

For years, a Christmas tree would be lit atop Racine's Horlick Malted Milk Co. Now, it's back

[Rachel Kubik](#)



Racine Mayor Cory Mason, lower left corner, applauds as the Christmas tree atop The William building at the Belle City Square apartment campus as it's newly lit.

Rachel Kubik

RACINE — As construction at the former Horlick Malted Milk Co.'s site continues, the third project at the property has officially broken ground. And a holiday tradition dating back possibly seven decades has been restored.



Milwaukee-based real estate company J. Jeffers & Co., along with Milwaukee-based construction company CG Schmidt hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Avenue buildings at the Belle City Square apartment campus, 2100 Northwestern Ave.

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Milwaukee-based real estate company [**J. Jeffers & Co.**](#), along with Milwaukee-based construction company [**CG Schmidt**](#) hosted the groundbreaking and a holiday tree lighting Thursday afternoon at the [**Belle City Square**](#) apartment campus located within the former Horlick complex at 2100 Northwestern Ave.

The groundbreaking was for the new Avenue buildings, the third project. The first project was The Arabella, named after William Horlick's wife, and is located on the south end of the former manufacturing site and features 60 apartment homes. The Arabella is now at 100% occupancy; residents began moving in during the summer.

The second project, an 86-unit apartment building named The William, after William Horlick, is located next to and north of The Arabella. The William is on track to be complete in April and already has a waiting list for new tenants, said Josh Jeffers, president and CEO of J. Jeffers & Co.

"That is actually really unusual in apartment leasing to have a waitlist this far out, so that's a very good thing," Jeffers said.



A sign denoting a rendering of how part of the Belle City Square apartment campus will look when it's complete sits in the parking lot Thursday during the ground breaking ceremony of The Avenue buildings.

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Construction on the 167-total-unit Avenue buildings began Nov. 30 and is scheduled for completion in spring 2023. They are to be two buildings, The Avenue North and The Avenue West, named after Northwestern Avenue where Belle City Square is perched.

By spring 2023, the development will have more than 300 complete apartment units, “which is a lot by any measure, and as we’ve come to learn, is definitely a lot for the City of Racine, so we’re very, very excited about that,” Jeffers said.

Racine Mayor Cory Mason said the development helps address the quality housing shortage present in Racine and that J. Jeffers is filling a need that is “real in the marketplace.”

“I don’t think you could find a collection of more impressive historic buildings anywhere in the City of Racine other than what J. Jeffers has accumulated here on the Belle City site,” Mason said.

Lighting the tree

Mason and Jeffers, with the help of their own children, restarted the campus’ historic tradition of lighting the rooftop tree.

A small audience gathered on The Arabella’s patio, counted down from 10 and the children from afar lit the tree, placed on top of The William. Horlick Madrigal singers performed Christmas carols.



Horlick Madrigal singers perform Christmas carols at the tree lighting Thursday at the Belle City Square apartment campus.

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Jeffers explained the reasoning behind restarting the tradition, which began with a phone call from Mason about two months ago. Mason asked Jeffers in the call what he knew about the annual Horlick tree lighting.

“I pride myself on knowing all things Horlick, and I said, ‘I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about,’” Jeffers said.

The Horlick Malted Milk Co. operated in Racine from 1873 to 1975. Mason and Jeffers looked through [old newspaper articles](#) and found out the factory held an annual tree lighting ceremony around Christmastime. The two were not sure when the tradition stopped exactly, but said it’s been maybe 60-70 years since a tree was last lit there.

Workers, vendors and others would come to the lighting back in the day. It was a “big deal,” Mason said.

