

AIAA Greater Huntsville Section Volunteers at Galaxy of Lights

By

Naveen Vetcha and Ken Philippart

Following the section's successful first ever participation at the Galaxy of Lights in 2017, on December 5, 2018, section again staffed the ticket booths and directed traffic at the Huntsville Botanical Gardens' (HBG) Galaxy of Lights. This is the second year in a row that AIAA Greater Huntsville served as the volunteer organization running the Galaxy of Lights for the evening.

Galaxy of Lights is a holiday light extravaganza featuring larger-than-life animated light displays. It is an annual light show organized by HBG that attracts over 30,000 walking night visitors and 25,000 carloads of people on driving nights. The show runs from mid-November to New Year's Day. The event is HBG's largest fundraising event and is run almost exclusively by volunteers. Local groups and societies choose nights to be the sponsoring organization and help the gardens with running the event by manning the admission booths, controlling the traffic, answering questions, and counting cars and revenue.



Greater Huntsville Section Volunteers gather before heading to the gates

The section's planning for the event traces back to the section's first ever participation at the event in December 2017. Section's then chair, Naveen Vetcha acted as the day captain for the night with past chair, Ken Philippart at the co-captain. All the volunteers who helped at the 2017 event loved their participation and suggested that we should consider doing it again in 2018. Taking note of this, Naveen contacted HBG and chose Dec 5th 2018 as the day that AIAA would return to HBG.

As the day approached, Naveen attended the training session as the event Day Captain and began organizing the section's participation. Ken Philippart again supported the event as co-captain. A call for volunteers was sent out in October and received a tremendous response with 25 AIAA members and family members signing up to help.

The night's activities kicked off with an orientation from the HBG staff including discussions on safety rules and equipment. Section's vice-chair, Greg Simpson thanked all the volunteers and shared information about some upcoming activities. The Greater Huntsville Section

banner was proudly displayed at the entrance to the Galaxy of Lights to let visitors know who was volunteering that evening.



[AIAA Greater Huntsville Section's banner at the gates](#)

The volunteers were divided into three teams. Each team member was assigned a particular task such as collecting passes, selling admissions, directing traffic, taking credit cards or counting cars and the night's proceeds. The teams rotated every 30 minutes, taking turns working and then relaxing in the Volunteer Room to network and enjoy a potluck dinner, drinks and camaraderie.

Volunteers worked from 5:30 pm – 9 pm, braving the cold to admit 245 vehicles and raise \$1,400 to support HBG operations. When the gates closed to the public, all volunteers received the opportunity to drive through the light display at their own pace at no charge and to take as many photos as they wished. HBG staff was so impressed with section's planning and organization of the volunteers that they are now suggesting all the other teams to consider following a similar plan.

Greater Huntsville's second time participation in the Galaxy of Lights was a fun and festive way for AIAA to give back to the Huntsville community during the season of giving while getting to know fellow section members in a relaxed setting. Several members commented how they would like to see the event become an annual Greater Huntsville Section tradition. With your help, that can happen!

The section thanks our volunteers: Megan Beattie, Jill Brown, Alex Byers, Jacob Clark, Patrick Dees, Hunter Dunne, Tom Giel, Nishanth Goli, Caitlin Hendricks, Aimee Huff, Jessica Huff, Joyce Huff, Eric Jackson, Richard Jozefiak, Anish Patel, Ranjan Patel, Carol McGinnis, Katie McGinnis, Ken Philippart, Lisa Philippart, Brittani Searcy, Greg Simpson, Brandon Stiltner, Nicole Stiltner, and Naveen Vetcha.

