

*'tis the season to decorate*

## Stratford Avenue Neighbors Create Holiday Tradition

**S**tratford Avenue is known as one of the most festive holiday streets in Lincoln. This reputation is well-deserved. During December, beautiful lights and displays grace the homes and on Christmas Eve, thousands of luminaries line the sidewalks and medians.

What is the history behind this long-time neighborhood tradition?

Most of the people on Stratford agree that the lights and luminaries have sprung from the energy and creativity of a few industrious neighbors. Hope and Ralph Ludwick of 2921 Stratford Avenue recall, "Our young neighbors (the Linwebers, the Campbells and the Haberstiches) were in our living room one evening years ago. They hatched the plan to decorate Stratford Avenue - to go all out!" These neighbors had strung up a few lights over the years, but this time the couples decided to add some additional illumination.

Joan and John Campbell had recently moved from St. Louis and told their new Stratford neighbors about a beautiful decoration they had seen there. On Christmas Eve, the St. Louisans would light votive candles inside sand-filled bags. The lighting of luminaries, or "luminarias" came from a custom of the same name which is associated with the Pueblo peoples in New Mexico. On Christmas Eve, small bonfires are built in front of their pueblos to help welcome the Christ Child.

No one seems to remember the exact year in which the luminaries initially appeared, but they know that it was sometime in the late 1970s. That first year, a few Stratford homes set up the luminaries which the Ludwicks believe were the first to appear in Lincoln. The next year, more neighbors joined in and the third year (as well as every subsequent one) the entire street was awash in luminaries. Coordinating such a massive holiday effort every year is no small task. Ray and Marti Linweber have been instrumental in making sure it happens without fail.

Each winter, the Linwebers order over a ton of sand and have it delivered to their home. They also order

2500 white bags and send out luminary information to the other neighbors. Although the materials have been a gift from the Linwebers, they are quick to point out that it is the effort of a large number of residents which ensures that the tradition will continue. On Christmas Eve Day, volunteers from all over the Avenue arrive at the Linwebers to fill and distribute the bags. The bags are piled onto a pick-up truck and volunteers jump off to deposit them three steps apart on the sidewalks and the medians.

Neighbors are asked to supply their own votive candles and to light them at sundown. However, the Linwebers are ready to assist with illumination. One of their person- *(Continued on page 2)*

By Julie Enersen

### CCNA History snapshot

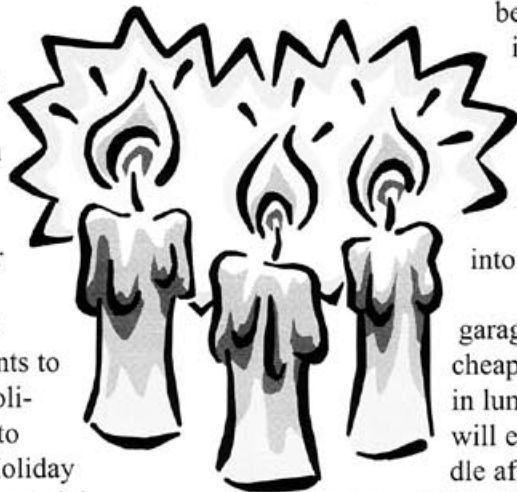


Christmas Eve luminaries grace the corner of Stratford Avenue and Bradfield Drive.

(Holiday continued from page 1)

al family traditions is to patrol the Avenue several times during the evening. They spend their Christmas Eve making sure that the bags are upright and the candles are lit.

Additional displays are set up at the complete discretion of individual homeowners. Contrary to popular belief, there is no formal requirement for Stratford residents to participate in the holiday decorations or to attend the annual Holiday Houses party that the neighbors hold during the first weekend of December. However,



many Stratford residents simply enjoy being part of the seasonal activities. As Marti Lineweber can attest, "It's like living in a Christmas card."

Over the years, a few lessons have been learned. For instance, kiln-dried masonry sand is better than regular sand because it won't freeze into one large chunk when left in a garage overnight. If cheap candles are put in luminaries, they will end up in a puddle after three hours...it is better to buy the 12-15 hour votives. Molley the Trolley sometimes needs a push to

get around the corners. Squirrels eat through electrical cords that are left on the trees for too long.

Overall, the mishaps have been few and the pay-offs have been great. Stratford Avenue is consistently on the StarTran bus tour of Christmas lights and, according to one informal study, approximately 600 cars an hour make a visit to the avenue on Christmas Eve. The home of the French family, 3067 Stratford, was even featured as the December photograph of the 1989 Nebraskaland calendar. "People respect the work and the lights. We're very proud of the community for that," says Ray Lineweber. In return, the Country Club neighborhood is proud of the holiday gem that the Stratford Avenue residents create every year.

End

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**Helpful Tips for Maintaining Your Home**

By Ryan Omel



How will old man winter greet us this year? So far this fall, the weather has been great and, if mild weather holds on a little longer, now is the perfect time to make a last minute outdoor repair. As weather permits go around the outside of your house and inspect the following items. Keep in mind some of these routine maintenance tasks know no season.

Inspect mortar joints on house and chimney.

As always, test your smoke detectors and change furnace filters.

**Windows and Doors** inspect putty, caulking and weather-stripping.

**Gutters and Downspouts** look to see if leaves are piling up. If so, you want to clean out the gutters before the snow starts to fly. Make sure downspouts and any extensions are attached and secure.

**Driveways and Sidewalks** Look for cracks, other than expansion joints, and seal with urethane caulking.

**Exterior walls** Look for loose or missing siding. Check for signs of wood rotting and replace boards as necessary.

Instead of repeating some of the same things year after year, I would like to make a request from all of our readers. Please e-mail me at [rjo@navix.net](mailto:rjo@navix.net) or call me at 484-5757 with any questions about a problem with your house that others in the CCNA area could learn from or maybe something we should include in the next article. Finally, a couple of weeks ago, while at a convention in Cincinnati, I had a chance to meet with a man who has a great website with plenty of answers to do-it-yourselfers: [askthebuilder.com](http://askthebuilder.com). Mr. Carter is a nationally syndicated newspaper columnist who has years of experience in the construction and remodeling industry.