



15 YEARS OF Lights & Comfort

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE DAVIS | WRITTEN BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT

A bridge at Dominion Gardens Park, Georgetown, invites visitors to explore the many installations at Light Up the Hills.



For the last 14 years Dominion Gardens and the adjacent park in Georgetown have been illuminated on December 1 to begin the season of Light Up the Hills, when Christmas- and winter-themed images brighten the landscape. People stroll the paths from sunset to full dark, enjoying the decorations and remembering loved ones. This season, 2022-23, is the 15th anniversary of this community event.



▲ The formal garden in Dominion Gardens Park, dusted with snow and brightened with lights.

December 1 at 7pm is Ignition Night when the lights are turned on for the season and all the old and new lighting displays create a bright, magical space. There are illuminations that suggest Christmas, including a huge wreath, Santa Claus in his sleigh, grazing reindeer, and oversize candy canes. Other decorations celebrate winter by showing snowmen, a skating party, and Polar

Bears. These displays may change slightly each year as old ones are retired and new creations introduced.

The show can be enjoyed from before sunset, at 5 pm, until 11 pm daily from Dec. 1 to Jan. 3. Entrance is free and no reservations are needed. You're welcome to go for a stroll through the bright wonderland any evening of the season.

Light Up the Hills is the idea of Gerry Kentner of

Georgetown. Gerry and daughter Lori Gysel published *What's Cookin' Christmas Cookbook* as a fundraiser for the festival, and it contains a description of the beginning: "...on a cold, frosty night in February 2008... Gerry had been out for a drive with [husband] Dave and was wondering why was it that our local parks were so dark in winter – couldn't they use a little twinkle? By June of that same year, after

much planning, organizing, obtaining town permits, and major fundraising, we had secured a 12-member board of directors and on December 1, 2008, we illuminated 13 trees, three displays and the first Tree of Hope at Dominion Gardens Park in Georgetown with a fantastic turnout of 500 smiling faces."

In 2010 a second Tree of Hope was created in Acton Sports Park and in 2013 Shelagh Law Parkette in Glen



▲ Dominion Gardens before dusk, with some of the organizers.

Williams joined in with its own Tree of Hope. This third tree was donated by Al and Lois Fraser of Georgetown.

Memory Balls

Light Up the Hills is fully funded by community members: sponsors, donors, volunteers, and people who buy raffle tickets or Memory Balls. These balls are clear glass ornaments that are tagged with the names of loved ones and are hung on

a Tree of Hope in Dominion Gardens Park. They cost \$25 each and can be renewed the next year for \$10. Names on the Memory Balls are also put on a plaque and updated every year. A smaller plaque lists the names for new Memory Balls that are purchased each year.

“The plaques remain all year and many families visit the site throughout the year,” says Marilyn Serjeantson, a member of the board. “It is a lovely spot for reflection and

remembrance. On December 1st that corner of the park is extremely busy. The Halton Hills community love the park but many really find comfort at the Memory Ball site. The volunteers that are involved with the Memory Ball program are very committed and proud of the program.”

Funds, Costs

Another way of raising funds for the festival is by selling raffle tickets for

prizes provided by sponsors. Tickets are \$5.00 each or three for \$10.00. They can be bought at the Downtown Georgetown Farmers Market, at designated times at Georgetown Marketplace and from members of Light Up the Hills who sell them. Sales close just before the draw at the Marketplace mall on December 13 this year.

The money raised is used exclusively to purchase lights and displays,” explains

Marilyn, “to pay for professional installers to decorate our major large Trees of Hope in Georgetown, Acton and Glen Williams, and to set up and store our lighted displays. We have to make sure the park trees are not damaged. The Trees of Hope and our major displays need professionals to install, including the lights, and to maintain the displays and store them. This budget alone is over \$25,000.00 each year. Money is also used to purchase the hundreds of additional lights and electrical cords needed in the park areas.”

Volunteer Work

Volunteers add hundreds of lights to the numerous trees and bushes in the Dominion Gardens Park and the Acton Arena site. Volunteers maintain the park and displays. They walk the park each evening to check the displays and lights. At the end of the festival, they take down the lights and small displays, storing them in a leased storage facility. Volunteers manage the Memory Ball program which includes the tabulation, preparation, hanging, maintenance and storage of the Memory Balls. Volunteers fundraise, manage draw ticket sales and staff booths at the Farmers Market and the Marketplace Mall. Volunteers advertise and even create Light Up the Hills displays in Young’s drugstore window and at the local libraries during December.

“We would like to thank our generous sponsors for their donations of money and in-kind services,” states Marilyn. “We need community support to light up the hills! Our dedicated, hard-working volunteers are the strength that makes Light Up the Hills work. However, we need

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▲ Ladies of the lights, from left: Donna Volpini, Natalie Smurthwaite, Gerry Kentner, Michele Cameron, Marilyn Serjeantson.

◀ A memory plaque of names from 2012 to 2020.

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volunteers. Some of them are now 15 years older and a younger group of enthusiastic citizens would help make the dream continue to light up our community. The more people that are involved and take pride in what is presented throughout Halton Hills, the better our displays will be and they will continue to shine. Our volunteers are committed and take pride in what they do to make Light Up the Hills such a success.”

For the latest, updated information, to donate, sponsor or volunteer, see www.LightUptheHills.com. **NEV**





◀ Some of the Lighting Displays



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