

State and Local

Christmas in the Park' provides early glimpse of holiday sparkle

By Anne Neidinger
Reporter



Graphic by Robbyn L. Lister

Having Christmas spirit while juggling with final projects and exams may seem impossible, but "Christmas in the Park" at College Station's Central Park can provide holiday sparkle to lift tired spirits.

The College Station Parks and Recreation Department sponsors the program, which includes displays of over 40,000 Christmas lights, various holiday mechanical scenes and events such as bonfires, carolers, a log hunt and choirs, program supervisor Sheila Walker said.

The free event, in its fourth year, will include new scenes of a Christmas Village and "Ski-boat Santa" to be placed in the park's pond, she said.

Over 20,000 cars entered the 43-acre park last December to view the decorations, Walker said, but more people are expected to attend this year since the program is gaining attention. Also, better weather as compared to last year's rainy December will help increase the turnout, she said.

The lighting display begins Tuesday and continues every night this month from 6 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. at the park located just east of Highway

6 and south of Harvey Road (Highway 30).

On every Friday, Saturday and Sunday evening, Walker said, there will be walk-around, life-sized characters such as Rudolph and the Polar Bear, who will distribute candy to the children. Santa Claus also will be at the park each weekend at 7 p.m. and pictures may be taken with him.

Some of the special events at "Christmas in the Park" include Tuesday's opening ceremony, a musical by the Allen Academy on Dec. 11 and one by the Brazos Valley Chorale on Dec. 13, Walker said.

On Dec. 18, 19 and 20, Stage-Center, a community theater group, will present "The Runaway Toy," a play produced and staffed by children. Tim Rogers, a guitar vocalist, also will perform on those dates at the park's pavilion, she said. Most of the events will begin at the park by 6:30 p.m.

"Christmas in the Park" began in 1983 with a \$6,000 donation from Jack Lester Jr., a Bryan merchant, Walker said. Lester again donated \$6,000 in the second and third years. The program also gets funding from the city and it has received a donation from Texana Bank. This year's program is funded by Lester's donation of \$4,000 and \$4,000 from the parks and recreation department's budget, she said.

Because of this increased funding, the program has grown considerably, Walker said, from a display of 15,000 lights to one with over 40,000 lights. New scenes also have been added to the event, such as a \$4,000 nativity scene with 7-foot-high, hand-crafted figures donated by Fred Brown Mazda in Bryan, she said.

Setup of the lights and decorations began on Nov. 1 by the city's forestry department, but planning has been going on since June by forestry and the parks and recreation

departments, Walker said.

Forestry Department Superintendent Ric Ploeger oversees the hanging of the lights in the trees and the setting up of the displays throughout the park, Walker said. He also masterminds special lighting projects, such as the "Sesquicentennial Flag" displayed last year on the backstops of the softball fields, she said.

A display celebrating College Station's 50th anniversary will be created this year in the same area.

Although the number of lights used may suggest a great increase in the cost of electricity, Walker said, there is no noticeable difference in the park's electricity bill and it usually increases by only \$10. However, she said, the program uses all of the power at Central Park and a new transformer had to be added this year to help light up the pond area, she said.

Walker said not many A&M students seem to attend the program, perhaps due to many last-minute semester obligations and activities. However, she encouraged Aggies to at least view the lighted display before leaving town for Christmas vacation.

"It's so quiet and peaceful that it really does fill you with the Christmas spirit," she said.

Attorney: UH research on superconductor may be unprotected

HOUSTON (AP) — A patent attorney says he's not sure the University of Houston is doing all it can to protect its advances in superconductivity research through patent applications and other strategies.

"I am very worried whenever I see a project of this significance being shepherded by academics who may not know the commercial world," patent attorney David Allen Roth said. "From my experience, universities are not very good at this."

Earlier this year, Paul C.W. Chu, a University of Houston physicist, disclosed dramatic advances in raising the temperature at which superconductivity can take place.

The advances brought closer some practical applications such as mass storage of electricity without energy loss and better means of transporting electricity.

Roth has sought documents regarding the University of Houston's patent applications, patent strategies, licensing, contracting and other information under the state's Open Records Act.

Roth says he's asking for the information as a citizen and taxpayer and not on behalf of a client.

The university has asked the state attorney general whether the information Roth seeks is exempt from the law.

Roth said he is not seeking any information that under law can be kept secret, but rather is seeking access to Chu's scientific publications and explanations of what discoveries are covered by patent applications.

"Patent lawyers are like monks in a medieval cell writing illustrated manuscripts," Roth said. "They depend on their clients for strategy and technological information, and most universities don't have the vision to supply it."

He said patent applications that are too narrow could leave the university with a smaller amount of the eventual benefits of superconductivity research.

Scott Chafin, university counsel, said the reputable law firm of Pravel, Gambrell, Hewitt & Kimball is advising the university in patent matters.

He said the law firm was involved before Chu published his first article about advances he has made.

State wants right to auction Connally's historical papers

HOUSTON (AP) — Former Texas governor John B. Connally donated potentially valuable historical papers to a library before his personal and business bankruptcy papers, the *Houston Post* reported Sunday.

In a copyright story, the newspaper said Connally donated roughly three million pages of paper to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin last July. The papers considered a nearly priceless historical treasure by archivists and collectors.

In the past, Connally, 70, a former secretary of the U.S. Navy and Treasury, had

turned away numerous requests from libraries and archives to house the papers.

The donation, or transfer as it is known in legal papers, has triggered a legal controversy over whether Connally was entitled to donate the papers, or whether they should be auctioned off to help pay Connally's \$93 million debt.

Among the historical papers is a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald to Connally 20 months before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy during a Nov. 22, 1963, Dallas motorcade. Connally was injured in the attack.

The staff of the LBJ library, which tried unsuccessfully for 20 years to obtain the papers, was surprised when Connally contacted library director Harry Middleton in early July, the newspaper reported.

On July 14, a moving van and two rented trucks arrived at the library's loading docks with 1,500 linear feet of Connally records, the newspaper said.

On July 31, Connally filed for protection from creditors for his personal finances and filed for liquidation of the Barnes-Connally Partnership, which he had formed

with former Texas Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes.

Connally's attorney, Myron M. Sheinfeld said Connally would not have been able to donate paintings or other property to a museum within 90 days of filing for bankruptcy, but he said historical documents may fall into a different category.

"Paintings you acquire by paying some consideration for them," Sheinfeld said. "There's a difference in file cabinets full of papers. You're never going to know what the value of those letters are going to be."

Jill Brett, spokesman for the National

Archives, which is handling legal work surrounding the transfer of the papers, says the case poses novel legal issues.

"Our lawyers couldn't find any legal precedent for personal papers being reachable by creditors," she said.

Connally's attorney has argued the papers are the property of the U.S. government.

The National Archives and the LBJ library say the papers are Connally's until a formal deed is executed.

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