

# **CASA of Cecil County partners with Netflix star “Mr. Christmas” to bring holiday cheer**

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**by: Matt Hooke (mhooke@chespub.com)**

NORTH EAST — CASA of Cecil County, with the help of Netflix star Benjamin Bradley, better known as “Mr. Christmas,” transformed the tiki bar at Woody’s Crab House in North East into an ode to Christmas joy for the fifth annual Festival of Trees.

“Christmas is really about kids, and the work they do is really unparalleled,” said Bradley. “How could I not help?”

Bradley judged more than 50 trees, decorated by a variety of community organizations. Each tree competed in one of three categories: regional, traditional and whimsical. Community Outreach Coordinator Michael Welker approached Bradley after watching his Netflix show, “Holiday Home Makeover with Mr. Christmas.”

Bradley looks for several elements in a tree, such as how full the tree is with decorations, a theme and light spacing.

“It’s Christmas, it’s all about the feeling you get from it,” Bradley said.

Bradley contributed a tree of his own, inspired by the Charles Dickens’ classic story “A Christmas Carol.” Bradley also decorated the tiki bar to give it a festive look. Bradley’s show features him helping people have a special holiday, from helping someone blend Hanukkah and Christmas traditions to creating a firehouse display honoring someone’s late father.

Bradley became a T.V. star after a friend of his who ran a production company was impressed by one of his Christmas parties. That friend shot a sizzle reel showcasing Bradley’s work, leading Netflix to pick up the concept as a television show.

"I was too naive to be nervous," Bradley said. "I just did what I do."

For the event, the Cecil County Public Library staff created homemade Christmas decorations, such as owls and pinecones, out of book pages.

"It's a really nice way to give back to the community," CCPL staff member Tracy Alexander said.

The winner for the traditional tree was sponsored by the Elkton Memorial VFW Post 8475, and decorated by the Stewart Company. For the whimsical category the winning tree sponsored by H&B Plumbing and decorated by Girl Scout Troop 1319. The Elkton Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 124 won for the regional category.

Other organizations that decorated or sponsored a tree at the event included the Cecil County Department of Social Services kinship navigation program, which helps families who are raising another relative's child, Cecil Solidarity, the Perryville Outreach Program, the Cecil County Department of Emergency Services and others.

"This is the most trees we've ever had," Welker said.

Money raised from the event will help CASA fund a transitional housing program for youths who are about to age out of foster care so they can ease into adulthood and gain the skills necessary to become successful. CASA currently has 78 advocates working with 80 children to help represent their interests in court. There are currently 140 foster children in Cecil County.

The Festival of Trees is a silent auction lasting from Nov. 13 to Dec. 4. Every tree at the festival is available to bid on. Readers interested in bidding on a tree, or for more information about the event can go to CASA's website at <https://www.cecilcasa.org/festival-of-trees-2021>.

"It brings people together especially now that we're recovering from COVID," attendee Katie Bird said.



## Cecil County Public Library's "Winter Wonderland" Tree

