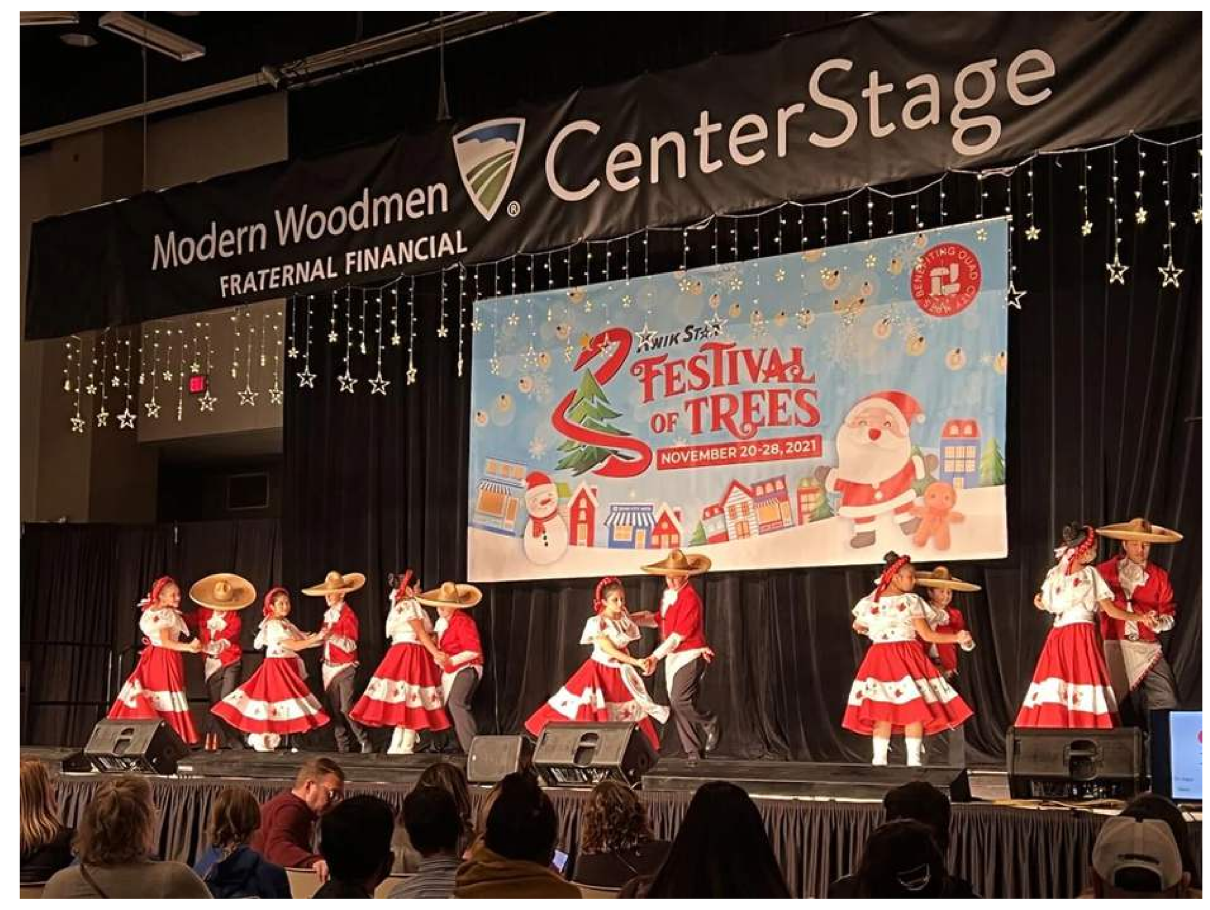
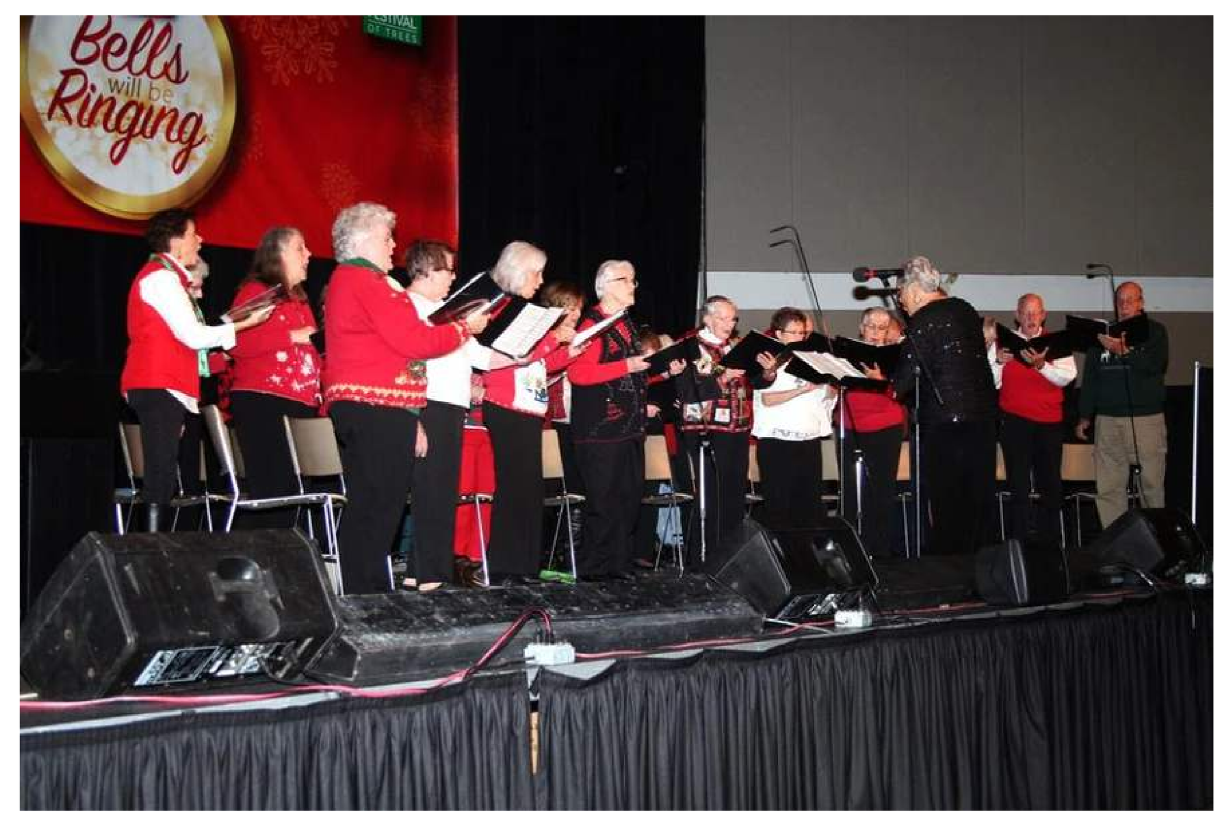
THE VALUE OF JOY

