



# CREATING A GLOW

A new holiday tradition takes hold  
in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

BY IAN ALDRICH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVEN VOTE

**A**s a child growing up in Darien, Connecticut, Carrie McGraw learned the value of a tight-knit community, especially when the holidays rolled around. That was when her hometown, and several others surrounding it, came together for “Luminary Night,” an event that saw thousands of homeowners line their driveways and yards with glowing tealights placed inside white bags. More than just fighting off—for one evening, anyway—December’s long, dark days, these festive decorations were a social catalyst, bringing neighbors together for potlucks, caroling, and hayrides. “It was a great way to get back to the simplicity of things,” says McGraw.

And so, three years ago, this mother of three, who had moved to the Boston suburb of Wellesley, Massachusetts, with her husband in 2002, decided to re-create the tradition in her new home. With a friend, McGraw lined up donated materials (bags, tealights, and candle stands), worked out the pricing structure (\$15 for a kit of 12 lumi-

naries), assembled an information sheet and order form, and made arrangements to donate the sales money to a local aid organization. Then, with their children in tow, the two women set out on foot, knocking on doors, talking up the event, and taking orders—more orders, in fact, than they’d expected. “People really liked the message,” says McGraw, who ended up selling 125 kits and raising more than \$3,200. “They got to help out local neighbors in need, it was inexpensive, and it was something the whole family could be involved in.”

Fast-forward a year, to December 2008, and Wellesley’s Luminary Night, now a major charitable fundraiser under the auspices of the Wellesley Hills Junior Woman’s Club, has



Laurel Lyle (left) and Carrie McGrow (right) check assembled luminaries. Their 2008 effort raised almost \$20,000 for the nonprofit Wellesley Friendly Aid Association from the sale of more than 1,000 kits.



THIS PAGE, kids gather around a warm fire as outdoor festivities take over the neighborhood. OPPOSITE, FROM TOP: Luminaries are assembled from supplies donated by the local Roche Bros. market, Green's Hardware, and White Mountain Creamery (the candle stands are water-filled plastic food containers); a welcoming glow beckons visitors; families set up outdoor tables with refreshments for guests who happen by.



become a big part of the holiday season in the community. It's pushing just past four in the afternoon, and McGraw, along with her new event co-chair, Laurie Slifka, and a few other friends are having a glass of wine and milling about in McGraw's kitchen. Work that began in the winter, followed by another round of door-to-door sales calls in October, has resulted in an expansion that now includes some 30 neighborhoods, including a number of newer households, as well as 35 local businesses. All told, the group has sold well over 1,000 kits, raising almost \$20,000—money that will go to a local food pantry, help defray the cost of summer-camp programs, and connect seniors with needed medical equipment, among other things.

At a little after five, the event is in full force. Yards sparkle with luminaries lining driveways and yards and, along with the holiday lights already strung around trees and homes, giving the area an elegant glow. The chilly temperatures? Nobody seems to notice.

A few streets over from McGraw's home, Suzanne Doherty lays out a full buffet of shrimp, cheese, cookies, and wine for any folks who want to stop by. And they do, lingering, talking, and partaking of seconds. Just around the corner, Peter MacGregor and his dad, Roy, owners of Maple Shade Farm in Groton, are escorting two large, rust-colored Belgian horses—Jake and Dan—from a trailer. Their mission: hayrides for the kids.

"Oh, my God, those horses are humongous!" exclaims one boy, who looks to be about 7, stuffed into his big blue parka. "They're gigantic!" shouts out his friend, jumping up and down.

Half a block away, Kevin Ouellette, a recent Wellesley arrival, is huddled around a small fire with a couple of buddies, listening to a New England Patriots game over the radio. "It's a small community," says Mike Stanton, one of Ouellette's friends. "It's natural that this would take off."

A few miles away, the scene at Laurie Slifka's house is pure block party. Ten or so kids are stationed around a large fire, roasting marshmallows for s'mores, while a crowd of adults stand around them, laughing it up. There's talk about work, children, upcoming school vacations. It's exactly what the evening's founder envisioned.

"During the summer the area really comes together," says Carrie McGraw. "But in the winter we all sort of hibernate and don't see one another. This is a way to break that up and see people again."

*Last year's Luminary Night (December 6, 2009), organized by Trish Bradley and Sara Bavaro, included more than 70 streets. The 2010 celebration is scheduled for Sunday, December 5. For details and photos, visit: [whjwc.org/content/luminary.asp](http://whjwc.org/content/luminary.asp)*

