



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**CONTACT:**

**Brenda Whitson  
Johnson City Convention  
& Visitors Bureau  
(423) 461-8010**

**Johnson City's Historic Sites and Attractions  
Transform for the Christmas Season**

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn.— With historical Christmas events and astounding light shows, the holiday spirit comes to life at a variety of local historic sites and major tourist attractions in Johnson City, Tenn. Visitors will be transported to Christmas past at the Johnson City historical Christmas festivals, 1818 Candlelight Christmas and Visions of Christmas. Visitors will also experience a unique aspect of local tourist attractions, transformed annually to showcase their seasonal spirit with light shows at the Festival of Trees and Night of Lights Gala and Speedway in Lights.

“Whether you are interested in experiencing a traditional holiday celebration or you want to be awed by thousands of lights and decorations, there is something for the entire family to enjoy when visiting Johnson City during the holiday season,” said Brenda Whitson, executive director of the Johnson City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

**Candlelight Christmas**

Each year since 1962, the Rocky Mount Museum and Living History Site hosts Candlelight Christmas, a Christmas celebration taking visitors back to 1791.

“Rocky Mount Museum truly gets visitors and the community in the Christmas spirit by rekindling this historic Christmas event every year. It reminds people what

Christmas was like before the commercialization of the season and really inspires the true reason for the season,” said Whitson.

The candle-lit event begins the first weekend of December, and uses music, dancing, decorations and sacred tales to create a historic festival, and relate the story of a special Christmas that dates back more than 200 years.

“The emphasis of our Christmas Program is that Christmas at Rocky Mount in 1791 was more ‘natural’ by necessity and design. So today we have more of a ‘festival’ focused on adults rather than children, obviously it’s less ‘commercial’ and our celebration is a longer duration of festivity lasting through until January 6,” said Gary Walrath, executive director of Rocky Mount Museum and Living History Site.

The Christmas program at Rocky Mount invites the visitors to step back to the year 1791 to experience the holiday season and life-ways just after the American Revolution.

“Candlelight Christmas features the main house and ancillary buildings decorated as they would have been in December 1791, awaiting the return of the territorial Governor William Blount and his family from North Carolina. Good discussion with the ‘first-person interpreters’ portraying the Cobb Family, Governor and Mrs. Blount and invited neighbors will prevail amidst the smells of good feasts and beverages of the day,” said Walrath.

Rocky Mount Museum and Living History Site annually hosts Candlelight Christmas. Rocky Mount creates interactive history through daily tours, educational programs and special events, that take visitors back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Candlelight Christmas tours are held from 4:30 until 8 p.m. Reservations are recommended. For information, call (888) 538-1791 or visit [www.rockymountmuseum.com](http://www.rockymountmuseum.com).

### **Visions of Christmas**

Tipton-Haynes Historic Site, located in Johnson City, is a live exhibit of the area’s history, dating back to the colonial era. Every year on the first Saturday of December, the museum holds the annual Visions of Christmas for visitors to the area.

“Over the years, the site has celebrated the holiday season based on a different year during the Civil War, so the program reflects the historical events of our region during the war,” said Penny McLaughlin, executive director with Tipton-Haynes historic site. “Each Christmas we celebrate a different year. We even did one year after the fall of the Confederacy, that truly was not a merry holiday, while in 1861, members of the Haynes family were very optimistic that the South would win the war, so it would be a very merry holiday season.”

Each year, Tipton-Haynes hosts the annual Visions of Christmas celebrations, taking visitors back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where they can join the Haynes family to commemorate a special Civil War Christmas celebration. The museum provides holiday music, food and drink, as well as activities for children.

Tipton-Haynes also provides annual special events, interactive tours, and educational programs in order to preserve the history of the Johnson City area. For more information call (423) 926-3631 or visit [www.tipton-haynes.org](http://www.tipton-haynes.org).

