

A. Describe the project. Is it a service project, fundraiser or event?

Kiwanis Holiday Lights is a project of the Mankato Kiwanis Club and 2017 will mark its sixth season. It is a free, nightly event celebrating the holiday season from the day after Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve. Visitors can walk or drive through lighted holiday displays featuring over 1.3 million colored LED lights and holiday-themed displays. Free-will donations are collected to help with event expenses and are also distributed to the nonprofit organizations who volunteer to help with the event. Nonperishable food items are also accepted each night of the event benefitting area food shelves.

Kiwanis Holiday Lights is unique in the fact that it fits within all three of the categories for this Signature Project nomination: An event, service project and a fundraiser. It has become a win/win situation for many different entities: Our Kiwanis club, by generating a huge amount of publicity and recruiting new members; area nonprofit organizations by providing volunteer opportunities and a chance for each organization to receive a portion of the donations; and individuals and families from throughout the region who are able to attend the event at no cost.

The mission of Kiwanis Holiday Lights is: *To create a celebration of Holiday Lights for the Greater Mankato Area that builds on past traditions and promotes the communities we serve, while raising non-perishable food donations for those in need.* Kiwanis Holiday Lights is a program of Mankato Downtown Kiwanis.

Kiwanis Holiday Lights is led by an Executive Team, Board of Directors and Steering Committee. All Executive Committee members and Board members are also members of the Mankato Kiwanis Club.

B. Describe the need being met through the project.

The awareness of the need for such an event came at a time when the club was brainstorming fundraising ideas. Club President Scott Wojcik noted that his hometown of Marshfield, WI has a holiday lights event and he brought the idea to a group of members of the Mankato Downtown Kiwanis club who were looking for a fundraiser that would greatly impact the Mankato community. The group felt an event like Kiwanis Holiday Lights would not only help promote Kiwanis as a whole, but also involve many other businesses and non-profits from the community. In addition, the idea of such an event appealed to many people who remembered the popular neighborhood displays on Mary Circle and North Broad Street from past years that no longer exist, as well as city leaders who had chosen not to replace the popular traditional holiday street lighting as displays aged over the years in Mankato.

Preliminary planning for Kiwanis Holiday Lights started in the spring of 2011 and the official press release happened in June of 2012 when the Mankato Area Foundation and CHS officially were named as presenting partners, kick-starting the capital campaign to make Kiwanis Holiday Lights a reality.

C. Describe the population being served by the project.

The population served by Kiwanis Holiday Lights has increased significantly since its inception. Originally the area served was within a 60-mile radius of Mankato. Since then, through

increased marketing efforts and significant word-of-mouth, we have seen many visitors from a much larger area attending. We now receive many visitors from the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (over 90 miles away) as from a multi-state area due to many out-of-town visitors in our community visiting family for the holidays.

Regarding the demographics of the individuals visiting Kiwanis Holiday Lights, this event is suitable for all ages. In fact, it seems there is no other event of this size in our community that equally appeals to populations including: children, teens, adults, seniors, developmentally and physically disabled individuals and immigrants, to name a few. One of the most rewarding things this past year was to welcome a bus-load of brand new Americans. We've been told that other cultures and religions view Christmas as "an American holiday" and they embrace it as much as others celebrating the traditional Christmas holiday. In addition, we partnered with the City of Mankato to install a wide, paved walking path so that we can accommodate people who require a wheel chair or walker.

In addition, individuals from all of the groups above are involved in volunteering for Kiwanis Holiday Lights.

D. How does the project benefit children?

Kiwanis Holiday Lights benefits children in so many ways!

- a) It offers a FREE event for families to attend between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. Families can, if they wanted to, visit the display every night during this time and not spend a cent.
- b) Children from church groups, Girl Scouts, sports organizations, etc. learn volunteerism by being involved in volunteering to help set-up and tear-down the event.
- c) Youth musical groups are given the opportunity to perform on the weekends.
- d) Non-perishable food items are collected at the event, benefitting children and families thru 20 southern Minnesota community food shelves.
- e) Children are given the opportunity to visit Santa for FREE on weekends.
- f) The event encourages childhood literacy in two ways: One of our sponsors, a book publisher, hands-out free books to all kids who attend the opening night parade. Also, this sponsor provides over 4,500 free, age-appropriate books for children visiting Santa.

