- Honoring Elizabeth
- More than a likeness
- Yuletide at Winterthur

Complimentary Copy
Yuletide at Winterthur features four decades of dazzling displays that visitors love the most.
By Steven Hoffman
Staff Writer

Yuletide at Winterthur, one of the Brandywine Valley's most beloved holiday traditions, is celebrating its 40th year with the most dazzling displays from across the decades.

Yuletide at Winterthur is open through January 5, 2020.

"Holidays are about memories, so this special anniversary Yuletide Tour is a walk down memory lane," explained Debbie Harper, the senior curator of education and coordinator of the Yuletide Tour. "Last year, we surveyed 1,850 guests about their favorite rooms and displays so visitors will see those, plus a record number of Christmas trees."

According to Harper, the 40th year Yuletide at Winterthur will be exactly what visitors have come to expect—only the displays will be bigger and brighter than ever. This year, visitors will have the opportunity to delight in the holiday traditions of the du Pont family, find inspiration for decorating their own homes, and marvel at 17 stunning Christmas trees at the Winterthur Museum, Garden, & Library.

The Winterthur staff spends a considerable amount of time planning each Yuletide at Winterthur. As the coordinator of the Yuletide Tour, Harper will work on various aspects of the planning throughout the year. Numerous people will work on the designing of the displays, and when it comes time

Continued on Page 48

All photos courtesy of Winterthur
A survey was undertaken to determine the favorite displays from the first 39 years of Yuletide at Winterthur. This year's event showcases many of those favorites.

www.ghlifemagazine.com | Winter 2019 | Greenville & Hockessin Life  47
to install the displays, there is an experienced team to handle those duties as well. Harper said that there could be as many as 40 people working in the house on a given day when the work of setting up the displays is in full swing.

"We plan it out well in advance," she explained. "From creating to marketing it, there is not a person at Winterthur who is not involved in Yuletide at Winterthur."

When Harper mentioned that this year’s Yuletide at Winterthur is a walk down memory lane, she wasn't exaggerating. She first started working at Winterthur in 1984, and she became the assistant to the Yuletide Coordinator in 1988. So she has a lot of memories of the special holiday event. In fact, the first time that she ever visited Winterthur was as a college student at Gettysburg College. She can still recall being at the top of the staircase and looking down to see a large table that was decorated with Christmas wreaths and a massive bowl of punch. It was a part of the Yuletide at Winterthur guided tour, which was just being set up at the time of that first visit. Although she didn’t get to go on a Yuletide tour during that first visit, when she started working at Winterthur, the holiday display was a highlight for her.
The displays have evolved and changed through the years, and because of her involvement there are a lot of memories.

"It has never really lost its magic for me," Harper said of Yuletide at Winterthur.

For those who make Yuletide at Winterthur a regular part of their holiday celebration, this year's program will offer a unique opportunity to revisit some of the favorite displays from the last four decades. And first-time visitors to Yuletide at Winterthur will be in for a real treat as they experience all the dazzling displays for the first time.

Continued on Page 50
Yuletide at Winterthur
Continued from Page 49

Harper explained, “When we surveyed visitors last year about what they wanted to see in the 40th year of Yuletide at Winterthur, it was really about big displays. This year, it is literally just bigger. It’s a bigger experience all around for visitors.”

From the history of the holidays to the beauty of the breathtaking dried-flower tree to the magical dollhouse mansion, as well as opportunities to shop, dine, and experience special programs and events, Yuletide at Winterthur is a festive celebration that will be enjoyed by people of all ages.

The festivities begin with shopping. In a spectacular display first seen in 1996, the Court will be transformed into an 1860s market square. In the rooms upstairs, visitors will see how the greens, gifts, and delicacies bought there were used to create unforgettable holiday displays. Special collections will include an array of antique gift-giver figures and a cupboard filled with vintage candy containers.

The stunning displays of trees include cookie-laden evergreens from Pennsylvania German communities in the 1810s and imported German feather trees of the late 1800s to the cotton-wrapped sassafras trees of the early 20th century and gleaming aluminum trees of the mid-20th century. Winterthur Museum founder Henry Francis du Pont’s own trees also will be seen, including the 1890s tree of his boyhood decorated with candy-filled cornucopia set among flickering candles and his 1930s tree embellished with glass balls, tinsel, and the still-new strings of colored electric lights.

Winterthur’s signature dried-flower tree, first seen in 1985, will be featured in the Conservatory. Other uniquely designed trees celebrating the March Bank and Peony Garden will remind everyone of the delights that await visitors every spring and summer in the Winterthur Garden.

Continued on Page 52
Yuletide at Winterthur

Continued from Page 50

In a nod to the popular costuming “The Crown” exhibition, which features 40 costumes from the Emmy award-winning Netflix series about the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, several Yuletide displays will look at royal influence on American winter celebrations, including the popularization of the Christmas tree by Queen Victoria in the 1850s. Guests will also see the traditions of American royalty—the du Pont family—reflected in several displays.

One of Harper’s most important duties is ensuring that the displays flow well with each other. They don’t want people to have to jump from a tour display showcasing 1860 to another one that showcases life 100 years later in quick succession. The displays have to tell a story, and organization is important.

Harper explained that Yuletide at Winterthur focuses on three different things: historic holiday practices; how the du Pont family celebrated the holidays; and then spectacular holiday displays. All three focal points have the potential to delight audiences.

Harper recalled one display that was set up to resemble Bracebridge Hall from the novel by Washington Irving. When visitors commented on the accuracy of the display, and were able to appreciate the nod to Bracebridge Hall, it was heartening for the staff.

Continued on Page 54
It is also wonderful, Harper explained, when a visitor sees a display that showcases Christmas from the 1930s or the 1950s and the visitor is reminded of what the holidays were like when they were children. The heartwarming nostalgia of it can be very meaningful for visitors.

“That kind of response is always great,” Harper said. “To think that you could bring back memories of something that is so special is really great. The things that stand out in my mind—always—are the visitors’ reactions.”

The popularity of Yuletide at Winterthur has proven to be enduring. That’s why the holiday event has lasted for four decades.

“For so many of our families,” Harper explained, “this is a part of their holiday tradition.”

She also noted that there are special holiday programs at Winterthur that take place throughout the season. These include the weekly Yuletide Jazz and Wine series, which features favorite holiday music ensembles on Wednesday evenings in December, live one-man performances of “A Christmas Carol” featuring Gerald Charles Dickens, the great-great-grandson of Charles Dickens, and the popular Yuletide Brunch with Santa. Visit winterthur.org/yuletide for a list of these and other events to make your holiday season special.

To contact Staff Writer Steven Hoffman, email editor@chestercounty.com.

---

Winterthur, known worldwide for its preeminent collection of American decorative arts, naturalistic gardens, and research library for the study of American art and material culture, offers a variety of tours, exhibitions, programs, and activities throughout the year.

For those visiting Winterthur from Nov. 23, 2019 to January 5, 2020, please note that the Yuletide Tour replaces the Introductory Tour and is included with general admission. The prices for admission during the holiday season are $22 for adults, $20 for students and seniors, $6 for children ages 2 to 11. Winterthur is open Monday to Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day).