

Sights and Sounds, holiday gift to community

By **CHRISTIE L. SMITH**

Imagine nearly a half-million lights shimmering on a chilly night along the San Marcos River, creating a magical wonderland.

Throw in Santa sightings, children's activities, food, crafts, music and more and you'll get a holiday present too wonderful to miss December 6-8 at Sights and Sounds in San Marcos.

There will be live music and performers, including the Sahawe Indian Dancers; food vendors cooking up Tex-Mex, barbecue, hamburgers, funnel cakes and more; craft vendors offering an array of special gift items; sock-skating; and, always a crowd-pleaser, the live Nativity.

"The river is just transformed," says Jackie Cable, Sights and Sounds committee president. "I say it's magic, because we go down there, and then in four or five days with all the greenery and the wreaths and the lights...well, the children's faces when they see it - it's just magic and it means everything."

Kyle resident Trish Murphy has attended Sights and Sounds every year for the last eight years, and it's hands-down her favorite holiday event.

"They have the midway stuff and the rides, all the food vendors, then they have the gifts and all that kind of stuff, but my favorite part is walking through

the living Nativity, and seeing the angels over the entry way, it's just the coolest," Trish says.

Kids of all ages have an opportunity to feed live camels and other animals inside the Nativity area, a reconstruction of Bethlehem with characters dressed in period costumes.

Santa arrives Thursday evening, and will be on hand to hear Christmas wishes each night.

Corporate sponsor Time Warner Cable provides one free photo for every child, and families have the option to purchase more photos.

A 75-foot Christmas Tree of Lights offers a dazzling display under which kids can twirl themselves dizzy.

Free musical performances take place on the main stage area, and a children's activity area offers sock-skating, craft making, and an opportunity to ride the Sights and Sounds Express Train and Christmas Carousel.

The marketplace this year will showcase more than 50 vendors.

"The vendors come from all over the state of Texas," Jackie explains, "and they offer a wide variety of things such as ironwork, artwork, candles, cosmetic products, and even a vendor who makes beautiful things out of old silverware."

Most of the food vendors are mem-

bers of small community groups such as the Scouts and local churches. Jackie says these groups often make enough money to fund their programs for an entire year. "The food is always good," Jackie smiles. "For the first time last year I tried pork-chop on a stick. It was marvelous."

With more than 30 food vendors this year, there's a lot of variety, but one of Jackie's favorite foods at the event is the hot biscuits. "On a chilly night to have a hot biscuit around the campfire with butter and honey, it's to die for," she says.

Trish chooses a different item to rhapsodize over, "They have the best kettle corn in the whole wide world, that's a fact," she shares.

Jackie has worked on the Sights and Sounds Committee since the event first began 21 years ago.

"It's a Christmas gift to the community, particularly the children," she says.. It is estimated crowds will average about 20,000 a night at this popular event.

FYI • Sights and Sounds is December 6-8 from 6 PM to 10:30 PM on the San Marcos Plaza at 202 C.M. Allen Parkway.

Free parking and a shuttle will be available from the Bobcat Stadium parking lot located on Aquarena Springs Drive, off IH-35, exit #206. Shuttles run every 15 minutes from 5 PM to 11 PM. Admission is free.

For more information, call the San Marcos Chamber of Commerce at 512-393-5900 or visit the web site at www.sights-n-sounds.org.