



THE BABY FOLD'S
FESTIVAL *of* **TREES**

Auction Item Donor Manual

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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in participating as an Auction Item Donor for The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees! We are excited to work with you and answer any questions you may have. This manual was created to explain the policies and procedures in place for the auction areas of the Festival of Trees. Should you have additional questions, please contact the Festival Coordinator, Jessica Shaw Romersberger, at (309) 451-7205 or jshaw@thebabyfold.org.

Thank you!

What is The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees?

The Baby Fold is a multi-service non-profit agency serving children and families in Illinois. Founded as a faith-based orphanage in 1902, the agency now specializes in caring for young children and youth who have severe emotional and behavioral disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and children who are at-risk for a variety of reasons. The Baby Fold has 12 programs and services that can be wrapped around a child and their family as needed. Our services focus on improving the lives of children and families by building safe, loving, healthy environments through foster care, special needs adoption services, special education, and early intervention programs. The Baby Fold serves over 1,200 clients annually with 260+ employees working in 6 locations across Central Illinois.

The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees began in 1994 as the organization's largest annual fundraiser. It has become a treasured tradition for local families, but more importantly, **the event is essential for raising critical funding to support The Baby Fold's children and families.** The Festival is coordinated and directed by Baby Fold staff members in the Development and Public Relations Department as well as 50 Festival of Trees Committee volunteers who help bring the Festival to life. All proceeds from the Festival of Trees help to provide positive changes in the lives of children and families served by The Baby Fold.

The Festival of Trees is a multi-day event that includes a silent auction, a children's area, special events, cookie and coffee shops, and much more!

The Baby Fold deeply appreciates our talented donors who provide the gorgeous items for The Festival of Trees silent auction. Most of our Auction Item Donors are not professional crafters or decorators, but they have many years of artistic, décor-crafting experience and are major supporters of The Baby Fold's mission.

Two main auction areas are described within this manual. They are defined as follows:

Enchanted Forest: this area is the main auction area that features over 500 items annually and includes 7-foot trees, 4-foot trees, trees shorter than 4 feet (Petite Pines), wreaths, centerpieces, other holiday décor, and one-of-a-kind gift baskets.

Gingerbread Village: this auction area includes all of the gingerbread houses and creations.

The majority of this manual applies to Enchanted Forest items; see the Gingerbread Village section for information specific to that area.

General Policies

- As the premiere holiday event for Central Illinois, all auction items must also be well-crafted and of high quality. The Festival of Trees Committee volunteers and The Baby Fold will be the sole judges of item appropriateness. Only good quality, well-crafted holiday décor will be accepted.
- Auction items that are store-bought and not handcrafted by the registered Auction Item Donor will not be accepted.
- Items must be holiday/winter-related.
- Donors are responsible for purchasing all supplies for their donated items, including trees.
- Once an auction item is delivered to the Festival of Trees venue by the Auction Item Donor, the item is considered a donation and becomes property of The Baby Fold.
- Everything displayed with the item must be delivered to the venue and sold with the auction item. Items in the silent auction are sold “as is where is.”
- The Festival of Trees Committee volunteers and The Baby Fold reserve the right to set item values and minimum bids. To help determine these values, please include a fair market value on your Auction Item Description form.
- All décor must be securely fastened to your item. Pieces are moved during set-up and again after the auction concludes. Use wire or glue to prevent loss of pieces off your item.
- No item (outside of 4-foot and 7-foot trees) should include more than five separate pieces.
- All items (outside of 4-foot and 7-foot trees) should be delivered to the venue ready to be displayed. All hanging items should include loops or hangers on the back.
- Do not decorate using actual gift cards or certificates. To ensure safety of the items, they should be turned into committee members at check-in. They will be held securely by Baby Fold staff until the auction item winner picks up the piece. Copies of gift certificates or empty gift card envelopes can be used for décor on your item.
- The following items are prohibited:
 - Extra light strands added to pre-lit 7-foot and 4-foot trees (they cause electrical problems)
 - Spotlights
 - Lit candles
 - Living materials
 - Children’s toys from fast food restaurants
 - New or used stuffed animals, including Beanie Babies, as primary décor for an item
 - Items/decorations/ornaments with a year printed on them are prohibited *unless they are collectible or highly valued*. Proper documentation must accompany the collectible item(s).
 - Logo/branded items (with the exception of gift baskets and general branding for sports teams). See the “No Advertising Policy” later in this manual.
 - Items created around political or social issues.
- If you decorate with battery-operated items, note that volunteers and committee members are not responsible for replacing batteries during the event, and your item might not be turned on each day.

