

Light Up the Hills celebrates 10 years

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An iconic Georgetown initiative has reached its 10 year anniversary.

This year, Light Up the Hills celebrates a decade, and organizers are eager to make this year bigger and better.

In February 2008, head organizer Gerry Kentner was driving through Georgetown along Main Street, right by the Cedarvale tobogganing hill, and an idea struck her.

"Suddenly, I had a vision," she explained. "I saw the trees were there with Christmas lights, there was lots of light and an illuminated area where people were tobogganing, and there was kids, laughter, families, hot chocolate and music."

She then went home and thought about it all night - so much so she couldn't sleep.

"I couldn't sleep, so I just started working on it," she said. "I thought, 'we have to have this.'"

Kentner assembled a team of 12 people and had their first meeting that June. By September, they had their list of directors and became incorporated.

Now, every time Dec. 1 rolls around, so does the team of Light Up the Hills with all the holiday spirits and illumination they can bring during the annual ignition night.

The first two years of Light Up the Hills took place at Dominion Gardens in Georgetown.

The third year introduced Acton Sports Park, and in the sixth year, Glen Williams.

Kentner hopes to be in all Halton Hills hamlets by the time they celebrate 15 years.

She explains the event as a moment of happiness that puts a smile on your

face.

"I think all of us have a passion to do that for our community and for our people," she said.

"The community spirit that has grown out of this, especially on Dec. 1, the community spirit is huge and warm."

One of the key parts of the night are the Trees of Hope and their decorations, commemorating those people in the community who have died with Memory Balls.

At first, the Memory Balls were simple in design: the committee didn't want them to be too much. But as time went on, Memory Balls organizer Kathy Brooks explained they needed to justify the price.

"We did red ribbon, and then added a little bit of green," she explained. "Every year, they've been getting a little bit more involved."

Now in its sixth year,

the Memory Balls have garnered a lot of attention. In the first year, 86 balls were sold, and in 2016, over 400.

Every single one is purchased, decorated and put on the tree by volunteers.

Between the Trees of Hope is a stand, featuring all the names the Memory Balls are purchased for. Brooks said any time of the year, if you drive along Guelph Street, you can see someone reading the sign.

The creation of the Memory Balls came through a joint effort in remembering those lost.

Brooks explained she had no way to express her losses in a public forum, and remembering them with Memory Balls seemed fitting.

"They were looking for new ideas, so I gave them this idea," she said.

The balls, decorations and assembly are all done by Brooks and several oth-

er members of Light Up the Hills: including Jean Hamilton, Judy Maclean, Bonnie Brunton and Marilyn Serjeantson.

They also maintain the balls during the year and make sure they are all clean and ready for the next year.

Each Memory Ball is \$25, and a renewal fee of \$10 every year after that.

All the funds made from the Memory Balls are raised for Light Up the Hills.

Every year, the Light Up the Hills team strives to make the event bigger and better, and with that come expenses, including new lights.

Although they couldn't say the official budget number, Kentner said their budget is under \$100,000.

Like always, this year's event is right on track to getting the community in the holiday spirit.

Now having reached 10 years, Kentner said there will be a meeting on where to take the event from here on out, noting she would like to see it continue for years to come.

Tickets will soon be on sale, and a number of attractive prizes are up for grabs: including a diamond bracelet, tickets to see the Toronto Maple Leafs, gift certificates to restaurants, live theatre, JV Clothing and much more.

As always, the ignition event will be held in Dominion Gardens, in Acton Sports Park and in Glen Williams on Dec. 1, with the lights turning on at 7 p.m. sharp.

Families are invited out for a special Canada Day display, as well as live music and hot chocolate.

"It's just magical," Kentner said. "It really is magical."

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