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Holiday Tree Lighting sets the mood for upcoming season

MONMOUTH – Western Oregon University's 38th annual Holiday Tree Lighting marks the beginning of this season's holiday cheer with the tree lighting festivities beginning at 6:30 p.m. on the Instructional Technology Center steps on Wednesday, November 30.

The outdoor program features WOU student Chris Buckley welcoming the campus and community with the carillon bells then the WOU Brass Ensemble and Chamber Singers will perform. WOU President John P. Minahan and Monmouth Mayor Larry Dalton will share their holiday greetings. Minahan will then introduce the elementary school coloring and essay contest winners and the winning essay will be read. The essay question asked children to talk about something they treasure that they would share with those affected by the hurricanes. The winner of the essay contest will then light the tree, which signals the parade to commence.

Immediately following the parade the indoor program at Werner University Center will begin. Santa Claus will be available for visits in the Oregon Room, crafts for children will be available and the WOU Chamber Singers will perform again. The Monmouth Elementary School Choir, Central High School Symphonic Choir and the Central High School Main Street Singers will perform in the Pacific Room.

The WOU Wind Ensemble will present a post tree lighting concert at 7:30 p.m. in Rice Auditorium. The WOU Bookstore, Wolf Express and Caffé Allegro will be open until 9 p.m.

Also, WOU students are collecting used clothing in good condition to share with local residents in need. Clothing may be dropped off at the ASWOU office in WUC until Wednesday, December 11.

The Giant Sequoia was lit briefly as a memorial in the 1940s. In 1967, elementary education major Gayna Meyers sought a decorating alternative when her dormitory, Todd Hall, was not allowed to use lights because of fire restrictions. She made a deal with Fire Chief Donald Milligan that if she could raise money to buy lights, the fire department would help place them on the tree. Meyers led a campus-wide project that raised \$300. The day before Thanksgiving she presented Milligan with about 1,500 strung lights. When she returned from the long Thanksgiving weekend, she saw that her efforts were rewarded; the tree was lit for the holidays.

The actual job of stringing the lights on the tree fell to WOU employee Vern McFarland. For several years, he would climb to the top and with a pulley system help guide the lights into place as he shouted to workers below.

Vern McFarland retired in 1997 after a long career at WOU as a repairman and locksmith. Workers now use a crane and communicate by radios to carefully place the lights on the tree.

WOU's annual Holiday Tree Lighting is free and open to the public. Hot chocolate will be provided free of charge at various locations throughout the event. For more information, contact the Aaron Worley at 503-838-8514.

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