You can't put a price tag on the feeling of a child taking a bow. But you can measure what happens next.





Every performance, every act of shared celebration, creates a ripple. Parents linger downtown for dinner. Family and friends visit from out of town and book hotel rooms. Volunteers form friendships that outlast the event. Donors decide to give again. A local student who sang on stage this year will design the festival logo 10 years from now — or serve on a cultural board shaping the next generation.

That's how community grows: through moments that move us first, then move the economy.

Leaders at The Cultural Trust call that the emotional return on investment.

"It's what happens when a community celebrates together and realizes that joy is infrastructure — it sustains both the heart and the balance sheet," said Jen Lewis-Snyder, CEO and president of the nonprofit. "We also have another saying at The Cultural Trust: 'fact over feeling — does the data support the feeling?'"

Festival of Trees is proof. Its success can be tallied in hotel bookings, ticket sales and restaurant receipts, but its real value lives in something quieter — a renewed sense of local pride. It shows up in the way families make attending a tradition, in the sparkle of downtown windows, and in the shared satisfaction of knowing "we built this together."

Quad-City Times 40
40 STORIES IN 40 DAYS
CELEBRATING 40 YEARS
OF Festival OF TREES

That's the power of cultural investment: Emotion becomes engagement, and engagement becomes community pride. The applause at the RiverCenter turns into foot traffic on Third Street, sales at small businesses and the kind of shared spirit that can't be legislated — only cultivated.

But it's not about numbers, she said: "The return begins with joy. Because joy brings people together, and together is where prosperity starts. Because culture matters here — and it always will."