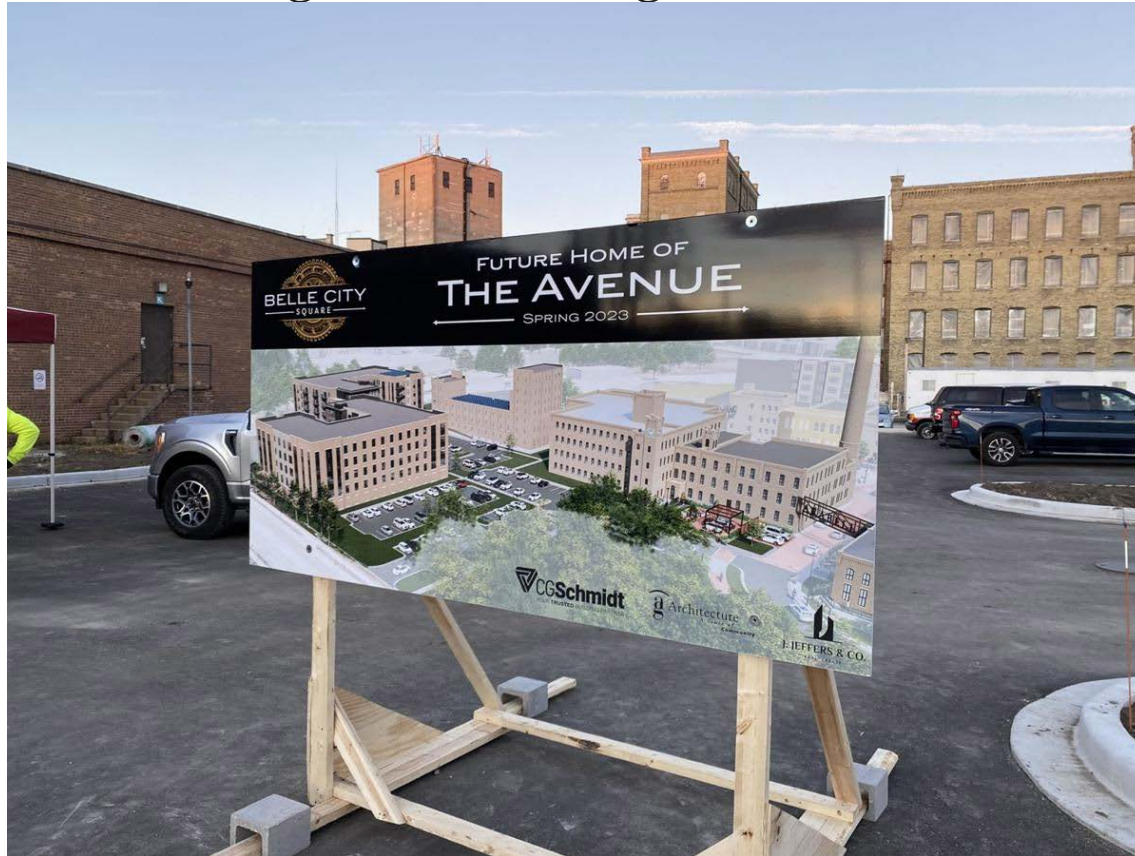
“We’re finally able to now kind of revive the tradition,” Jeffers said. “What’s just so unbelievably rewarding is the opportunities that we have sometimes to not only rehabilitate a building, but also to help rehabilitate a community, bring back great traditions that have been gone for a very long time ... Our hope, if all of this goes well, is we would love for this to become a big tradition again here at what we are now calling the Belle City Square.”

Mason said he thinks of the word “home” when he thinks of the new development, representing a new place that’s home to new people and connecting with family in that home during the holidays.

“So much of home and holidays is about nostalgia, and harkening back to what it was like when we were kids and did those holiday events, and what were those things that made them special,” Mason said. “We hope that this is the first of many annual traditions ... and doing some great events like this, to call on the holidays, to call on tradition, to call on family and to bring us all home.”

In photos and video: Groundbreaking and tree lighting at Belle City Square apartment campus

The Avenue ground breaking



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Watch now: [Ground breaking ceremony at Avenue buildings opening remarks](#)

Sarah Godlewski



Sarah Godlewski, Wisconsin state treasurer and chair of the state Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, speaks on Thursday at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Avenue buildings at the Belle City Square apartment campus, 2100 Northwestern Ave. Next to her, from left, J. Jeffers & Co. President and CEO Josh Jeffers and Racine Mayor Cory Mason look on.

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Posing for a photo



Milwaukee-based real estate company J. Jeffers & Co., along with Milwaukee-based construction company CG Schmidt on Thursday hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Avenue buildings at the Belle City Square apartment campus, 2100 Northwestern Ave.

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Stabbing the dirt



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Throwing the dirt



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Horlick Madrigal singers at The Arabella



Horlick Madrigal singers perform Christmas carols at a reception with refreshments inside The Arabella building Thursday on the Belle City Square apartment campus.

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Watch now: [Christmas tree lit at former Horlick site for first time in decades](#)
[Gathering to light the tree](#)



Racine Mayor Cory Mason's and J. Jeffers & Co. President and CEO Josh Jeffers' children from afar light the tree placed on top of The William building at the Belle City Square apartment campus.

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Cory Mason claps his hands



Racine Mayor Cory Mason, lower left corner, applauds as the Christmas tree atop The William building at the Belle City Square apartment campus as it's newly lit.

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Horlick Madrigal singers



Horlick Madrigal singers perform Christmas carols at the tree lighting Thursday at the Belle City Square apartment campus.
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