Auction Item Categories

Please note that the Festival only accepts holiday-themed auction items in the following categories:

- Gingerbread houses/creations
- 7-foot trees
- 4-foot trees
- Trees shorter than 4 feet (Petite Pines)
- Wreaths and hanging décor
- Centerpieces and tabletop décor
- Other holiday décor—stockings, decorated benches or sleighs, quilts, etc.
- Themed gift baskets (these items do not necessarily need to be holiday-themed, but there must be an obvious, cohesive theme for each basket)

These categories were updated in 2024. Please note that “Fall Décor” is no longer its own category. If you create a fall piece, simply use the most applicable category for it when you complete your Auction Item Donor Registration and Auction Item Description forms. The Festival of Trees is a fundraiser, however, and fall items have not sold well the last few years. Please take that into consideration when planning/designing your item.

Additional Policies for Tree Designers

- Trees must be decorated to be viewed from all sides.
- All trees must have a matching tree skirt provided by the donor.
- Extra strands of lights added to a pre-lit tree, spotlights, lit candles, and living materials are prohibited. Extra electrical items (such as lights) plugged into a tree can damage the light strands on the tree and/or blow breakers at the venue.
- Trees will be moved multiple times, so all ornaments must be glued or wired securely to the tree. Ornaments with an inserted or slip-in hanging attachment must be glued where the two pieces meet so the hanger cannot slip out (a hot glue gun works well for this).
- Traditionally, all 7-foot trees are decorated onsite at the Festival of Trees on Designer Day. 4-foot trees can also be decorated onsite, but the majority are brought in fully decorated.
- Auction Item Donors are responsible for supplying their own tree to decorate. 7-foot and 4-foot trees are available for purchase from The Baby Fold. All trees purchased elsewhere by designers **MUST** follow the Festival of Trees sizing guidelines listed below.
- 7-foot and 4-foot trees purchased through The Baby Fold are traditional, green trees with white lights.
- Flocked trees are allowed for all tree sizes. The trees purchased through The Baby Fold will not be flocked, but you are welcome to purchase one elsewhere as long as it meets the guidelines for height (see below). We also ask that you purchase a pre-flocked tree rather than flocking it yourself. DIY flocking techniques do not last as long as those done by the manufacturer.
- 7-foot trees purchased through The Baby Fold will be available to decorate onsite during Designer Day. 4-foot trees purchased through The Baby Fold can be picked up in advance if designers want to decorate their tree prior to the event. 4-foot trees purchased from The Baby

Fold will also be available onsite if designers choose to decorate there instead. Volunteers will assemble trees purchased through The Baby Fold for designers decorating onsite during Designer Day.

- Tree Sizes
 - 7-foot Trees:
 - The tree purchased for all 7-foot trees must be between 7 and 7.5 feet tall. With topper, the tree should not exceed 8 feet tall because it will be more likely to be damaged when transported.
 - Skinny trees are not allowed in this category.
 - 4-foot Trees:
 - The tree purchased for all 4-foot trees must be between 4 and 4.5 feet tall.
 - All 4-foot trees are displayed on cubes that are 3 feet wide. Please consider the size of the area beneath the tree when planning your tree skirt and accompanying pieces. All pieces of the tree must fit on a single cube.
 - Skinny trees ARE allowed in this category as long as the tree itself measures at least 4 feet tall.
 - Petite Pines (Trees Shorter than 4 Feet):
 - All trees less than 4 feet tall fall into this category.
 - Skinny trees are allowed.
- The Baby Fold reserves the right to refuse or re-categorize any tree that is not the correct size for its category. **Trees between 4.5 feet and 7 feet are not allowed.**

Suggested Decoration Amounts for Trees

Designers often underestimate the amount of décor needed to design a high quality tree. The chart below provides suggested amounts for your planning purposes.

