

Illinois is Aglow with Holiday Magic This Season

Chicago (November 6, 2000) – The sights and sounds of the holidays come to life in Illinois this season! Every corner of the state sparkles with holiday activities, from light shows to parades to designer tree displays. Whether you are nestled close on a carriage ride, window shopping along picturesque streets or listening to strolling carolers, Illinois is the perfect place for a winter getaway.

The North Pole of Illinois

Get into the spirit of the season at **Oregon's Candlelight Walk** on November 18. The holiday fun starts at the tree lighting ceremony with an appearance by Santa himself. Visitors to the festival can enjoy live music, marvel at the nativity scene, warm up at the marshmallow roast and take a carriage ride around the luminary-lit town. For those who have already made their lists, stores are open late and many offer refreshments to help keep up that holiday energy.

Just a short drive from Oregon in **Dixon**, the **11th Annual Festival of Trees** takes place November 22-26. Visitors can see dozens of distinctively decorated tree and light displays, find one-of-a-kind gifts at the country store and wander through the hearth and home room displays at this festival at Sauk Valley Community College.

The **Luminary Walk in Freeport** on December 9 surrounds visitors with nature's beauty. Narrated candlelight tours allow participants to learn about the different trees and wildlife that thrive in the area during the winter months. To warm up from the winter chill, visitors can head to the Oakdale Nature Preserve Lodge to enjoy warm drinks and sweet treats.

Ottawa welcomes the season at its **Festival of Lights Parade** on November 24-26. A dozen lighted floats will amaze on-lookers as they pass by on their way to Washington Square in the heart of downtown Ottawa. After the parade, the floats will line the square to give visitors an up-close view.

Rockford glows with spirit this holiday season. The **Holiday Festival of Lights** at Sinnissippi Park from November 26 – December 31 features twinkling light displays showcasing the delightful sights of the season. At the **Luminary Walk and Music Festival** visitors can explore nature along the candlelit trail on December 8 – 9 at the Severson Dells Forest Preserve. After the walk, visitors can enjoy folk music while sipping hot chocolate inside the Environmental Education Center.

The Holiday Cheer of Central Illinois

Visitors to **Mattoon's Lightworks** can drive through Peterson Park to view dozens of innovative light displays from November 10 – December 26. Created for old and young alike, this may be the only place this year to see Santa slam dunking a basketball or driving a car.

Urbana provides a unique holiday activity at its **Candles Over Prairie Grove Festival**. Look towards the sky to see the display of holiday hot air balloons light up the evening. Afterwards, visitors can warm up with hot chocolate as they view the balloons up close, enjoy live music, holiday craft making and illuminated hikes along Busey Woods Trail. This year's festivities are scheduled for December 1, 2 or 3. A final date will be determined by the most optimal weather conditions for the balloons. Please call the Anita Purves Nature Center at (217) 384-4062 for the exact date.

The **Victorian Splendor Lights Festival** transforms **Shelbyville's** Forest Park into a winter wonderland throughout December. Feel like a kid again standing among 30-foot toy soldiers, trumpeting angels and snowmen. See more than 400 dazzling light displays when touring the Winter Wonderland, Winter Carnival, Victorian Village and Toyland. Leave your car in the lot and kick back in a trolley or horse-drawn carriage for a tour of the festival.

In **Springfield**, visitors can celebrate **Christmas in Mr. Lincoln's Neighborhood**. From December 2 – January 1, travelers can see replicas of the holiday decorations used on Abraham Lincoln's home. Also in Springfield, the **Dana Thomas House Christmas Celebration** takes place December 6 – 31. Live music, luminaries and special evening tours help complement the distinctive architecture of this Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home to give it a warm holiday glow.

Shoppers at the **Christmas in Illinois Amish Country** in **Tuscola** are taken back to seasons past with cobblestone roads and old-fashioned family fun December 1 – 10. Shoppers can experience "The Best of the Country" at an Amish bakery, general store and furniture store while learning about the unique Amish culture. There are also a variety of other places to shop including a Victorian store, a store dedicated to the state of Illinois and old-fashioned country shops with gifts for even the most particular friends and family.

