

Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Executive Director Matt Edwards expects this one to be one for the record books. Plans are well under way for an event that has become a community favorite over the years: The annual Holiday Open House Program. This year's open house is set for Dec. 7 from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. During the event, community members are welcome to come into the museum free of charge, enjoy its annual holiday decor and take in live music. For a second year, there may even be an appearance by Saint Nick. Edwards said the event is one of his favorites. "We consider this to be our Christmas gift to the community," he said. "It's one of the few times each year that we waive admission and scheduled programming, open the doors and make it completely free to the community."

During the event there will be something for everyone. "We have a whole palette of music throughout the day starting at 11 a.m., and continuing throughout the open house," he said. This year's lineup includes Backstep, featuring award-winning local musician Chester McMilliann, and Grammy-nominated Celtic musician Alicia Merritt, who is returning for a second year. "We're going to have music every hour on the hour," Edwards said. "And we will be offering light refreshments for our guests, and the museum will be fully decorated for the holidays." During last year's open house, Edwards said hundreds turned out. "We easily expect between 300 and 500 people, but think it could go as high as 1,000 this year," he said.

For a second year, the museum is working with the Mount Airy Professionals of Surry (MAPS) to bring what is sure to be a crowd favorite, Cookies with Santa. The event will be held in the Children's Gallery on the third floor, and Edwards said that last year dozens of children turned out to sit on Santa's lap. "Last year we did it for the first time and the turnout was great," he said. "The MAPS group was very happy with the turnout, and said it was much larger than they'd anticipated. This year we're hoping it gets even bigger." Will Jackson, incoming president of the professional group, said the event is a chance to get out and fellowship with the community. "We love doing it," he said. "It's a great family event and we really enjoy seeing the kids' faces light up when they see Santa."

Edwards urges anyone who hasn't been to the museum to come out and enjoy one of the unofficial starts to the holiday season in the community. "If you've been putting off coming out and seeing what we have going on, this is the perfect time to do so," he said. "It's a great way to reconnect with the museum and maybe even do a little Christmas shopping in our gift shop. We have a great selection of products year-round, but we ensure we have a full inventory in advance of the holiday season."