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McCall Chamber Announces Theme of 2023 Winter Carnival, Significant Changes to 2024 Event

McCALL, ID (Tuesday, October 11, 2022) – As autumn leaves begin to change color in McCall, the close-knit mountain town is already preparing for its signature winter event. **The 2023 Winter Carnival will span a 10-day period from January 27 to February 5, 2023.**

This year's carnival theme will be "Fairy Tales, Folk Tales and Tall Tales" and will see the return of the Mardi Gras parade, which was last held in 2020. Other signature events will include the children's torchlight parade, community-wide snow sculpture contest, two fireworks shows and a vendor court with live music on the main stage downtown during the weekends.

The modern McCall Winter Carnival was inspired by the Payette Lake Winter Games, first held in 1924 when a train from Boise brought 248 visitors to McCall. The official McCall Winter Carnival started in 1964 to give the sleepy lake community a winter boost and to promote the new (at the time) Brundage Mountain ski area, which opened in 1961.



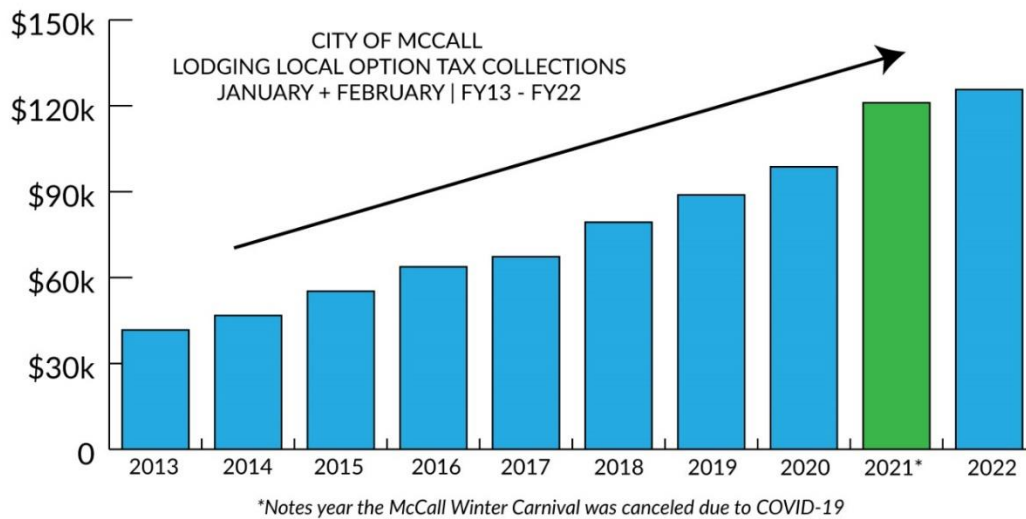
Over the years, the Carnival has grown into an iconic Idaho event bringing more than 60,000 visitors to the 3,500-person town.

The rapid growth in winter visitation, combined with a housing and labor shortage in McCall, has prompted the Chamber of Commerce to institute some changes in the event's format for Winter 2024.

"We know that people book their lodging for Winter Carnival well in advance," says Chamber spokesperson, McKenzie Kraemer. "So while we feel the format changes are needed, we wanted to give both visitors and local businesses ample time to adjust their plans."

The McCall Chamber uses city lodging tax collections to measure tourist visitation levels. Over the past 10 years, (FY13 – FY22), lodging tax collections in McCall have more than tripled during the months of January and February, increasing by 201.5%.

January/February lodging tax collections increased 22.66% from FY20 to FY21, **in spite of Winter Carnival being cancelled that year due to COVID-19**. Tax collections increased by a more modest 3.7% from FY21-FY22 when the Winter Carnival was brought back.



These dramatic trends, along with feedback and surveys from McCall’s business community, prompted the Chamber to make changes.

“Having a year with no Carnival gave us tremendous insights into the role Carnival plays in our winter economy,” says Kraemer. “It became clear that while Carnival is, for some, a treasured tradition, our local winter economy no longer relies on it, and it may actually be a detriment to our local businesses to have it occupy two weekends during the peak of snow season.”

A Chamber survey of McCall area businesses conducted at the end of the 2021 Winter season showed:

- 82.5% reported that canceling Winter Carnival had no negative impact on their business
- 80% reported winter business was UP during the winter when there was no Winter Carnival (2021)
- 70% of businesses supported either shortening Carnival to one weekend or moving it later in the winter, only 30% voted for no change

In recent years, several cornerstone downtown business owners have chosen to close their doors rather than face the prospect of providing a less-than-satisfying experience to Winter Carnival crowds.

“For the last couple of years, as a business, we decided to close down during Winter Carnival,” says Cosette Martineau, longtime co-owner of My Father’s Place restaurant. “We did not have the staffing to adequately service the influx of people.”

“Because the crowds have swelled to such unmanageable numbers, many business owners, including myself have expressed concern over whether Winter Carnival has outlived its usefulness,” says Cori

Rice, who owns the Christmas Shop and Silver Linings retail stores in downtown McCall. “Additionally, with staffing shortages that all businesses are experiencing, recruiting staff to commit to a ten day stretch of chaos has been problematic, if not impossible.”

Based on those concerns and community feedback, the McCall Chamber has decided to shorten the event to a single weekend and move it to late February to strike a balance between tradition and the evolving needs of the business community.

The 2024 Winter Carnival will span a 3-day period from February 23 to 25, 2024. The most beloved Chamber-sponsored events - the Children’s Torchlight Parade, Mardi Gras Parade, snow sculpture contest, live music on the main stage and an evening fireworks show - will all be contained in that three-day period.

“As a hotelier and downtown business owner, I think this is a good solution,” says David Carey, who co-owns Hotel McCall, Rupert’s Restaurant and Foresters Club. “I am confident that skiers and snowmobilers will fill our beds, tables and bar seats during peak season. As a community member, I’m happy to see that the events and traditions people love most will continue, just later in the winter.”

Organizers of other community events will have the option of scheduling them during Carnival or establishing them during other time periods when lodging and other services are more available.

Jerry Wortley is one of the organizers of the Idaho Sled Dog Challenge. That event will continue to be held the last week in January/first week in February. Wortley says not competing with Winter Carnival will give his event room to grow. “We host a week-long event, and now, if people come up to the race there might be hotels available that were all filled up during Winter Carnival.”

“Winter Carnival began as a tool to bring visitors to our area when they would not otherwise be here,” adds Rice. “Outdoor recreationalists are already here in January and February, and many snowmobilers, skiers and winter sports enthusiasts I’ve talked with over the years have expressed discontent with Winter Carnival being held during peak snow conditions. All businesses will benefit from smaller influxes of visitors throughout Winter rather than an overwhelming volume that stresses the locals to the point of sheer exhaustion.”

“We are extremely pleased the Chamber is listening to the businesses of McCall concerning Winter Carnival,” says Martineau. “We support the changes that they are making. We are looking forward to the new traditions to be made.”

McCall Winter Carnival Dates:

2023: January 27 to February 5

2024: February 23 to 25

2025: February 21 to 23

More info: www.visitmccall.org/carnival2024

Still Photos and B-roll of the McCall Winter Carnival are [available for download here](#)

Background: The McCall Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau is committed to maintaining a desirable quality of life featuring year-round recreational opportunities, as well as a thriving economic climate. The MACCVB works with local businesses, citizen groups, city governments and neighboring communities to see that growth is directed in a positive and beneficial manner. The chamber is the concerted voice of local businesses to promote and protect their interests and the community as a whole.



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