

## Edelweiss Village celebrates German Richtfest

BY DANIELLE KUEHNEL  
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In light of the construction of the giant glockenspiel and new business and residential area, Mount Angel's Edelweiss Village will celebrate with a traditional German Richtfest tomorrow afternoon.

"It's a celebration for those who worked on the project," said Oktoberfest representative Jerry Lauzon.

The glockenspiel — a clock tower complete with music and wooden figures — is expected to be completed in time for this year's Oktoberfest, Sept. 14-17, and at 49 feet tall, it will be the largest in the United States.

The rest of Edelweiss Village — affordable housing for senior citizens and areas for local businesses — should be finished by the first of the year, Lauzon said.

"Topping-Out Festivals seldom take place on this side of the Atlantic Ocean," said Lauzon. "It will be a lot of fun."

While the celebration which follows the 15-minute ceremony is private, all are encouraged to come and watch the raising of the tree.

"This is a great way to take a cultural event and wrap it into our lives," Lauzon said. "It's what memories are made out of."

A Richtfest, or Topping-Out Festival, occurs in Germany after a building's framing has been completed, before the roof is put on. The ceremony is one of Europe's oldest customs, and began as a way of honoring the forest — the place from which fruit, nuts, firewood and wood for housing come.

According to Scandinavian mythology, humans originated from trees, and our souls return to the trees after death. Therefore, each tree has a spirit of its own.



Submitted photo

Flowers adorn the roof line of a finished building during Richtfest.

In accordance with this belief, people began to honor trees, asking for the forest's permission to use a tree, before cutting it down for shelter. As a gesture of thanks to the forest, and in honor of the tree's spirit, the topmost leafy branch would be placed on top of the building, showing that the spirit would not remain homeless.

Today, while the Richtfest ceremony does not necessarily honor the used tree's spirit, the festival has become an integral part of housewarming festivities.

Likewise, Mount Angel's new Edelweiss Village will celebrate its near-completion by having a crane lift a fir tree decorated with flags, ribbons and wreaths to the highest point on the roof line. The tree will remain in place until the roof is installed.

The Richtfest will take place at 3:30 p.m. tomorrow on the corner of Charles and Garfield streets, in Mount Angel.