

## Local company trades own holiday party for tree-lighting ceremony

**Kate Webb**

The Province

*Monday, December 03, 2007*

Vancouver will get a taste of a megacity cosmopolitan Christmas tonight, with its first annual Rockefeller-style tree-lighting celebration at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Local real-estate company, Amacon, decided to throw the public bash in lieu of its usual lavish Christmas party.

The company recently raised \$80,000 for local charities and \$10,000 of that is going to The Province Empty Stocking Fund, which benefits 29 Christmas bureaus, community service centres and the Salvation Army throughout B.C.

"We wanted to create an event that would bring the city together as a whole and give Vancouver an opportunity to do something Christmasy," said Amanda Patterson, event co-ordinator.

"Also, Amacon is a very family-focused company, so we wanted to work with some charities that had the same values."

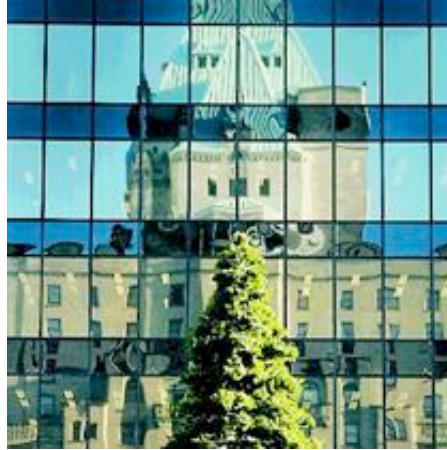
The organizers' goal is to make this year's celebration, and each one after it, incrementally more like the world-famous Christmas-tree lighting that kicks off the holidays at Rockefeller Center in New York City each year.

The \$23,000 artificial tree Amacon purchased for the event, which has been set up on the Vancouver Art Gallery lawn on the Georgia Street side, stands more than 10 metres tall. Next year, the company plans to extend the height to more than 15 metres.

Patterson said she's expecting 600 people to show up for tonight's countdown to the 5 p.m. lighting, scheduled to begin 10 seconds before the hour.

"We really want to promote this as a family event," she said.

Families who show up will be treated to free cookies and hot cocoa and hear traditional Christmas carols sung by 25 children from the Outreach Arts Program at Strathcona School. There will also be a performance by 15 child drummers.



CREDIT: Jon Murray, The Province

Rockefeller Center comes to Vancouver via a Christmas-tree lighting ceremony tonight at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The tree was donated by Amacon, a real-estate company, in hopes it will become an annual event.

Vancouver Canucks Kevin Bieksa will also make an appearance with the team's mascot, Fin, who will be dressed in full Santa attire.

Fin will give hugs to the kids, while Bieksa poses for pictures.

"There will be tents if it's raining and treats for the kids, so we've made it easy for parents to bring the whole family down," said Patterson.

To donate to the Empty Stocking Fund, visit [www.theprovince.com/esf](http://www.theprovince.com/esf).

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