AIAA Greater Huntsville Section Volunteers at Galaxy of Lights

By
Naveen Vetcha and Ken Philippart

Following the section's successful participation at the Galaxy of Lights in 2017 and 2018, on December 11, 2019, the Greater Huntsville Section again staffed the ticket booths and directed traffic at the Huntsville Botanical Gardens' (HBG) Galaxy of Lights. This is the third 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 January 4. 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 traces back to our participation at the event in the past two years. Past chairs of the section, Naveen Vetcha and Ken Philippart led our participation at this event in 2017 & 2018. All the volunteers who helped in the past two years loved their participation and suggested that we should consider doing it again in 2019. Taking note of this, Naveen contacted HBG and chose Dec 11th 2019 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 November 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 Vice-Chair, Nishanth Goli thanked all the volunteers and shared information about some upcoming activities.

AIAA Greater Huntsville Section volunteers Dylan and Naz Stapp at the admission gate

The volunteers were divided into two 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. Clear skies during the event allowed some volunteers to observe some prominent constellations such as Orion and Cassiopeia. Some lucky volunteers saw a bright meteor at 7:11 pm in the North-Western part of the sky in the constellation Cygnus.

Volunteers worked from 5:30 pm – 9 pm, braving the cold to admit 347 vehicles and raise $4,000 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 or to return at a later date for complimentary admission

Greater Huntsville's third 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 continue to be an annual Greater Huntsville Section tradition. With your help, that can happen!

The section thanks our volunteers: Alan Lowrey, Nikki Lowrey, Mark Smith, Laura Smith, Hunter Dunne, Dave Manav, Carlton Corbitt, Nancy Donahoo, Nishanth Goli, Anish Patel, Dylan Stapp, Naz Syed Stapp, Nash Beasley, Theresa Jehle, Jessica Huff, Brittani Searcy, Ken Philippart, Lisa Philippart, Lauren Fisher, Greg Simpson, Brandon Stiltner, Nicole Stiltner, and Naveen Vetcha.