Frosty Fun in Western Illinois

The annual **Parade of Lights** kicks-off **East Peoria's Festival of Lights** on November 25. Through December 31, East Peoria's spectacular display of more than one

million lights greets festival-goers as they enter town. A fireworks show sets the stage for holiday fun, with displays before and after the parade. Specially selected holiday music creates the perfect backdrop for the more than 40 stunning floats that light up the night. Floats will remain on display in the winter wonderland throughout the festival for visitors to enjoy again and again. Get in the spirit of the season by exploring the enchanted forest, a narrated nativity scene and a marketplace complete with gift ideas and holiday sensations, featuring elaborate gingerbread creations and baked goods.

Peoria is bursting with holiday activities. Visitors can warm up under the glow of hundreds of candles along Luthy Botanical Garden's **Candle Walk** November 17 – December 16. For a seasonal touch, the **Poinsettia Show** runs in conjunction with the Candle Walk, from November 17 – January 2. Check out the best of summer and winter while wandering through a trail of brightly colored poinsettias mixed with tropical flora, creating a different kind of seasonal wonderland. Visitors can also see the **113th Annual Santa Claus Parade** on November 24, the nation's longest running parade. Set this year to the theme of *2001: A Christmas Odyssey*, parade goers can see floats, costumed characters and local band competitions.

Quincy's festivals let visitors capture the splendid sights and spectacular shopping of Christmas. **The Avenue of Lights** sprinkles the town with holiday cheer November 22 – January 1. This animated lights festival spans two miles and features more than 40 individual displays. Get a jump on holiday shopping at the **Country Treasures Folk Art and Craft Show** November 17 – 19. Shoppers can choose from thousands of one-of-a-kind handmade items for a truly personalized gift.

Visitors to **Bishop Hill** can learn how to celebrate an authentic **Scandinavian Christmas** from November 11 – December 9. The **Julmarknad Christmas Market** satisfies those craving a taste of international culture with music, food and of course, shopping on the weekends of November 24 – 26 and December 2 – 3. Bishop Hill is home to numerous gift and specialty stores where imported Swedish crafts abound. After working up an appetite, feast on traditional Scandinavian food including lingonberries and lutefisk while enjoying traditional Swedish holiday music.

The Seasonal Spirit of Southern Illinois

Travelers are invited to the first-ever **Holiday Lights Fair** from November 24 – January 1 at the **DuQuoin State Fairgrounds**. Experience the atmosphere of a summer carnival with light displays including the Blue Ribbon Arena, the Midway, towering musical instruments at the Grandstand and a nine-foot ice cream cone. After touring the fair, the Exhibition Hall offers an elaborate display of decorated trees and choral performances inside and out.

In Southwestern Illinois, **The Parade of Lights** illuminates **Highland** with the spirit of the season on November 24. Parade-goers keep warm by sipping hot chocolate and listening to a chorus while dozens of floats wind their way through downtown Highland. After the parade, Santa sets the rest of the town aglow when he throws the switch to light the town square.

In **Alton**, travelers can participate in the **Celebration of Christmas** from November 17 – December 27. More than two million lights help to capture Christmas memories through the eyes of a child. A tunnel of lights leads drivers past giant rocking

chairs, toys, decorated houses and dozens of other animated displays. The celebration, which features a Victorian/Dickens theme this year, includes two “walkers only” nights, November 20 and November 27, to let visitors experience the lighted wonders up close.

Recently voted one of the American Bus Association’s Top 100 Events, the annual **Way of Lights in Belleville** is a sight to behold. The town’s National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows illuminates the Christmas Story with more than one million twinkling lights November 17 – January 7. In the Visitors Center, area choirs singing seasonal favorites provide travelers with the perfect backdrop to wander among dozens of sparkling trees, take a horse drawn carriage ride around the grounds or explore a Christmas Village.

