

It's a Capitol Christmas

Nelson presides over lighting

BY KELLI LACEY
Staff Reporter

A 30-foot tree, 219 colored bulbs, 93 bows and Gov. Ben Nelson made up the celebration.

The 50th Nebraska State Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony took place Sunday in the rotunda of the Nebraska Capitol.

The ceremony was presented by Lincoln's Pinewood Bowl, KFOR-AM (1240) and the Lincoln Jaycees. The ceremony included music, which was broadcast live on KFOR, from the Holy Trinity Adult Hand Bell Choir, the Accent Brass Quintet and the Lincoln All-City Girls Choir, who sang, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

The music resonated throughout the high stone ceilings of the rotunda, and was so loud that the 200 people there could hardly talk to each other.

Whether the public came because of friends in the brass, children in the choir or just to participate in the Christmas season, the lighting ceremony drew a full house Sunday afternoon.

Barbara Rixstine and Jim Danielson, both of Lincoln, came to watch their friend play in the Accent Brass Quintet. They said they also came to show their spirit for the Christmas season.

After the music, Nelson, dressed in his usual black suit, gave a holiday message on the appreciation of Nebraska during the season. He was then in charge of lighting the Christmas tree.

Finally, the ceremony ended with an all-audience sing-along, including favorites such as "Jingle Bells," "The First Noel" and "Joy to the World."

Nelson comes to light the tree not only because it is the governor's duty, he said, but because the "tree celebrates the spirit of the season." Each of the tree's 93 bows represents one of Nebraska's counties.

"I think it's appropriate that in this tree-planters' state, our holiday celebration is centered around trees. After the devastating impact of the October storm, it is especially meaningful this year because we recognize the days ahead in which tree planting will become important," Nelson said.

The tree is donated every year by a Lincoln resident. This year, Lorin Krantz, a north Lincoln resident, donated the Douglas Fir. The retired state employee planted the tree in his backyard 18 years ago. Because of its 30-foot height, the tree had outgrown its space in the yard and had to go. This year's tree was the largest ever.

"The generosity that Lorin Krantz has given to all of us by donating this tree represents a perfect example for all of us this holiday sea-



son," Nelson said. "So, I encourage all Nebraskans to do something to brighten someone else's holiday this year as this tree brightens our holidays."

This year, the ceremony was special because of its golden anniversary. Fifty years ago, at the first lighting, a huge snowstorm hit Lincoln, preventing the lighting from taking place outside. Since then, the ceremony was moved into the rotunda of the Capitol.

The tree will be up through New Year's Day and is available to view during the Capitol's regular building hours. Roxanne Smith, Capitol tour supervisor, urges the public to come and view the tree in the evenings because the sunset shines in through the windows.

After the New Year, the tree will be recycled into wood chips which could possibly be spread around the Capitol plant beds.

Nelson plans to spend the holidays at home and is thankful that all of his children will be able to make it home for Christmas.

"So, I say happy holidays from my family to yours, and best wishes for a new year of progress and prosperity for all Nebraska."



ABOVE: ACCENT BRASS, a brass quintet, plays to a full crowd during the 50th annual Nebraska State Christmas Tree Lighting and Carol Sing.

LEFT: NANCY YOUNGMAN directs the Holy Trinity Adult Hand Bell Choir during the Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the Capitol.

TOP: (from left to right) SUSAN AND MIKE NAGLE of Lincoln sing carols during the Christmas tree lighting ceremony at the Capitol while their son Michael, 2½, sleeps.



LEFT: CONNIE HECKMAN reads in one of the halls of the State Capitol while listening to the music echoing from the Christmas tree lighting ceremony. Heckman said she was studying for a literature final.

Photos by
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Happy Holidays from the Daily
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