E. What is the impact of the project?

Over the past five years:

- a) Over 600,000 people have attended Kiwanis Holiday Lights
- b) 70.5 tons of food has been collected for area food shelves (20 food shelves in 2016)
- c) \$240,000 has been donated the nonprofit organizations that have provided volunteers

In addition, nearly 90 businesses are involved as cash or in-kind sponsors and over 80 nonprofit groups provide over 1,700 volunteers and over 12,000 volunteer hours each year.

Furthermore, this event gives an opportunity for our service leadership programs and other area Kiwanis clubs to also volunteer:

- a) In 2016, 50 members of the Mankato Downtown Kiwanis Club volunteered at the event providing 425 volunteer hours.

- b) 1,769 hours were volunteered from the board members of Kiwanis Holiday Lights
- c) 10 members of the Kiwanis Club of St Peter provided 80 volunteer hours
- d) 45 Circle K students provided 155 volunteer hours
- e) 15 Aktion Club members provided 56 volunteers hours
- f) 5 Builders Club members provided 15 volunteer hours

F. Is the project recurring?

Yes, Kiwanis Holiday Lights has been held every night between the Friday after Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve since 2012.

G. Are there Kiwanis Partners involved in this project?

Yes, in addition to members of the Mankato Kiwanis Club, members of the St. Peter Kiwanis Club, Circle K, Aktion Club and Builder's Club have participated each year as volunteers during set-up, tear-down and running the park each night.

H. Are there other partners involved in the project?

Yes, in 2016 we partnered with 84 area nonprofit groups which, together with volunteers from our Kiwanis Club provided 1,735 volunteers and 12,089 volunteer hours. In exchange for their volunteer help with set-up, tear-down and assistance running the park each night Kiwanis Holiday Lights donated back a portion of proceeds from the event based on the number of hours provided by each group.

In addition, the Cities of Mankato and North Mankato are instrumental in helping with event logistics and also in providing bucket trucks/workers, special directional signage, traffic control and security.

Finally, as mentioned above, each year nearly 90 businesses are involved as cash or in-kind sponsors.

I. Describe how the Kiwanis Brand is incorporated into the project.

The Kiwanis Brand is firmly incorporated into the project in multiple ways, the most important being the integration of the word "Kiwanis" in the event's name. The event was purposely named "Kiwanis Holiday Lights" so that it would be unavoidable for members of the media and individuals to leave out the word "Kiwanis" when speaking or writing about the event. The name "Kiwanis" is also prominent in the logo design. Since our presenting partners, the Mankato Area Foundation and CHS, required their logos to be integrated into the event's logo design we felt the best way for Kiwanis to be prominently recognized was to integrating the word "Kiwanis" into the event name rather than just saying: sponsored by (Kiwanis Logo).

A full-page ad featuring our Kiwanis Club and branding is also included in the free program that is distributed to attendees (23,000 distributed each year).

Large poster boards promoting our Kiwanis club are also hung in the volunteer trailer and both of the warming houses.

In addition, the word “Kiwanis” is mentioned no less than 30 times in the event’s program and is mentioned numerous times throughout the park. With the exception of Kiwanis marketing materials, no other organization’s logo or marketing materials are allowed inside of the park. This Gives Kiwanis a strong presence in the park and Eliminates the rampant commercialism seen at so many event venues today. Our goal is to provide a non-commercialized event for all to enjoy.

A Kiwanis float designed by club members is also featured in the Opening Night Parade.

Finally, we plan on creating a lighted display in 2017 featuring the Kiwanis logo.

J. How is the project promoted?

Kiwanis Holiday Lights is fortunate to have the in-kind promotional support of several large media partners:

- a. KEYC-TV – a local CBS/FOX affiliate that serves south-central Minnesota and northern Iowa.
- b. Mankato Free Press – a local daily newspaper with a circulation of 22,000
- c. Radio Mankato – a locally-owned radio group featuring six AM and FM stations.

These partners provide a vast amount in-kind advertising, live interviews, website ads and links and other support. Their sponsorship support accounts for over \$100,000 of in-kind advertising each year.

Also, Visit Mankato, the community’s “Convention & Visitors bureau” is a partner in Kiwanis Holiday Lights. Visit Mankato markets overnight packages that include our event as well as helps us reach a larger, more regional audience through their community marketing efforts.

