

A light in the darkness



Photo courtesy Bill Motchan/Chabad Jewish Center

Rabbi Chaim Landa, the Co-Director of the Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County, stands on a ladder to light the first candle on the first night of Chanukah on Main Street.

Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County's second annual Chanukah on Main Street brings the spirit of the holiday to St. Charles

By Brett Auten

A message of hope and light is being brought to Main Street in St. Charles.

The second annual Chanukah on Main Street will wrap up eight nights of the holiday this week. The Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County will light a public nine-foot Chanukah menorah placed at Berthold Square Park, every night of the eight-day holiday, concluding on Thursday.

While capacity will be limited amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and masks and socially distancing will be required, the lights will shine as bright as ever.

"It's a special time for the community, and a special time of year to come together," Rabbi Chaim Landa, who co-directs the Chabad Jewish Center together with his wife Bassy, said. "We've been working hard to ensure that this annual tradition continues in a safe and joyful way."

The Chabad Jewish Center will also distribute menorahs, candles and Chanukah-at-home kits to those celebrating at home.

The Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County offers Jewish education, outreach and social service programming for families and individuals of all ages, backgrounds

and affiliations. According to the most recent demographic study sponsored by the Jewish Federation of St. Louis an estimated 5,800 members of the region's 61,000 member Jewish community live in St. Charles County. And Chaim Landa is the only rabbi in St. Charles County.

Last year's inaugural Chanukah on Main Street was a big success.

"We had no clue how many people to expect last year," Bassy Landa said. "When we got 300 RSVP's in advance of the event and even more people showed up, we were shocked, in

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Weather

FRIDAY
 Cloudy
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SATURDAY
 Cloudy
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SUNDAY
 Partly Cloudy
 51/36

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a good way. The amount of people that came over to Chaim and myself at the menorah lighting, and in the weeks and months following it, just to say how meaningful it was for them and how much it meant to be there, especially with their young children, it was heartwarming. Some people actually had tears in their eyes. It was very special.”

As is with everything this year, COVID-19 safety is at the top of the list when it comes to the festival. This year has seen illness, death, quarantine, closures and business collapses; all amidst an overwhelming sense of confusion and some despair. In light of this heightened sense of urgency to share the message, spirit and hope of Chanukah, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement worldwide is preparing the largest Chanukah awareness campaign in history.

“This year’s menorah lighting is done with the recognition of the crucial need for a message of hope during what for many is a very difficult time,” Chaim Landa said. “To ensure everyone’s safety, participation will be spread out over the eight-nights of the holiday, with a twenty-minute celebration every night of the eight-night holiday. The menorah lightings will be limited, with participants distanced and wearing masks.”

St. Charles’ menorah is one of more than 15,000 large public menorahs in more than 100 countries around the world, including in front of landmarks such as the White House, the Eiffel Tower, and the Kremlin, helping children and adults of all walks of life discover and enjoy the holiday message.

Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, began this year on the evening of Dec. 10 and concludes the evening of Friday, Dec. 18. It recalls the victory of a militarily weak Jewish people who defeated the Syrian Greeks who had overrun ancient Israel and sought to impose restrictions on the Jewish way of life and prohibit religious freedom. They also desecrated and defiled the Temple and the oils prepared for the lighting of the menorah, which was part of the daily service. Upon recapturing the Temple only one jar of undefiled oil was found, enough to burn only one day, but it lasted miraculously for eight. In commemoration, Jews



Photo courtesy Bill Motchan/Chabad Jewish Center

Bassy Landa, who co-directs the Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County together with her husband Rabbi Chaim Landa, welcomes more than 300 people to the organization’s inaugural “Chanukah on Main Street” on Sunday, December 22, 2019.

celebrate Chanukah for eight days by lighting an eight-branched candelabrum known as a menorah. Today, people of all faiths consider the holiday a symbol and message of the triumph of freedom over oppression, of spirit over matter, of light over darkness.

“The menorah serves as a symbol of light and hope for us today amidst the darkness of the pandemic, as it did for generations before us,” Chaim Landa said. “The flames of the menorah shine out into the night, reminding us that even when confronted with much darkness, a tiny light can dispel it all. Another act of goodness and kindness, another act of light, can make all the difference.”

Chanukah on Main Street is open to all and times for the rest of the week is as follows; Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, at 5:20 p.m. at St. Charles’ Berthold Park. To reserve your attendance, visit www.eventbrite.com/e/chanukah-on-main-street-tickets-130197003743

For more information on the Chabad Jewish Center of St. Charles County, visit www.jewishstcharles.org.

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