

## **Lights of Christmas**

Christmas time is the one Christian holiday that our culture still values and enjoys. Despite all of the pressure to create a generic "Holiday" time, people still resonate with the hope, joy, and love that saturates the Christmas season.

For Christian Camps & Conference Centers, Christmas-time is our "down time." There aren't many retreats going on then and things are generally pretty slow. So, about nine years ago, we decided to launch a major family event that lavishly celebrates the Christmas message in a way that would positively connect with the general public.

We launched The Lights of Christmas, a festival-like event with over one million lights, live entertainment, children's activities, dinner theatre, overnight options, and more. We traveled to Nashville and gleaned inspiration from Opreyland's Christmas in the Park then came home in January 1997 and began planning an event for about 5,000 people to attend over 12 nights. We'd never done anything like this before and it was a total "God-Adventure" from beginning to end. To our amazement, 20,000 people showed up our inaugural year! Since then we've averaged about 45,000-55,000 people a year and The Lights of Christmas has become a significant regional attraction.

Every year, we receive numerous stories of lives that were touched by the atmosphere, music, drama, nativity display, or something else where the message of Christmas was clear, uncontrived, and unforced. We're not evangelistic, just authentic in celebrating Christmas and inviting the whole world to join us. Our testimony in the community has gone from one of skeptical indifference to welcoming acceptance and we've enjoyed much greater participation in our other camps and retreats throughout the year.

In addition, we give out hundreds of charity passes a year and truly enjoy blessing the many, many disabled, elderly, and disadvantaged folks who come. It's another way to bless the community and it doesn't cost us a dime.

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