Kiwanis Holiday Lights also has a strong presence on the web and recently upgraded to a mobile-friendly website that provides a large amount of information. This is especially important when we’ve found that a majority of users are seeking information on the event on their mobile devices while they’re in town to visit the lights. The website includes maps, sponsor and volunteer information, photos of the event and links to other community websites of interest. www.kiwanisholidaylights.com There were over 25,500 website users in 2015 with 1.4 million page views between Nov. 1 and Dec. 31, 2016.

Social media is also used extensively. We utilize Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and a Snapchat filter is coming for the 2017 season. Social media also enables our club to cross-promote club-sponsored events throughout the year to our Kiwanis Holiday Lights followers. Social media is also very helpful to notify the public of weather-related issues or to remind them of special events going on each night.

K. How many third-party media hits resulted? How many social media shares were made?

Facebook-specific statistics include:

9,117 page likes as of March 1st 2017 (over the last 180 days we have grown this number by almost 3,000 likes).

Daily Page engagement: 117,317; an average of 652 engagements per day over the last 180 days.

Daily Total Reach: 1,476,241; an average of 8,201 people reached per day over the last 180 days.

Daily Independent page views from people logged into Facebook; an average of 30 independent page views per day over the last 180 days.

Daily people talking: 117,630 unique users which is an average of 98 people per day over the last 180 days.

L. How does the project attract new members?

Kiwanis Holiday Lights has been effective at attracting new members because of the increased visibility the event has given our club. Many of our new members become of Kiwanis by volunteering at Kiwanis Holiday Lights. Their initial volunteer experience leads them to want to become more involved with Kiwanis and to continue their relationship with the members they meet in the park while volunteering. By becoming a member of our club they're able to continue to network with Kiwanians all-year-long! In addition, some volunteers have chosen to join our club so that they can become even more involved in Kiwanis Holiday Lights. All lead committee members and board members are required to be members of Kiwanis.

Here are some comments from three Kiwanis members that became aware of the club through their involvement as Kiwanis Holiday Lights volunteers:

"I was originally introduced to Kiwanis by volunteering to help with Kiwanis Holiday Lights. Initially some board members asked about using some equipment for the event and as I spent more time helping out at the park I was impressed by the spirit of volunteerism among the members of Kiwanis and decided to learn more about Kiwanis as a whole." **Jon Guentzel, Guentzel Family Farms**

"Through my growing involvement as a volunteer for Kiwanis Holiday Lights I became interested in joining the Kiwanis Club so that I could take on a more involved roll in Kiwanis Holiday Lights. I am now a member of the Kiwanis Holiday Lights board and am proud that I'm providing additional volunteer leadership to ensure that Kiwanis Holiday Lights continues in the future." **Jeremiah Frein, JBeal Real Estate Group**

"I started as a volunteer for Kiwanis Holiday Lights and my love for the project as a community member persuaded my decision to join the Mankato Downtown Kiwanis club and serve the Mankato community in a larger capacity. I'm also thrilled to be the coordinator of the float representing our Kiwanis club that's entered in the Kiwanis Holiday Lights opening night parade." **Natasha Chester, The PAW Pet Resort**

M. How many new members were gained through the project?

Our estimate is approximately 50 new members have joined or remained as members (when they would have otherwise left the club) as a result of their involvement in Kiwanis Holiday Lights.

N. What is the total cost of the project?

When the project started the initial purchase for all of the displays, lights and electrical exceeded \$100,000, which was secured through our initial presenting level sponsorships from the Mankato Area Foundation and CHS. Since then our goal each year is to secure sponsorships totaling \$45,000 and voluntary cash donations collected at the event totaling around \$95,000. After paying annual expenses for items such as electricity, replacement and additional light strings, printing, etc. we are then able to take remaining funds and donate them to the other Kiwanis Partners and nonprofit organizations involved in the project and also maintain a reserve balance to continue to grow and sustain the project moving forward.

O. What is the per-member cost of the project? We currently have 120 members. Since this project is completely driven by donations and fundraising it costs our members nothing.

P. What are the total funds raised by the project? Including sponsorship dollars, donations, grants, and concessions. We have raised \$730,850.00 in 5 years.

Q. What is the per-member amount of funds raised by the project? N/A

R. Did members of a service leadership programs club participate? Yes, we had Kiwanis Kids, Builders Clubs, Key Clubs, Circle K and Aktion Clubs all participate in our event.