

SPOTLIGHT PICK

Now that **Black Friday** has come and gone (and oh yeah, Thanksgiving, too), we can focus on the coming juggernaut known as "Christmas." Whether you're consumed by the spiritual nature of this time of year, or driven to near-insanity by com-



mercial considerations, everybody likes bright lights and most enjoy festivity. It's time again for the city of Worcester's **Festival of Lights**, taking place on Friday (Nov. 30) between 5 and 8 p.m. on the Common side of Worcester City Hall (and there's some stuff going on inside, too). There will be the customary tree-lighting, horse-drawn hay rides, musical performances, children's activities, the unusual and interesting **Worcester Windows Art Show**, food, fun and more. Everything's free and open to the public. And try not to think about why a perfectly good, ancient tree had to die to make your holidays a little merrier — just be sure and say "thank you" to the dear ol' tannenbaum.

FRIDAY

She is one of four women — joining Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer and Helen Gurley Brown — who brought feminism to the fore in the 1960s. And she's still spectacular. She's **Gloria Steinem** (pictured, of *Ms.* magazine fame), and she's coming to Mechanics Hall at noon today to speak to the **Female Leadership Interest Council**. Here's a rare opportunity to meet and listen to the experiences of a leader who is known throughout the world for her dedication to women's rights and equality — a truly dynamic, provocative and effective pioneer of our time. For more information, e-mail dpenta@pentamarketing.com or call 508-616-9900, ext. 110. One Steinem story: When she was asked by a reporter what it felt like to turn 50, she famously responded: "This is what 50 looks like." Don't miss this chance to experience a little history, as *Ms.* Steinem takes her rightful place on the Mechanics Hall stage, site of the appearance of so many famous speakers of our past and present.



We carefully scanned the Web and, to our surprise, the only Toys for Tots drive we could find so far this

Maureen H. Brennan

 REALTY
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so much. so close.

season in Central Mass. is taking place at the **Southbridge Hotel and Conference Center** (14 Mechanic St., Southbridge). This is one of our favorite holiday charities, as it exemplifies all that's best about the season. You can support our fine **U.S. Marines** and children in need all at the same time. So please provide new, still-in-the-package (that means you haven't played with them) toys or monetary donations. All you have to do is bring your toy(s) and/or financial assistance to the hotel between now and Dec. 13. We're hoping many more individuals, businesses, social service agencies, etc. will get on Santa's sleigh and provide dozens more places to drop off gifts for Toys for Tots. Call them. They'll bring you a big box. The Marines will be grateful, the kids will be delighted, and your heart will be warmed many times over.

SATURDAY

It's a weekend of holiday festivals hereabouts, replacing all those autumn fests just concluded. Join the **Fitchburg Historical Society** (50 Grove St.) for their second annual **Festival of Lights House Tour**, where historic homes throughout the city will be featured and dressed to impress. Tickets are available at Fitchburg City Hall, the Historical Society and the Public Library. The tour begins at the Historical Society at 2 p.m., and a concluding reception will occur there from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. For more information (and a list of houses open for visitation), visit fitchburghistory@verizon.net or call 978-345-1157.

The good folks in Rutland have elevated the concept of the "holiday stroll" to a thoroughly enjoyable art (and social) form. You can literally "stroll" through the 1950s, visit Santa, see dozens of beautifully decorated trees (Rutland has perfected this particular manner of display — it's truly breathtaking), listen to live music, enjoy some yummy comestibles and lots of other delightful things. The **Festival of Trees and More** happens in Rutland today from 4-8 p.m. at the Rutland Historical Society's Wood House (232 Main St.). For more information, visit www.rutlandmahistorical.org/calendar.html.

SUNDAY

Yesterday was festivals, today it's performances: Here's a pleasant and refreshingly un-seasonal offering from the folks at Theatre at the Mount (Wachusett Community College, 444 Green St., Gardner) — East meets West in Rodgers and Hammerstein's lush and beautiful musical, **The King and I**. This cherished classic follows an English schoolteacher and her son on an incredible journey to the court of the King of Siam (10 points if you know where Siam is today). The memorable score includes the hits "Getting to Know You," "I Have Dreamed," "Shall We Dance" and "Hello, Young Lovers." We know Yul Brynner is gone, but he was the king — of Siam and Egypt. To paraphrase Brynner's Rameses the Great if he were to speak about this show — so it was written, so it shall be done.

We've all heard Handel's **Messiah**, sure to make many a return trip to choir lofts and concert halls this season. But it's been decades (in Worcester, anyway) since another Handel classic — **Judas Maccabaeus** — has been performed. The Master Singers of Worcester are rectifying that situation at Temple Emanuel (280 May St.) today at 3 p.m. Second only to the *Messiah* in Handel's oeuvre of popular work, this presentation tells of the liberation of Judea from the persecution of the Syrians (hint: think Chanukah). A host of talented singers are set to perform, so don't disappoint them. Be there. They get really concerned if there are empty seats. o

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