



Clarendon Hills Infant Welfare president Jen Alsmann, vice president Melissa Woodbury, out-of-town luminaria chair Anne Marie Bodrozic and in-town luminaria chairs Kim Peterson and Susan Overbey.

## *Lighting up the parks*

### Clarendon Hills Infant Welfare seeks to expand luminaria sales in 2020

BY MIKE ELLIS/PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAROLINA MENAPACE

Most organizations have been forced to adapt due to the Coronavirus pandemic, converting traditionally in-person events to virtual ones, which have often resulted in diminished revenues. But one non-profit that has a traditional fundraiser that dates back more than half a century hopes that the circumstances the pandemic has imposed will actually assist in growing it.

If you happen to pass through Clarendon Hills on Christmas Eve after sunset, you will be immediately struck

by a beautiful, glistening display of lights aligning the streets. These lights are the product of an intricate series of roughly 20,000 *luminaria*, or lanterns, consisting

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- MELISSA WOODBURY, vice president, CHIW

of single candles enveloped by brown paper-bags.

Started in the mid-1960s, Christmas

Eve luminaria is organized annually by the Clarendon Hills chapter of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago auxiliary (CHIW), and all proceeds from kit sales are directed towards the parent organization.

“It’s not just beautiful, but the money that we make from selling the luminaria goes to a really good cause,” said Susan Overbey, co-chair of in-town luminaria sales for the chapter.

According to Overbey, the tradition originated with CHIW members, who inherited it from the Southwest.

“The idea is that you light up the paper-bags, and on Christmas Eve, they create

hopefully an unbroken chain of lights on the streets of Clarendon Hills,” she said.

Overbey, a Hinsdale native, said growing up, her family would pass through Clarendon Hills on Christmas Eve to view the luminaria.

“It’s a special tradition that people from all over the area come to see,” she said.

Because the activity involves the collaboration of individuals each placing the lanterns on their own properties, chapter members believe it will not suffer from the pandemic, but in fact, may indirectly benefit.

“The biggest impact that Coronavirus is having on luminaria is that we are making a bigger impact this year with this effort to bring the community together, and also for the cause,” CHIW vice president Melissa Woodbury said.

“We know people are going to be around more on Christmas Eve, and maybe with not being able to go to church or out to dinner, something for everyone to be able to do,” chapter president Jen Alsmann said.

This year, CHIW desires to “light up the parks,” setting up luminaria throughout Prospect and Hosek Parks, at village hall and in sundry triangles scattered throughout the village, such as the J. Kenneth Sloan Memorial Triangle in the downtown business district and the triangle at the intersection of Prospect and Harris Aves. about a block to the southward.

“The hope is that we will be able to light up all of Prospect Park, and if we sell more than that, other parks within the village, to expand luminaria this year, and raise more money for the health clinic,” Overbey said.

In order to illuminate these public spaces, the chapter is seeking sponsorships from corporations and residential blocks.

Overbey said typically, homeowners might purchase three or four kits for their house, but this season, “we would encourage homeowners to consider buying an extra kit that would go towards this year’s ‘light up the parks’ initiative.”

CHIW members and their families will place the luminaria in the parks, along with the chapter’s new junior board, comprised of kids eighth grade and older in the community.

Alsmann said the number of illuminated



spaces “depends on the number of sponsors that we get.”

The chapter also sells luminaria kits to other auxiliary chapters, neighborhood associations and golf clubs in the western suburbs.

Anne Marie Bodrozic, the CHIW out-of-town luminaria chair, said the chapter has observed “an increased interest this year” from outside groups.

“More communities or streets have heard about the tradition, and want to bring it to their own neighborhoods and towns,” Bodrozic said. “I think that that’s a real positive, that the light will be spreading to additional communities this year to help this good organization.”

CHIW members prepared luminaria kits at the Lions Park Pool pavilion on Nov. 7. According to Overbey, each of the chapter’s 50 members is responsible for wrapping 80 kits, all of which contain five candles. Some CHIW members picked up their supplies to perform the wrapping at home.

“I know a lot of people’s children really like wrapping them,” Overbey said.

Alsmann said the activity presented a nice opportunity for chapter members to gather together.

“All of our meetings have been over Zoom,” she said. “We got lucky that it was so beautiful, that we could all come together and socially-distance.”

Kits are stored and sold at the pavilion, which is managed by the Clarendon Hills Lions Club.

“[The Clarendon Hills] Lions Club has

generously let us use this space year after year, and is a very important partner in our sales,” said Kimberly Peterson, co-chair of in-town luminaria sales.

Luminaria will also be sold beginning at the end of November at Clarendon Hills Bank, Kramer Foods in Hinsdale and online, with Web purchasers possessing the option of having kits delivered to their homes.

Aggregately, the chapter purchases approximately 25,000 candles, and came close to selling out last year. It generally raises approximately \$25,000 through luminaria sales—CHIW’s second-largest fundraiser behind its annual benefit in January.

At \$6 per kit, Woodbury said the purchase of ten kits “would cover two health visits for a client at the Angel Harvey [Family] Health Center”—Infant Welfare’s clinic on the Northwest Side of Chicago that provides medical treatment to uninsured and under-insured individuals.

“You’re covering doctor visits for people who don’t have any other options,” she said, “just by lighting up your house.”

*The Clarendon Hills chapter of the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago will be selling luminaria at the Lions Park Pool pavilion, Clarendon Hills Bank, Kramer Foods and online leading up to Christmas Eve. Prime viewing spots for the picturesque scene after sunset on Christmas Eve include Notre Dame Catholic Church, Walker Elementary School and Norfolk and Golf Aves. All proceeds from luminaria sales will be directed towards the Infant Welfare Society of Chicago. For more information about the chapter, visit [www.clarendonhillsinfantwelfare.org](http://www.clarendonhillsinfantwelfare.org).*