

Christmas in the Park set to open on Friday night



By Mike Pickford

The transformation is complete. After months of hard work, a longstanding festive tradition is all set to celebrate its silver anniversary in style next month as the popular Christmas in the Park returns to Orangeville for a 25th year.

Put together by the Optimist Club of Orangeville, the annual extravaganza turns Kay Cee Gardens, located between Bythia Street and John Street, into a "winter wonderland" jam-packed with various Christmas-themed displays and more than 50,000 bright Christmas lights.

Christmas in the Park will officially get under way tomorrow (Dec. 1) at 6:30 p.m. with various special events planned for its grand opening. The park will re-open nightly throughout the entire month of December, running from 5:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

"Christmas in the Park has really become one of the premiere festive events in Orangeville. It's become a really popular place for people, not just from our community but outside of the community too, to attend and get into the Christmas spirit," said Optimist Club President Melody Greenley.

The event was pioneered by the Orangeville and District Seniors Centre back in 1993, and the Optimists adopted it in 1996. Since that time the group, working alongside dozens of community volunteers, has expanded the event to the point where today it fills most of the 2.6-acre park.

MacMaster Buick GMC returns as the main sponsor of Christmas in the Park, while Ms. Greenley noted between eight and 10 new contributors had jumped on board this year to help make this year's event the best one yet.

There is plenty planned for opening night again this year. Attendees will be treated to complimentary hot chocolate and cider upon arrival, with the Theatre Orangeville Youth Singers (T.O.Y.S.) performing at 6:50 p.m. At approximately 7:05 p.m. Ms. Greenley, MP David Tilson, MPP Sylvia Jones and a representative from the Town of Orangeville and Orangeville Police Service will give greetings before the Christmas lights get turned on shortly after 7:15. At 7:20 there will be a performance of Land of the Glass Slipper.

"That opening night will be special, it's always a really great atmosphere," Ms. Greenley told the Citizen. "It's our busiest night of the year and we're expecting to be really busy again. We look forward to seeing the community come out!"

But while she's keen to bring attention to tomorrow's festivities, there's lots going on all month long at Christmas in the Park. The popular Peruvian alpacas will be on display every Friday, Saturday and Sunday (other than Dec. 24) from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Theatre Orangeville's David Nairn will do readings of The Night Before Christmas at 7 p.m. on Dec. 2, 3, 10, 16 and 17, while Sing-a-long with Norma is scheduled to take place at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 8, 12, 15, 19, 22, 26 and 29.

T.O.Y.S. will perform on Dec. 6 at 7 p.m., Bassically Sound Quartet at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 8, Orangeville Show Chorus at 6:30 p.m. on Dec. 13 and Westminster United Church Choir at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 14.

Now, the big announcement for all the excited children: Santa will be on hand every Friday, Saturday and Sunday between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. Santa will also take time to be at Kay Cee Garden for the entire week leading up to Christmas, other than Dec. 21.

Having welcomed more than 27,000 people through the gates in each of the past two years, Melody is excited to share the delights of Christmas in the Park with thousands of people once again this year.

"This really is Christmas in Orangeville. Christmas in the Park is a huge event now. We hear from people time and time again how much they've enjoyed the experience, so much so that they come back year after year," Ms. Greenley said. "It fills our hearts that

we're able to offer this to the community. We love it ? it's one of our favourites, that's for sure.?
For more information on Christmas in the Park, visit orangevilleoptimists.ca.