TREE HEIGHT	NUMBER OF LIGHTS	NUMBER OF DECORATIONS	FEET OF GARLAND
2 feet	100–175	30–50	15 feet
3 feet	150–175	50–60	25 feet
4 feet	250–300	60–75	50 feet
7 feet	450–600	175–225	100 feet

Additional Policies for Gift Basket Designers

- Items donated in the Gift Baskets category should be just that—a gift basket. Collections or assorted items not in a single container (i.e., basket, decorative box, etc.) are not allowed.
- Each gift basket should have a specific theme and a cohesive collection of items that complement the theme. Below are a few theme ideas and basket content suggestions:
 - Spa Experience: gift certificate to a local day spa, soft slippers, scented candles
 - Gardening Basket: small gardening tools, gloves, flower pots, seed packets
 - Date Night: movie passes, gift card to a local restaurant, bottle of wine, wine glasses

- Family Activity Basket: board games for all ages, pre-packaged nonperishable snacks and popcorn, craft supplies
- Christmas Baking Kit: cookie sheets, holiday-themed baking utensils, cookie cutters, recipe book
- All items included in the gift basket must be brand new and unopened.
- All items included in the gift basket must be placed inside of the basket/decorative box; items may not be attached to the sides of the basket/decorative box.
- Homemade and perishable food items, live plants/materials, and table settings submitted as a gift basket are prohibited.
- Gift baskets must be shrink-wrapped AFTER a photo of the basket has been submitted to the committee.

Getting Started with Your Item Design

- The Festival of Trees is a fundraiser for The Baby Fold, so please consider the overall appeal of your item(s) when planning and buying supplies and décor. All auction items should be decorated in a style that would enhance any home or business.
- Use your imagination to add value to your items; however, we strongly suggest that you use décor and ornaments related to your item's theme for consistency and to increase the overall value of your item. When decorating a tree, the designers at Jeffrey Alans recommend 1 theme, 2 colors, and 3 textures/shapes.
- If you are a little overwhelmed as a first-time donor, focus on the colors you want to use instead of a theme.
- Unique items sell! We have found that our bidders tend to like items that are not always created in the typical "traditional" Christmas fashion; we encourage you to think outside of "red and green."
 - However, we strongly suggest that you don't use a theme so specific that only a few bidders would be interested in your item, such as a "Pixar Tree for Nurses."
 - The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees only accepts holiday-themed auction items. Auction items created around political or social issues are prohibited.
- Experienced designers often shop after-Christmas sales for discounts on items to use the following year. Plan ahead and watch sales to be cost efficient!

Submitting Auction Item Forms

- We ask all Auction Item Donors to fill out two separate forms. These forms are necessary as we prepare and plan for a silent auction with 800 to 900 items. Direct links to each form will be available on the [Festival of Trees website](#) in early spring.
 - Auction Item Donor Registration: This form tells us who you are and the number and type of items you're planning to donate.
 - NOTE: If you plan to decorate a 7-foot tree, please first fill out the 7-Foot Tree Designer Application Form, and do so prior to purchasing your tree. Designers

new to the Festival of Trees are encouraged to design a 4-foot tree prior to designing a 7-foot tree. If you have any questions about designing a tree, please contact Jessica Shaw Romersberger at (309) 451-7205 or jshaw@thebabyfold.org or Emily Nafziger at (309) 451-7235 or enafziger@thebabyfold.org.

- Auction Item Description: This form should be filled out for each individual auction item. It includes information necessary for our online silent auction system, including a description and dimensions. Please upload photos of your item when you submit this form. Up to three photos can be included in the auction system.
- All forms are due October 31. Items without completed forms after October 31 will be held for the next year's Festival of Trees.

Designer Day (Dropping Off Your Item)

- Designer Day is the day during Festival of Trees set-up when Auction Item Donors drop off their finished items and/or decorate their trees onsite. This typically takes place the Tuesday prior to the Festival of Trees opening day. See "Important Dates" at the end of this manual for more specific information about the date and time for this year's Designer Day.
- When you arrive at the venue, please check in with our committee members. You'll receive a packet with information to review concerning your item and your complimentary ribbons/tickets.
- Your packet will also include a numbered inventory tag. Securely attach it to your item so that it is visible.
- Please remember that your item(s) may be moved several times by our committee members to better suit the final auction area layout. Our committee members are highly skilled in aesthetics and layout structure. Make sure all décor is securely attached to your item.
- Designers dropping off or decorating 4-foot and 7-foot trees will notice a plastic bag placed beneath their tree. Please leave the bag under the tree skirt. It will be used to package your tree for pick-up or delivery.
- If you are decorating a tree during Designer Day, you must bring your own tools and supplies, including stepladders, folding tables, glue guns, wire cutters, scissors, tape, and other tools. *We suggest that you do as much prep work as possible before you arrive to decorate your item onsite. For example, glue all ornament tops to the ornaments, bundle ornaments if decorating with ornament groupings, etc.*

Gingerbread Creations

Gingerbread Village is one of the most loved areas of the Festival of Trees and features over 100 houses and other adorable structures each year. These intricate and charming auction items are also created by community members of all ages. The confectionary creations bring joy (and an inviting scent) to the Festival of Trees!

