

Moraga's Luminarias, a Bright Christmas Tradition

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Mike Wilson

Six years ago on Christmas Eve, new Moraga resident Cathy Schultheis was coming back from Mass around midnight to her Tharp home and lost her way. Then from Camino Pablo, she spotted the luminarias on Rimer Drive, rows of lights shining through paper bags on both sides of the street, "one after the other, the little lights led me to my home," she remembers. She following year, she decided to join the Rimer group and added the Tharp/Deerfield loop to the display. That's how a tradition that was born many years ago, south of the border, has expanded in our suburb.

According to Michelle Wilson, who lives on Rimer, the Moraga tradi-

tion started at the very end of Rimer, past Tharp, in the area nicknamed 'Rimer Court.' When she arrived in Moraga seven years ago, Wilson wanted to create a 'giving tradition' for her family to celebrate Christmas. She had read an article about the Old Town Albuquerque luminarias in Sunset magazine and had heard of the Rimer Court tradition, though she thought it was extinct. The Wilson family decided to order the small candles, the paper bags and the sand used to weight the bags down, and to deliver supplies for 10 bags with instructions to each of their neighbors along Rimer. "It was our gift to the neighborhood," explains Wilson. Mike Wilson remembers the first

night of the luminarias. "It was a bit foggy that night, the display was truly magical." The next morning the Wilsons found, on their doorstep, little thank you gifts from their neighbors.

This year's luminaria lighting will be the 7th for the Wilsons; they will supply 80 homes with luminarias. Many other streets have joined them, not only the Tharp area, but also Oxford Dr., Greenfield Dr., Sanders and Carr Dr.

"It's become a tradition for people to come out around 6:00 p.m. to light their candles, walk up and down the street, meet and greet," says Wilson, "almost everyone participates, even if they do not belong to the Christian religion. Only one resident has asked us not to deliver candles any more."

As the popularity of the display grows, more residents from outside of the area come to enjoy it. "It's nice that people come," says Mike Wilson, "but may be they could park (near Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School on Camino Pablo) and walk our street, otherwise, too many headlights are not very good for the charm of the display."

"This is a real Christmas feeling," says Schultheis, "something that can't be bought in a store."

Sneetches Spotted in Orinda

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Photo Ohlen Alexander

"I had all these creatures, and my house isn't that big," Piatt said. "I thought, *What am I going to do with these?*"

Years ago, Piatt used to show her artwork at Orinda Books, so one call to owner Janet Boreta and the December exhibit was born.

The sculptures are made by drawing the patterns on newspaper, then cutting them out of flannel or felt. Piatt stuffs and sews them while watching tel-

evision at night.

"I use pipe cleaners, yarn or anything that works to make things stick up right. I'll use a piece of wood, if I have to. I used old cardboard boxes and colored paper to make a chimney I needed," she remembered.

Her favorite is The Cat in the Hat, followed closely by the cellar characters from *There's a Wocket in my Pocket*. "I like all those creatures that are down there in the dark. They typify the book and I like how they turned out."

At age 80, Piatt sounds very much like the schoolgirl she once was, growing up in Columbus, Ohio.

"When I was in elementary school I read *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, and it was magic. Oh, that was a wonderful book!"

She attended a private school, called University School, that offered an innovative art program she described as "tremendous." There, she learned to build furniture, practiced fine art and began to sew. The memories are sweet, especially as she reflects on the slim offerings in today's public schools.

"I think art is a very big part of life and can be used in so many different ways. I suppose it boils down to money. The emphasis just isn't on art anymore, but art is really all around us. I think it's a big

The New Rheem Theatre's First Christmas

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Ohlen Alexander

On December 4, about 300 people gathered at The New Rheem Theatre for a screening of "Miracle on 34th Street," preceded by a reception featuring Santa Claus himself. The event was supported by

Charles Schwab. Girls Scout Troop 30550 gathered toys for the Martinez-based Shelter Inc. and set craft tables for children. Meredith Clark, harpist from the San Francisco Symphony, played during the reception, and

hors d'oeuvres were served.

"It was a pleasure organizing this event with Beau (Behan- Manager of the Theater)," said Chuck Kallgren, Financial Consultant with Schwab and father of Caroline, a 4th grader at Los Perales Elementary and member of troop 30550, "This makes it a real community event."

"Every month we screen a different classic film," said Behan, "we are so happy to have been able to create this first Christmas event at The New Rheem Theater, with the support of Schwab." The event was open to California Independent Film Festival Association members and Schwab clients.



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