### **Festival of Trees and Night of Lights Gala**

For those who want to experience a wonderland of trees and holiday décor and help a good cause at the same time, the Festival of Trees is a unique way to enjoy the beginning of the holiday season. Held at the Hands On! Regional Museum, the family event takes place the first two weeks of November and showcases a variety of decorated trees and wreaths, as well as many other holiday decorations. The Festival of Trees is open to the public during normal museum hours and is free with museum admission.

The Festival of Trees gives visitors a preview of what is to come at the Night of Lights Gala, held annually the Friday before Thanksgiving. The events raise an estimated \$80,000 annually for the museum.

“The Festival of Trees and Night of Lights Gala has turned into a foremost annual Johnson City event that brings together people from different states to enjoy the Christmas season, while benefiting a great cause,” said Whitson. “Hands On! Regional Museum is a unique opportunity for all ages through the numerous exhibits and displays it offers and through the interactive educational experiences for children. The Festival of

Trees and Night of Lights Gala is the museum's annual fundraiser, and by supporting the museum, participants are continuing to allow the community this excellent resource."

The gala is a black-tie event, featuring a silent and voice auction, dinner and dancing. The Night of Lights gala features designer decorated trees and wreaths, as well as items donated by area businesses and individuals, including artwork, centerpieces, children's items, entertainment and dinner packages, trip packages and massage and fitness packages.

"With more than 100 items to choose from, the Night of Lights Gala is the perfect time to get a jump start on your holiday shopping before Thanksgiving," said Kristine Carter, marketing manager of Hands On! Regional Museum.

For 20 years, Hands On! has been engaging and educating children and families through exhibits and displays, daily outreach programs and festivals. The museum features distinctive exhibits that allow children to get a "hands on" experience with educational topics, such as art, science and technology. For more information call (423) 434-4263 or visit [www.handsonmuseum.org](http://www.handsonmuseum.org).

### **Speedway in Lights**

World-renowned Bristol Motor Speedway is the featured location for NASCAR events, such as the Nextel Cup and the Busch Series, with the world's fastest half-mile. For those looking to take a trip around the track, the Speedway in Lights celebration allows visitors to do just that, while raising money for a good cause.

At Speedway in Lights, guests can drive the five-mile route, allowing drivers to circle the concrete oval, the world's fastest half-mile oval, and the dragstrip at Bristol Dragway. The drive-through route, powered by Tennessee Valley Authority, showcases more than 1.5 million lights and 200 animated displays. The animated displays include Dinosaur Village, featuring an erupting volcano and dinosaurs; flying snowballs that construct a snowman; motorsports displays; and a cannon shot.

In addition to millions of lights and animated scenes, visitors to the speedway can skate the York Ice Skating Rink and visit the Christmas Village, which features crafts, roasted marshmallows and hot chocolate for the children.

The event was established as an outlet to give back to the local community, and it benefits the Bristol Chapter of Speedway Children's Charities. The non-profit charity has raised more than \$3 million for children's charities in northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia.

"We've had a tremendous last 10 years and we've been fortunate to be able to raise quite a bit of money, more than \$3 million, for needy children's organizations in this area. Every single person who visits Speedway In Lights is helping those children," said Claudia Byrd, chair of the Bristol Chapter of Speedway Children's Charities. "Those folks, our volunteers and all of our wonderful sponsors are responsible for making Speedway In Lights such a big success."

Bristol Motor Speedway is located in Bristol, 25 miles from Johnson City. For more information call (423)-989-6933 or visit [www.bristolmotorspeedway.com](http://www.bristolmotorspeedway.com).

Johnson City is located in Northeast Tennessee and is the fourth largest metropolitan city in the state. Set in a region known as America's First Frontier, Johnson City is "Where the Pioneer Spirit Began"—a historically significant and culturally rich community surrounded by an abundance of unspoiled natural beauty. Johnson City has a history, which dates back more than 200 years, and its culture embraces individual creativity and encourages innovation through expression. The area is world-renowned for its modern and traditional Appalachian and bluegrass music, art and cuisine, and outdoor recreation for the whole family throughout all four seasons. For more information on Johnson City, please visit [www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com](http://www.visitjohnsoncitytn.com) or call (423) 461-8000 or (800) 852-3392.

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