



## NEWS RELEASE

Public Contact: 843-795-4386 / [www.HolidayFestivalofLights.com](http://www.HolidayFestivalofLights.com)

Media Contact: Sarah Reynolds / (843) 762-8089 / [sreynolds@ccprc.com](mailto:sreynolds@ccprc.com)

Holiday Festival of Lights Media Room: [www.CharlestonCountyParks.com/HFOLMedia](http://www.CharlestonCountyParks.com/HFOLMedia)

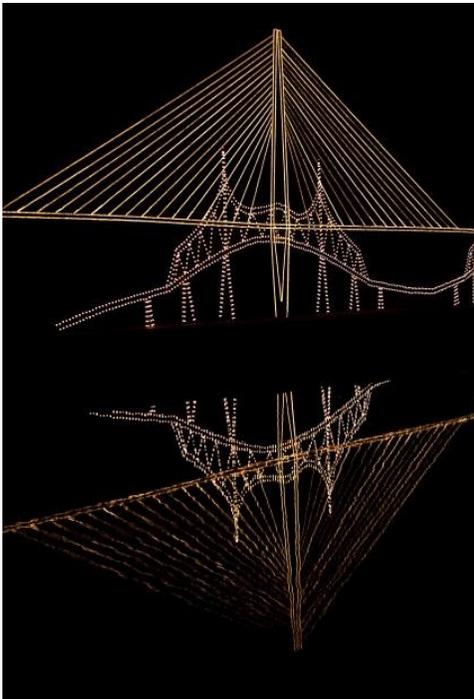
# Celebrate 25 years of the Holiday Festival of Lights! *Making Spirits Bright since 1990*

[CHARLESTON, SC] – Believe it or not, the Holiday Festival of Lights is celebrating 25 years in 2014! With an estimated two million shimmering lights over a three mile loop, Charleston's most popular holiday event returns to **James Island County Park** for its silver anniversary **Nov. 14 – Jan. 1, 2015**.

Throughout its 25 year span, more than four million people have toured the Holiday Festival of Lights, which is hosted by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC) at the agency's James Island County Park. The silver Grand Opening ceremony is on Friday, Nov. 14, featuring a tree lighting ceremony, live entertainment, fireworks, and a celebration of what has become a tradition for thousands of families in the Lowcountry and beyond.



Also in honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one lucky guest each evening of the festival (Nov. 14 – Jan. 1) will receive a special gift valued at \$25 as they drive through the park gates. Charleston County Parks will also give away a 5-night cruise as part of this year's celebration. No purchase is necessary for the cruise sweepstakes; all entrants can enter to win at [CharlestonCountyParks.com/Sweepstakes](http://CharlestonCountyParks.com/Sweepstakes) between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31.



### ***History of the Festival of Lights***

The very first Holiday Festival of Lights featured just 18 light displays made by an engineer in Wheeling, WV. After learning the craft, Rich Raab, a park maintenance and electrician staff member, began building his own light displays on site in the park. His first "house-made" light display was the "Santa on the Roof" atop the Park Center building. Raab, who today is the CCPRC's Light Show Supervisor, has perfected the technique over the past two and a half decades, and today the park features almost exclusively house-made light displays.

The early light displays featured traditional colored light bulbs, but now as displays are created or refurbished, LED lights are used. These LED lights are more energy-efficient and give the piece a more vibrant appeal.

Soon, demand by families and festival-goers for seeing the displays up close and outside of their vehicle expanded the event. Santa's Village and Winter Wonderland were created around the festival's parking lots. In these areas, which expanded each year, visitors were able to see additional walk-through light display areas, peruse unique gift shops, visit with Santa Claus, hop on the festival train, roast marshmallows and sip hot chocolate, see a giant holiday sand sculpture, and even take a spin on the carousel.

High-resolution photos available upon request

Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission / 861 Riverland Dr. / Charleston, SC 29412 / (843) 762-2172 / [CharlestonCountyParks.com](http://CharlestonCountyParks.com)

[continued]

### **Behind the Scenes**

Every year, brand new light displays are unveiled, each one taking between six and ten weeks to create. The process begins by creating the design. Then, in Rich's work shed, known fondly as "Santa's Workshop," the magic begins. Using self-taught techniques, Rich projects the design onto the floor of his workshop, where he traces it with chalk. Next, rebar is laid out along the tracing, and through a skilled process of soldering and bending, the rebar is molded into the depicted shape. The electronic wizard then winds light bulbs and their power cords neatly around the rebar, creating the individual display you see at the park today.



Each year, numerous staff members and volunteers commit hundreds of hours to draping additional light strings known as "mini lights" along various areas of the park. The purpose of these extra lights is literally to illuminate the entire environment and avoid having "dark" spots, contributing to the unique look of the festival. Among those featured on the displays and also those draped on trees and bushes, the festival boasts an estimated two million lights.

And believe it or not, the Holiday Festival of Lights is literally worked on all year long. In addition to the work that goes into creating a new display, many displays must be reconditioned each year, with each piece lasting about five years before refurbishment. The hundreds of displays are dismantled into 1,000 pieces within 28 trailers stored on site at James Island County Park, coming together again each year like a giant puzzle.

Other behind-the-scenes folks who are absolutely integral to the festival's success are the park's campground hosts. James Island County Park is home to a 124-site RV campground. Eighteen couples who travel around the country in their RVs reunite each year in Charleston to volunteer at the Holiday Festival of Lights. These volunteers check and replace an estimated 180,000 light bulbs and also assist with various tasks at the festival each night.

### **25 Years of Lowcountry Memories**

Currently, the Holiday Festival of Lights features more than 700 displays, and the festival driving route is now a full three miles in length.

Each year the festival kicks off with the popular Fun Run and Walk, allowing an estimated 2,000 people the chance to travel on foot through the festival and see the displays up close. This year's Fun Run and Walk will take place on two evenings, Nov. 12 and 13.

Today, the festival averages over 200,000 visitors each year, a far cry from its premiere night of 85,000 people. During its 24-year history, the Festival has seen license plates from all 50 states and even some from Canada.



Join Charleston County Parks for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary **Grand Opening Ceremony** to celebrate all that the Holiday Festival of Lights has been and will continue to be for years to come. Festivities start at 6 p.m. at the Park Center of James Island County Park.

For more information, including event hours, fees, and the most up-to-date events schedules, call 843-795-4386 or visit [www.holidayfestivaloflights.com](http://www.holidayfestivaloflights.com). This event is presented by Boeing and your Charleston County Parks.

*Owned and managed by the Charleston County Park and Recreation Commission (CCPRC), James Island County Park is located at 871 Riverland Drive. The mission of CCPRC is to improve the quality of life in Charleston County by offering a diverse system of park facilities, programs and services. The large park system features over 10,000 acres of property and includes three land parks, three beach parks, four seasonally-lifeguarded beach areas, three dog parks, two landmark fishing piers, three waterparks, 19 boat landings, a climbing wall, a challenge course, an interpretive center, an equestrian center, cottages, a campground, a marina, as well as wedding, meeting and event facilities. The park system also offers a wide variety of recreational services - festivals, camps, classes, programs, and much more. For more information on CCPRC, call for 795-4386 or visit [www.charlestoncountyparks.com](http://www.charlestoncountyparks.com).*



*High-resolution photos available upon request*

**Holiday Festival of Lights Media Room:** [www.CharlestonCountyParks.com/HFOLMedia](http://www.CharlestonCountyParks.com/HFOLMedia)

Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission / 861 Riverland Dr. / Charleston, SC 29412 / (843) 762-2172 / [CharlestonCountyParks.com](http://CharlestonCountyParks.com)