

AIAA Greater Huntsville Section Volunteers at Galaxy of Lights

By

*Naveen Vetcha and Ken Philippart
Images courtesy of Naveen Vetcha and Lisa Philippart*

On December 6, 2017, visitors to the Huntsville Botanical Gardens (HBG) annual Galaxy of Lights saw something no previous visitor had ever seen before—the Greater Huntsville Section staffing the ticket booths and directing traffic. For the first time ever, 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 November 2016 Council meeting where the idea was first raised. Over the course of the next eight months, the Council discussed and approved the idea. Last July, Section Chair Naveen Vetcha and the Council selected December 6, a driving night, for the section's inaugural participation and fully committed AIAA to helping that night.

As the day approached, Naveen attended the training session as the event Day Captain and began organizing the section's participation. A call for volunteers was sent out in November and received a tremendous response with 29 AIAA members and family members signing up to help, one of the largest responses ever received for a call for volunteers.

The night's activities kicked off with an orientation video from the HBG staff including discussions on safety rules and equipment. 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.



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.

Volunteers worked from 5:30 pm – 9 pm, braving the cold to admit 255 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.

Greater Huntsville's inaugural 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: Naveen Vetcha, Brandon and Nicole Stiltner, Ken and Lisa Philippart, Tammy and Matt Statham, Richard and Karen Jozefiak, Thomas Barker, John Roy, Candice Dalton and her mom Melanie, Erin Gish, Brittani Searcy, her sister Bridget, her mom Jessica Huff and grandparents Bill and Joyce Huff, Eric Jackson, Tom Giel, Joe Huwaldt, Brenda Kimani, Carson Kennedy, Kurt Polzin and Mike Bangham.



Tammy Statham and Ken Philippart await visitors to the Galaxy of Lights.