

1. Dazzle your family

Kansas City resident Diana Lambdin Meyer reflects on Christmas past and thrills to the glittering holiday lights of her Missouri hometown.

As my son unpacks boxes of holiday trimmings, our collection of The Mayor's Christmas Tree ornaments unleashes years of memories. He was just a few weeks old when I bought the first of these special wooden ornaments, transformed by a local Hallmark artist from a piece of the last year's community tree into a treasured family heirloom. We now own 18.

These ornaments represent a long-standing Christmas tradition, for our family and for a city that loves tradition. The Mayor's Tree, a magnificent Douglas fir standing taller than the one on the White House lawn, captures the magic of Christmas in Kansas City. Going to see it in the middle of bustling Crown Center, a hub of ice-skating, lights, and festivities, is a holiday rite we never miss. At the end of each year, the tree is recycled into 3,000 ornaments that are sold to support The Mayor's Christmas Tree Fund, which for more than 100 years has helped provide a beautiful holiday for Kansas City families in need.

On our mantel, a framed photo shows my son snuggled up to his Grammy, silhouetted by the unique architecture of Kansas City's Country Club Plaza. The nation's first planned suburban shopping district, its stunning Mediterranean

curves, outlined by 80 miles of lights and dotted with fountains and public art, transcend the average shopping mall. Our city is filled with backdrops like this, picture-perfect settings for family memories.

Children grow up. Cities change. But traditions ground us to our past, to each other, to the real meaning of the holidays. And the moments we spend with the people we love are the greatest gifts of all.

EDITOR'S PICKS: FAVORITE KC TRADITIONS

- **Horse-drawn carriage rides** through Country Club Plaza, a holiday custom since 1925. 816/531-2673 or 816/531-1999
- **Family photos atop the Hall Plaza's parking garage**, a secret spot with a backdrop of lights. 211 Nichols Road
- **Ice-skating, Christmas carols, and the gingerbread village** at Crown Center. crowncenter.com
- **Kansas City Repertory Theatre's** annual production of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* is now in its 30th year (November 19–December 26). kcrep.org or 816/235-2700
- **1950s Kansas City holiday decorations**, restored and put on nostalgic display in Zona Rosa, a retail village north of the river at I-29 and Barry Road. zonarosa.com or 816/587-8180