The Gingerbread Village committee hosts a workshop in September (invitation only) to teach their donors tips and tricks, including the recipe to make gingerbread that is the perfect consistency for building, as well as a recipe for icing that best helps adhere the walls and decorations together.

The Gingerbread Village committee recommends the following guidelines:

- We encourage the use of only edible materials, but allow the use of small, nonedible props—sometimes this helps the gingerbread creation sell.
- The base on which your gingerbread creation sits must be wooden or another type of sturdy base, such as a cake or seasonal plate (no cardboard), and should not exceed 24" by 24". Bigger is not always better; smaller houses and creations are more likely to have more bids because bidders don't always have room for the larger creations.
- Halloween-themed gingerbread creations are prohibited, but fall-themed creations are acceptable.
- Store-bought gingerbread house kits are allowed, but please do not use the plastic tray that comes with the kit. Be sure to use more edible items than just those provided in the kit.
- Please do not use hot glue to hold the walls and other parts of the structure together and please do not spray your creation with any varnishes or clear coat.

For additional information on Gingerbread Village, including their submission forms, guidelines, and deadlines, please contact Jessica Shaw Romersberger at (309) 451-7205 or jshaw@thebabyfold.org.

Ribbons and Complimentary Tickets

You will receive a blue "Designer" ribbon when you check in at auction item drop-off. Bring this ribbon with you for free admission throughout the Festival of Trees. The Baby Fold will provide one ribbon for each designer who helped decorate your item, with a maximum of 4 ribbons per item for all item categories besides 7-foot trees. Designers decorating 7-foot trees can receive up to 8 designer ribbons.

To thank you for supporting The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees, all designers will also receive complimentary tickets. The number of tickets varies depending on the type of item donated, with a maximum of 6 complimentary tickets per auction item donor or group.

Auction item donors who decorate a 7-foot tree will receive 6 general admission tickets, 3 tickets for a 4-foot tree, and 2 tickets for each tree under 4 feet, wreath, swag, centerpiece, fall décor item, gift basket, other holiday décor item, and gingerbread creation.

Use your "Designer" ribbon for free admission to the event, and then share your complimentary tickets with friends and family so that they can see your designs on display!

Additionally, judges will award first, second, and third place ribbons in the various auction item categories. For gingerbread creations, awards are given in several categories including, but not limited to, Best Use of Candy, People's Choice, and Chairman's Choice.

Festival of Trees Sponsorship

When visiting the Festival of Trees, you may notice a sponsorship sign near your item. This is an honor!

The Festival of Trees offers [sponsorship opportunities](#) to local businesses and individuals in order to provide advertising opportunities to them and additional funding for The Baby Fold's life-critical programs.

When your item has a sponsorship sign nearby, it means that a sponsor loved your item so much that they selected it for their sponsorship sign. Congratulations!

Your item will still be sold through the online silent auction. A sponsorship sign does not impact the sale of the item.

No Advertising Policy

The Festival of Trees is an important fundraiser for The Baby Fold, and the event raises essential funding for local kids. Please consider the overall appeal of your item(s) when planning and buying supplies and décor. All auction items should be decorated in a style that would enhance any home or business. Items customized to a business or niche audience tend to not sell well.

No company logos are to be incorporated into the decorations or overall design of your item(s). If your primary goal is to use The Baby Fold's Festival of Trees as a way to promote your business, organization, club, etc., consider becoming a sponsor instead of donating an auction item OR in addition to donating an item. Sponsors pay to have their business name displayed prominently by the auction items. For more information, please contact Jessica Shaw Romersberger at (309) 451-7205 or jshaw@thebabyfold.org.

Photos of Items—Tips and Tricks

With the integration of our mobile bidding platform, we will need one to three photos of each auction item for our auction site. You may upload a photo of your item when you are filling out the Auction Item Description form or email photos to Emily Nafziger at enafziger@thebabyfold.org.

