

Lighting a Tradition



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“Lighting a Tradition” is one of my favorite times of the year at the University of Southern Indiana. It is the night we gather to celebrate the lighting of the Christmas lights that decorate the campus in late winter. “Lighting a Tradition” is an event held every year to welcome the start of the holiday season and get everyone into a festive mood. The lighting ceremony and the activities that accompany it normally take place during the week of Thanksgiving, but in the week leading up to this special night, you can spot crews already at work putting up the lights and decorations. They carefully wrap the trees with strings of Christmas lights and hang wreaths and light-up snowflakes. But at night the lights will remain unlit, waiting in anticipation of the official lighting ceremony.

When the day finally comes, the lighting ceremony begins with caroling in front of Rice Library. Around 6 o’clock at night, when it is already dark, the front steps of the library begin to fill with students all bundled up in their winter coats. Sheets of paper with the words to several popular Christmas songs are passed around, and then the music begins to play over a loudspeaker. The crowd of students joins in unison to sing these familiar traditional songs. There’s something really special about being surrounded by friends as well as strangers all singing and joining together in this tradition. After several minutes of caroling, the countdown begins. Students, professors, and community members chant in unison: “Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two... one!!” and the Quad is illuminated with sparkling lights.



Everyone cheers, and then groups start to break away to go enjoy the holiday-themed activities that follow the lighting ceremony. Volunteers hand out free cookies and hot chocolate to students bundled up in warm scarves and hats against the chill of the winter night. Children and grown-ups alike pile into a miniature train that drives in circles around the Quad, past the University Center and its Cone, the Liberal Arts building, the Business and Engineering building, and the Arts Center, finally stopping back in front of Rice Library. The train ride gives a full view of all the lights and decorations.

Inside, a giant inflatable snow globe provides the perfect photo opportunity for families and groups of friends. There are tables for decorating cookies and writing Christmas cards. Santa Claus himself even makes an appearance! The children of professors and staff members wait in line to meet Santa and tell him what’s on their wish list, and students gather with their friends to get their picture made with Santa. A lot of people are dressed in festive holiday clothes, from ugly sweaters to Santa hats.

This special night is a wonderful way to begin the holiday season. It brings the whole campus community together to celebrate a treasured tradition and spend some quality time relaxing and having fun before the beginning of finals. It will always be one of my favorite memories of my time here at the University of Southern Indiana.

