



Mayor Sylvester Turner

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**HOUSTON'S OWN GRAMMY AWARD NOMINEE CHERYL FORTUNE TO HEADLINE MAYOR'S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION AND TREE LIGHTING PRESENTED BY RELIANT**

*Festivities set for Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup>*

**HOUSTON, TX** - Mayor Sylvester Turner will kick off the holiday season at the **98<sup>th</sup> Annual Mayor's Holiday Celebration and Tree Lighting Presented by Reliant, an NRG company.**

Scheduled for Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup> at City Hall in Hermann Square from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m., this exciting, FREE event is a holiday tradition of music, fireworks and family fun. An enormous 65' holiday tree twinkling with energy-efficient LED lights, striking ornaments and a sparkling star topper will light up downtown Houston this holiday season.

"There may be no better way to get in the holiday spirit than with a tradition of music and family fun," said Mayor Sylvester Turner. "I am honored to be part of such an incredible event. I want to thank Reliant and all of our sponsors who continue to make this event possible. We have pulled together as a community many times this year. Now we have this opportunity to come together in warm celebration."

The show will feature original compositions about building strength and overcoming adversity. Professional and amateur artists will showcase their many talents. Santa will be available for free photos with children in The Gingerbread Village, along with seasonal food and beverages for sale.

Houston-based singer, songwriter and producer **Cheryl Fortune** will be the featured artist of the evening. Fortune is known for her contemporary gospel tracks that earned her a Grammy Nomination in 2012 for Best Gospel Song and Best Gospel Album. "Fighters," a song inspired by her survival of domestic abuse, immediately entered Billboard's Gospel Airplay chart and was quickly followed by her first album, "Simply Cheryl."

The holiday variety show will include fellow Houstonian **Kechi Okwuchi**, a finalist from this year's *America's Got Talent*. Kechi was one of two survivors of the Sosoliso Airlines Flight 1145 plane crash in Nigeria that killed 107 people. Kechi and her family moved to Texas in 2007 for treatment at Shriners' Hospital for Children in Galveston, where she has undergone more than 100 surgeries.

**The Houston Children's Chorus** will perform a song its members wrote during the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, "We Love Houston." The professional dance group from the **Houston Metropolitan Dance Company** will join in on the fun with holiday dance numbers while the **Lanier Pops** perform more holiday songs. **Walter Suhr** from Houston's own Mango Punch will sing "Because of the Storm," a song of strength and perseverance. The remarkable Texas Southern University Drumline, **Ocean of Soul** will also be performing.



Musical Director **Ernest Walker and the Official Holiday Band** will close out the evening with an 80-voice choir from **Sharpstown, Westbury and North Forest** high schools, singing the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s Messiah; and **Mayor Sylvester Turner, Reliant and NRG Retail President Elizabeth Killinger**, along with **Santa Claus**, lighting the official holiday tree and igniting the fireworks.

“I’m excited to kick off the holidays with Mayor Turner and the City of Houston’s annual celebration of the season of hope and joy,” said Killinger. “While we have partnered with the City for more than a decade, this year’s celebration will be an extra-special time to enjoy some amazing musical talents. When I think about the thousands of LED lights that will illuminate the holiday tree, I am reminded of those bright lights in our community who came together to make our city shine through trying times. Reliant is honored to light your holidays and encourages you to help spread the cheer by donating a toy for a child in need.”

The public is invited to bring a new, unwrapped toys to the Salvation Army booth at the Mayor’s Holiday Celebration to help make the holidays brighter for children in need this season. Each person who brings a toy will receive a light-up Santa hat from **Reliant**. The annual toy drive benefits the Salvation Army Greater Houston Area Command.

**Sponsors include: Reliant (an NRG company), Cigna, Wells Fargo, Magical Winter Lights, KHOU-11, the Downtown Management District, The Green Sheet, the Houston Parks and Recreation Department and the Houston Public Library Foundation. The celebration is produced by the Mayor’s Office of Special Events.**

For more information and street closures, please visit [www.houstontx.gov](http://www.houstontx.gov) or [www.houstonspecialevents.org](http://www.houstonspecialevents.org).

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