Here are some tips to make sure you get the best photo of your item(s):

- Lighting: make sure you have ample lighting to highlight the details of your item.
- Background: a plain, neutral background and surface on which you photograph your item is key.
- Angle: take one photo that shows the entire piece and then take others to zoom in and highlight specific parts of the piece

Frequently Asked Questions

My item does not have any bids and it is the last day of the auction! What happens if my item does not sell?

Auction psychology has shown us that bidders tend to wait until the last possible second to place their bids, in hopes of getting the item for the best deal possible. Each year, every item at the Festival of Trees sells, and if items do not sell, they become property of The Baby Fold.

Who sets the starting bids? Why is my item priced so low?

Starting bids are set by staff of The Baby Fold and they follow best practices in silent auctions. Opening bids are typically around 30–40% of the reported value of the item. (This is why it is important to be accurate when you submit the item's value on the Auction Item Description Form.) A low starting bid does not indicate that an item is less desirable. Sometimes lower opening bids are used to entice bidders or start bidding wars that will ultimately increase the final item price.

Do I REALLY have to securely wire the ornaments onto my tree? Or glue items down on my centerpiece?

Yes. All items—including trees—are moved several times both during set-up and tear-down. Make sure everything is secure so that no elements are lost as your item transitions to its final spot. Use hot glue to secure ornament tops to your ornaments so that no ornaments pop off in transit.

Can I use a skinny tree?

Skinny trees are not allowed for 7-foot trees as these are our large, showcase pieces. However, skinny trees are allowed in the 4-foot tree and Trees Less than 4-foot tree categories.

Can I purchase an artificial tree that is flocked?

Yes. Flocked trees are a design trend right now. The trees purchased through The Baby Fold will not be flocked, but you are welcome to purchase one elsewhere as long as meets the guidelines for height. We also ask that you purchase a pre-flocked tree rather than flocking it yourself. DIY flocking techniques do not last as long as those done by the manufacturer.

I want to add more lights to my tree. It's too dark. Is that OK?

No. Adding extra strands of lights to a tree increases the chance of blowing fuses within the light strands and throwing breakers at the event space. Extra lights are not allowed.

Can I decorate an item with gift cards?

No, but you can use empty gift card envelopes or fake certificates. All gift cards and gift certificates that accompany an item should be turned in during item drop-off so that they can be securely stored until the auction item winner picks up the item.

I'd like to decorate my centerpiece with live pine boughs and orange slices. Is that OK?

No. Live décor is prohibited because it is likely to dry out during the event. This becomes a fire hazard. The air at the venue is incredibly dry.

Why do I have to provide my own artificial tree to decorate? Didn't The Baby Fold provide those in the past?

The Festival of Trees is a very important fundraiser for The Baby Fold. In order to be better stewards of the organization's resources, trees are no longer provided for free to designers. If you are unable to purchase a tree to design, we ask you to consider not designing. We do not want designers to go without, just as we do not want our children and families to do so.

Do I have to purchase my artificial tree through The Baby Fold?

As long as your tree is within the guidelines in this manual, it does not have to be purchased through The Baby Fold. We do not make a profit on the purchase of the artificial trees. Many designers purchase trees at a discount after Christmas.

Important Dates and Information

October 2024

- Festival of Trees tickets go on sale **Tuesday, October 1**, and can only be purchased online until the Festival opens to the public on Thursday, November 21; tickets can then be purchased both online and at the event.
- The deadline to submit your Auction Item Donor Registration Form and Auction Item Description Form(s) is **Thursday, October 31**. The links to both forms will be inaccessible after October 31. Any donated items without registrations and completed descriptions after October 31 will be held for next year's Festival.

November 2024

NOTE: The following dates are still tentative as planning has just begun for the 2024 Festival of Trees.

- Item drop off and Decorating Day is **Tuesday, November 19 from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Interstate Center**
 - 7-foot trees and 4-foot trees may be decorated on-site during this time; wreaths, swags, centerpieces, all "other décor" category items, gift baskets, Petite Pines, and decorated 4-foot trees must be dropped off on this day during this timeframe ONLY.
- Festival of Trees 2023 – Hours of Operation:
 - **Thursday, November 21** **4 to 8 p.m.**
 - **Friday, November 22** **9 a.m. to 8 p.m.**
 - **Saturday, November 23** **9 a.m. to 8 p.m.**
 - The silent auction ends at 8 p.m. on Saturday, November 23.