Winter Wonderland in the Windy City

The **9th Annual Magnificent Mile Lights Festival** on November 18 – 19 illuminates Michigan Avenue for the entire season. After the switch is flipped, a spectacular fireworks display marks the official start of the holidays in **Chicago**. Throughout the weekend, shoppers can hunt for bargains, stroll through the Winter Walk, explore the life-size gingerbread house and meet Mr. and Mrs. Claus along Michigan Avenue.

Chicago’s Lincoln Park Zoo welcomes the season with its **Annual ZooLights Festival** from November 24 – January 7. Enchanting displays of polar bears, penguins, lions, rhinos, giraffes, elephants and more come to life as Penny the Penguin flips the switch to illuminate the animals. This year’s festival features a variety of family

activities including a gingerbread house display, holiday crafts and rides on the children's train.

Frankfort celebrates the beginning of the holiday season with the **Christkindle Weekend** November 24 – 26. This traditional Bavarian village will put visitors in the holiday spirit with decorated shops, seasonal music, storytellers and the smell of fresh roasted chestnuts. St. Nicholas will be on-hand to take a poll of who has been naughty and nice.

The Chicago Botanic Garden in **Glencoe** will be wrapped in holiday cheer as **Celebrations! A Festival of Lights and Flowers** blooms November 24 – December 31. Inside, festival-goers can enjoy strolling carolers, ice sculptures, storytelling and the magnificent indoor gardens including the area's biggest display of poinsettias. Outside, explore more than a half-million lights and decorated trees on a carriage ride through the grounds.

Historic **Long Grove** takes on an old-fashioned charm during the **Countryside Christmas** festival November 17 – December 31. Carolers singing the season's favorites and Victorian buildings glittering with thousands of lights enhance the holiday atmosphere while visitors stroll past dozens of antique and specialty shops. To heighten the holiday spirit, take a picture-perfect horse-and-carriage ride through a covered bridge, see Father Christmas and check on his reindeer.

Vernon Hills promises holiday magic with the **Winter Wonderland Holiday Light Show** at the Cuneo Museum and Gardens. The Holiday Light Show creates a fairytale-like setting with millions of twinkling lights and animated light displays November 24 – January 2. Children of all ages will be immersed in fantasy with displays

that bring storybook characters to life. The towering Christmas tree and seasonal foliage and flowers at the Cuneo Museum and Gardens will make a holiday-lover out of any Scrooge.

Holiday lights point the way through **Oak Park's** art studios and shops on December 1 – 3 at the **Holiday Lights Air Studio Walk**. Each studio offers different types of holiday music, refreshments, activities and of course, unique holiday gift ideas.

St. Charles shines brightly when the mayor throws the switch at the **Lighting of the Lights** on November 22. A brass ensemble and two choirs will entertain the town as they await the arrival of Santa Claus, who officially begins the season.

From family adventures to romantic getaways, Illinois offers a holiday experience for everyone. For detailed information on these and hundreds of other holiday events and attractions across Illinois, or to plan a customized trip, call an Illinois Travel Counselor at 1-800-2CONNECT (TTY: 1-800-406-6418) or visit the Illinois Web site at www.enjoyillinois.com.

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The Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA), Bureau of Tourism works to enhance the economic development climate for the citizens of Illinois.

Editors note: To receive additional slides of Illinois' magical winter landscapes or holiday festivals, call the Illinois News Bureau at 312-240-2605.

For information, contact: Sarah Mathay
Edelman Public Relations
Ph: 312-297-7026
Fax: 312-240-2901
E-mail: sarah.mathay@edelman.com

Slide Captions:

Sleigh Ride – Galena, IL

It's lovely weather for a sleigh ride together with the whole family.

East Peoria Festival of Lights – East Peoria, IL

Enjoy the twinkling floats and remember why this is the most wonderful time of the year.

First Night – Springfield, IL

While stoplights are blinking a bright red and green, all of Springfield is illuminated with a rainbow of dazzling lights.