

PRESS RELEASE – DECEMBER 13, 2006

For More Information, Contact:

Lynnette Lakey Taff

Telephone: 214-616-6961

E-Mail: llt@lonestarmail.net

LANCASTER, TX

CHRISTMAS IN OLDE TOWNE LANCASTER

For more than two weeks, Lancaster has been brightened by the sights and sounds of Christmas, with banners flying on light-posts all over town, and festive lights shining from homes and businesses everywhere you look. The Heritage Park Foundation opened the season in style with a Preview Party on Friday, December 1st at the home of country music star Janie Fricke and her musician husband Jeff Steele. The Fricke-Steele home (the historic Lowrey-Hurst Homestead) was filled with a capacity crowd of 75 Lancaster luminaries who enjoyed hors d'oeuvres and convivial conversation before heading out to tour four homes on the 2nd Annual Lancaster Lights and Tour of Homes. First stop on the Tour was the exquisitely remodeled home of Jim Mannos and David Millison. Lancaster native Eunice Sandling greeted guests at the door to provide a little history of the 1950 bungalow and former truck farm, which were built and operated by her father. Next stop was the Victorian-inspired 1985 home of Anita Bostrom and her daughter and son-in-law, Dr. David & Kris Reagan. Though the house itself is not historic, it is filled with antique furnishings and Victorian era decorating touches that give it a very authentic appearance. Tour guests moved next to the Tudor-style home of Cheryl & Kyle Wright in Lancaster's Historic District. Built circa 1914-1918 by Clyde McCurdy, this stunning home retains many original or period-correct details, including original hardwood floors and lighting fixtures that inspired awe among Tour visitors. Finally, the Tour concluded with dessert at the beautiful Queen Anne home of Charles Gunn. Emory Taylor built this home for his daughter, with construction completed about 1902, and Mr. Gunn has stayed true to the home's history in his decorating. The home features three original fireplaces with carved oak mantles, a wrap-around porch with eleven Greek Revival style columns, 12-foot ceilings, and original hardware on the doors, including a pane of pure crystal in the front door.

On Saturday, December 2nd, the four Lancaster homes were once again open for Tour visitors. In addition, the Lancaster Historical Society offered free refreshments at their holiday Open House at the historic MKT Depot, which was built in 1888 and served as an important stop on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas line from Dallas to the Gulf Coast. Both the Depot and the adjacent Rose Garden were decorated for the Lancaster Lights and Tour of Homes, and will remain ablaze with lights through the season. The City of Lancaster helped make this one of the brightest spots in town with their addition of the animated lights of the "Lancaster Express" train, located on the west side of the Rose Garden. The MKT Depot is located on Pecan Street, just east of Centre Avenue, near the LISD Administration building and the Lions Den.

On both Saturday and Sunday, December 2nd and 3rd, Lancaster's First Baptist Church offered their annual Christmas Carols and Confections. This presentation of music and delectable desserts was enjoyed by more than a hundred local residents. Visit the church's website at www.fblancaster.org/christmas.htm for photos.

December 7th was another busy evening in Lancaster, with two special concerts. More than three hundred people turned out to hear students and teachers from Donald Shields Elementary perform Christmas carols on steel drums. The church website referenced above includes photos and MP3 files so even those who missed the concert can enjoy the performance. Meanwhile, on the same evening, the Lancaster Middle School held their Winter Concert at the new Lancaster High School Auditorium. Parents, relatives, friends, and neighbors were bursting with pride and joy as the crowd expressed appreciation for the concert.

Then on Saturday, December 9th, the Christmas season really got into full swing, starting with 2nd Saturday on the Square. Stores and specialty vendors offered all kinds of options for holiday shoppers while Don Baker of Top Tunes 4 U Karaoke provided entertainment. As a prelude to the parade, the Beautiful Bells handbell choir from First Christian Church in Lancaster performed a selection of Christmas carols. They were followed by A Class Act Dance Troupe, known as Texas' home-grown Rockettes, who entertained the crowd right up to the moment when the Christmas Parade of Lights arrived on Town Square. LISD Assistant Superintendent Eugene

Young III was honored as the Grand Marshal in recognition of his recent induction into the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame. Winning parade entrants included the Greater Southwest Shrine Club's dazzling lighted float, the Lancaster High School marching band, a delightful float featuring folks from the Senior Center in rocking chairs gathered around a lighted Christmas tree, and an antique Model A Ford entered by the Lancaster Historical Society.

Following the Parade of Lights, Mayor Joe Tillotson invited Santa and Mrs. Claus to join him in the gazebo at Heritage Park, where two young children assisted in the official lighting of the City's 25' tall Christmas tree. The Lancaster High School Choir performed several songs of the season, after which the crowd had a variety of choices for fun and entertainment. Some stayed on Town Square for more shopping, a visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus, pony rides, bounce houses, face painting, or a ride around the Square on a miniature train. Others opted to follow the High School Choir on the 4th annual Lantern Stroll through the Historic District, singing Christmas carols along the way. Rosa Finsley and other members of First Presbyterian Church joined the stroll in a wagon drawn by a team of large draft horses. At the first stop, the Worship Choir from First Baptist Church performed a selection from their upcoming Christmas cantata, and other church volunteers offered hot apple cider to warm up strollers on the cold night. The next stop was at First Presbyterian, where strollers had the opportunity to rest a few minutes and sing another favorite Christmas carol; they were accompanied by the talented Charles Gunn performing on the church's historic pipe organ. Once the crowd moved outside again, the Rev. Dr. Richard Selby, pastor of First Presbyterian, offered a reading about the tradition of the Christmas tree as the church's living Christmas tree was illuminated. At the next stop, volunteers from Harvest Time Church presented a live nativity as Pastor Mark Gonzales read the story of the birth of Jesus, as told in Luke Chapter 2. After the reading, Lancaster Chamber of Commerce President Joe Johnson sang a beautiful rendition of "Sweet Little Jesus Boy." The lantern stroll ended at the Wishing Well on Town Square, where the Rev. Sara Hardaway and volunteers from First United Methodist Church offered a reading on twelve traditions of Christmas, then distributed candy canes to everyone in the crowd.

Sound like a lot? Wait, there's more!

On Tuesday, December 12th, students from Lancaster's elementary schools offered their Winter Concert, and on Thursday, December 14th, students from Lancaster High School received a warm welcome at their Winter Concert. Both events were held at the Lancaster High School Auditorium.

Although many of the special events are past, Lancaster is still a great place to visit this Christmas season. Homes, businesses, and historic buildings all over town are decked out in their holiday finest. A drive through the Historic District is a special treat, and the lights at Heritage Park (on Dallas Avenue in front of City Hall) are worth making the detour around road construction on Dallas Avenue.

To cap off the holiday season, the Lancaster Historical Society is hosting a New Year's Eve Party at the Lions Den. Local favorite Chef Carlos of A Different Plate will cater the event, and entertainment will be provided by Top Tunes 4 U Karaoke. Tickets are available by calling Lynnette Lakey Taff at 214-616-6961.

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