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Tradition continues at Winnetka's tree lighting

by Danielle Perlin

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The crowd of approximately 75 people counted down from 10 to one and saw the tall tree light up at Winnetka's Station Park at 6 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 30.

Throughout the park, families applauded the shining, bright tree while carolers sang, "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer," among other holiday classics.

Before the countdown began Village President Jessica Tucker welcomed everyone to the tree lighting ceremony.

"We're excited to kick off the holiday season in shopping locally with this celebration of lighting the tree," Tucker said. "We started some years ago at Elm and Chestnut ... it was just a few people. [This] has turned into this wonderful celebration. And it's just terrific to see you all here."

Winnetka residents Irene and Robert Zmudka and their 6-year-old daughter Katherine attended last year's tree lighting ceremony, too.

"This is a great community. There are not a lot of places that do things like this, and I think this is just a nice event," Robert said. "The town tries to build a sense of community, and even just having everybody go over to the coffee shop for hot chocolate ... I think everybody appreciates it."

Caribou Coffee offered free hot chocolate after the ceremony, on behalf of themselves along with First Bank & Trust.

Robert added that this event "kicks off" the Christmas season, and it has become a holiday tradition for his family.

Winnetka residents Sandy and Kevin Carlson just moved to the northern suburb a month ago from Philadelphia and will definitely attend next year's ceremony, too. They brought their 2-year-old son, Evan, and their 6-year-old daughter, Ellie, who found a friend from school at the tree lighting.

"I think it was very well organized," Sandy said.

"It's great to see all these young families with small children," she added. "[It's] not too crowded, and it's just a great event. Everybody's very friendly."

Friends, 11-year-old Jack James and 10-year-old Griffin Wallace went to the tree lighting together with their families. This was the first time the Winnetka residents attended the ceremony.

"My mom said, 'Let's go to the tree lighting,' and we just thought it would be fun," said James, who lives down the street from Wallace.

James, who attends The Skokie School with Wallace, said they got to help with the switch that turned on the tree.

"[The ceremony] brings a lot of joy to the community, and it's fun for the little kids ... time for part of the community to get together," James said.



Mrs. Claus writes down the many Winnetka children's messages and special request to pass along to Santa during the Winnetka tree lighting ceremony Friday, Nov. 30. *photo:Dave Kraus/22nd Century Media.*



Festive carolers spread some holiday cheer at the tree lighting in Winnetka Friday, Nov. 30.

Wallace said he would try to come to the ceremony once again next year with James.

"Next year, I'll probably wear long pants," said James, pointing to his black shorts.

"And I'll stay nice and bundled up," said Wallace, who was wearing a hat, pants and a coat.



Mrs. Claus poses for a photo with Austin Mune, 8, and Kylie Mune, 6, at Winnetka's tree lighting ceremony.



Winnetka residents gather Friday, Nov. 30, to help bring in the holiday season at the tree lighting.



Tree lighting attendees and carolers head to Caribou Coffee for complimentary hot chocolate.