

https://www.hometownsource.com/union_times/community/light-up-princeton-sees-3-years-of-growth-and-giving-since-its-inception/article_50821c06-7655-11ed-8aa6-dfd15cb33.html

POPULAR

Light Up Princeton sees 3 years of growth and giving since its inception

Chloe Smith
Dec 8, 2022



Light Up Princeton has brought the magic of Christmas lights to the community since 2020 in a time when most Christmas events were put on pause in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

With little to no events taking place for community members to look forward to, the City of Princeton and the Princeton Area Chamber of Commerce (PACC) hatched a plan to bring something new to the community for everyone to enjoy.

“During 2020, during the pandemic, we couldn’t do anything,” said Kim Young, executive director of the PACC. “There weren’t any events happening, and so we thought that the park with the campground down there would be great to set up lights and do a drive through.”

Then the work began with Young and the City of Princeton’s economic development manager at the time - the person in question no longer works for the city - spending countless hours in Riverside park stringing lights, setting up displays, running the event each night, and collecting donations since the event didn’t yet have enough volunteers.

In its initial stages, Light Up Princeton required a lot of support and donations from community members and organizations to help purchase all of the lights for the displays. The Princeton American Legion became the event’s biggest donor which led to the inclusion of the American Legion Loop in the displays.

“It took a lot of donations from the community. The American Legion was our big donor which is why we have the American Legion loop. They were a big sponsor for us right out of the gate. Really the only way for us to get it going was to have sponsors and donors,” Young said. “So, that initial year we had to

buy everything. We also did as many homemade things as we could by constructing things like the little trees made out of tomato cages. We just tried to do things as inexpensively as possible which we still try to do.”

To keep Light Up Princeton going and to give back to organizations in the community, Light Up Princeton started collecting free will donations its first year open

In its first year open, Light Up Princeton collected free will donations with all of the proceeds going to the Princeton Pantry. However, in the years that followed, the donations were split between the pantry, a nonprofit organization of the volunteer’s choice, and Light Up Princeton for the next year.

“We wanted to benefit the community members and organizations, so we started doing free will donations despite the event being free. That first year, if I remember correctly, it was free will donation and everything went to the pantry,” Young said. “The next year we split it between nonprofits and the pantry; 50 percent of donations go to a nonprofit of the volunteer’s choice that evening and the other 50 percent is split between light up Princeton next year and the pantry.”

In 2021 alone, Light Up Princeton raised over \$14,000 for nonprofit organizations along with collecting almost 1,000 pounds of food items donated to the Princeton Pantry.

Every year since its opening in 2020, Light Up Princeton has grown with new displays and more lights for people to enjoy. Its second year saw the addition of a giant inflatable tiger to represent the mascot of the Princeton School District alongside some other smaller additions. This year, the event welcomed some new animated displays, a new tunnel, and a light up Santa to sit on a big chair.

“(We) added a third tunnel this year which we’re calling the Bumble Tunnel because it was made to look like an ice cave from the old ‘Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer’ movie,” Young said. “The reason we added it was because we wanted to figure out a way to get the (snow) plows through more easily. In order to do that, it has to be wide and tall and we can’t have any cords running across the road.”

In order to get the light displays set up and running smoothly, Young alongside many volunteers and workers from the city’s public utilities department began setting up at the beginning of November.

“We started with our first group of volunteers of Randy (Hatch), the city, and I were down there at the beginning of November. The entire month of November, the city’s public works would come down and set up all the big displays among other things, and then Randy and Adam (Adam Taff, the 2021 winner of the residential lights contest) were down there laying down chords and just putting things in place,” Young said. “Then we’re constantly working and checking to make sure things are working and that we’re ready to go for the kick-off on small business saturday. It’s a lot, it’s many, many hours of work.”

From its first year open to now, Light Up Princeton has seen a lot of growth in community interest and the amount of volunteers it receives to keep the event running.

“This is our third year and we only have two (volunteer) spots open. So, it’s really grown and the community has really jumped in to help,” Young said. “It brings joy to people. When I work down there, we have the volunteers greeting people and everybody is just so happy when they come through there. I just really want to thank the City of Princeton, Princeton Public Utilities, Randy, Adam, and all of our volunteers because we couldn’t do this on our own and I’m very very appreciative.”

The Light Up Princeton Christmas light displays are open to view from 6 - 9 p.m. every night until Dec. 25 in Riverside Park.

Reach Chloe Smith at chloe.smith@apgecm.com

Tags

Light

Kim Young

Randy

Economics

Sport

Building Industry

Company

Agriculture

Commerce

Princeton Area Chamber Of Commerce

American Legion

City

Donor

Chloe Smith

Editor