



## Light up, Pikeville!

For more information, email [lightuppikeville@gmail.com](mailto:lightuppikeville@gmail.com) or visit the Light Up Pikeville Facebook page.

Last Christmas the city of Pikeville’s “Light up Pikeville” project transformed the downtown area into a winter wonderland, a “Hallmark Movie” inspired town here in the Sequatchie Valley.

The transformation was the dream of Lola Sells — caterer, past owner of the Vaughn House Tea Room, current owner of “It’s Lola’s” antiques and collectibles shop and one of Pikeville’s most beloved citizens. “I was watching a Hallmark Christmas movie in the spring of 2021, and they had all the trees and buildings on the streets in that little town lit up for Christmas,” said Sells. “I walked out on my steps and looked at our little town and thought, ‘We could be a Hallmark town!’”

Sells posted her belief on Facebook and received more than 200 comments in agreement. Making a list of interested people, she began her campaign to transform the town for the Christmas season. She began talking up the idea to everyone she knew and even visitors to town who came into her shop or whom she met on the street. “I was possessed,” said Sells.

Her next post on Facebook was to let people know what was needed: lights, wreaths, bows — anything that would work to light up and decorate the town. “People started bringing in lights and wreaths, and I started buying up bags and totes of lights at yard sales,” said Sells. “I was getting overwhelmed. I had to get a storage unit to house it all!”

“Fortunately, Jeff Henry, a retiree from the Knoxville area and owner of the Red Bird Manor, stepped up, offered to help and was a life saver. He helped with everything!”

“I had already called Bledsoe Telephone Co-op and SVEC, the chamber of commerce and the city and county mayors and had gotten all the proper approvals. I wasn’t sure what they would think about the project, but they were very enthusiastic. By then it was already time for the Fall Festival — the first weekend in October — and we still had a LOT to do!”

“Then Jeff and I had to start raising funds. I realized that just buying up yard sale lights wasn’t going to get the job done!” Sells exclaimed.

The town of Pikeville awarded the project \$10,000. With that commitment, a professional lighting company, NoogaLights, was contacted to get quotes for lighting the buildings. John Haustein, the owner, and his crews took care of the hard tasks — lighting that needed tall ladders, lifts and professionals to do the job safely. With those commitments in place, donations from other businesses and individuals began pouring in to fund the rest of the project.

“One of the area nurseries agreed to donate a huge tree for the courthouse lawn,” said Sells. “Jeff and I selected the tree, and the city of Pikeville sent workers to the farm to dig it up and get it set at the courthouse. The SVEC crew came with their bucket truck and put up wreaths on the second-story windows at the historic Ross house. Businesses up and down Main Street began lighting and decorating their buildings. The community was really embracing the project. It brought love from the town and the outlying communities. But when John Haustein lit up the water tank, the program just exploded! When I drove through town and saw the water tank lit up, I knew we’d really done it. The dream was now a reality.”

“When we started planning events for the Main Street Stage, the Garden Club volunteered to decorate that whole area, which included 17 trees! It was beautiful.”

The stage was the site of the Light Up Pikeville beauty pageants and numerous concerts, including the kickoff night concert by hometown musical artist Carrie Hassler. A “Sip ‘n’ Shop” Market was held on the lawn at the Red Bird Manor with craft and gift vendors selling an array of crafts, food and other holiday-related items.

While the initial goal of Sells, Henry and the many volunteers who helped transform the town into a winter wonderland was beautification, the other equally important goal was to attract visitors to support the local shops, restaurants, gas stations and other tourism-fueled businesses in Pikeville.

The events were publicized on BTC Fiber's local access TV channel, the Main Street Pikeville Committee's YouTube channel and on social media. SVEC included the activities in the bill insert newsletter, *The Tennessee Magazine* included it in the Tennessee Almanac listing of community events in November and the Bledsonian Banner and Chattanooga Times Free Press both ran front-page stories promoting the town and its holiday events.

The publicity worked. The Light Up Pikeville kickoff was held in conjunction with the 25th annual Christmas Parade. The lighted event held the day after Thanksgiving was the largest in the town's history. An estimated 3,500 people lined the streets that night for the festivities. Holiday-related activities on the Main Street Stage and at other venues downtown during the kickoff and the following Saturdays in December were also well attended and provided additional boosts to the local economy.

However, the events that were most dear to the heart of Sells, and many other committee members were the ones that had neighbors out meeting and getting to know each other while enjoying their hometown.

"One of my favorite events was the Ugly Sweater Contest," said Sells. "Volunteer Michelle Collier put a lot of time into organizing and running the contest. It gave people who couldn't help with one of the other projects a fun way to get involved with the festivities. Then there was Patsy Pend-



The towering Christmas tree and beautifully lighted and decorated courthouse were the centerpieces of the Light Up Pikeville project.

ergrass, a retired teacher who got 700 wooden bell-shaped ornaments made. Then, to get the elementary school students involved in the program, she had them decorate the ornaments with silver glitter to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Christmas Parade.

"This year we are involving the high school FFA Club members by having them decorate hay bales at the fairgrounds. We are expanding the lights out that way to a few more streets paralleling the bypass and getting the lights out earlier.

"The Fall Festival changed their lights from orange to white this year so that we wouldn't have to take down one set of lights and replace them. As soon as the Fall Festival was over, we began putting up more of the lights. The Christmas decorations and the rest of the lights will go up after the Halloween Boo Bash.

"There is nothing you don't learn from. I have met and become friends with so many people I didn't know before starting this project. A lot of people are moving into the area to retire, and they want to get involved in their new community and get to know their neighbors. This project has really brought us all together to boost our economy and to celebrate and enjoy our wonderful town. People of all ages and backgrounds, people who have lived here all their lives and those who have just moved here — they have all pitched in to make this dream a reality. It just warms my heart!"

## Light Up Pikeville

### Downtown Pikeville

#### Nov. 12 - Light Up Pikeville Kickoff

- 10 a.m. Light Up Pikeville, Beauty Pageant, Main Street Stage
- 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. "Sip 'n Shop" Market, Red Bird Manor, 2827 Main St.
- Lighting of the Fairgrounds — Decorations by BCHS FFA
- 6 p.m. Cruise-In Parade followed by Carrie Hassler in concert on the Main Street Stage

#### Nov. 26 - Lighted Christmas Parade

- 6 p.m. - Parade, Main Street
- Music on the Main Street Stage after the parade

The following three Saturdays in December will feature other special events.

- Food trucks available at all events.

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