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## **For Immediate Release**

### **Simcoe Christmas Panorama Celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

In 2008, the town of Simcoe, near Lake Erie will be looking back and celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first light show of its kind in Ontario. Over the years, as many things have changed as they have stayed the same, but the need to balance progress with tradition is a tight rope that is walked with diligence. Energy conservation and potential cost savings led to 90% of the lights being updated to the new LED technology. Today there are over 60 displays, but they still must fit into one of the three original categories; religious, traditional or fantasy. Many of these exhibits are three dimensional structures lovingly built by volunteers that will remind you of the department store windows of days long ago.

Years ago, the organizers of the towns annual Santa Claus Parade, abandoned parade floats in Wellington Park after yet another wet and miserable event. Together, they made a bold decision to try something new the following year. They dressed three new exhibits and the existing parade floats with lights and positioned them in the park for all to enjoy at their leisure. The Simcoe Christmas Panorama was born.

The Opening Night Ceremony on November 29th will kick-off five-weeks of festivities designed to get even Ebenezer himself into the spirit of the season. Crowds will gather to sing carols along with the live entertainment, witness the honorary guests light the park for the first time and cheer as Santa arrives on the antique fire truck.

The Simcoe Christmas Panorama is still shining with thousands of lights transforming downtown parks into a winter wonderland and it continues to attract motor coach tourists from across the province and the USA. Buses that register for our 45-minute tour are provided with an enthusiastic step on guide who will illuminate the history and beauty of the "River of Lights" show. Afterwards, they return to our "Welcome Centre", to enjoy some small town hospitality, warm up with hot drinks and shop over 30 local merchants in one convenient location.

Our community partners help us to offer free family events and activities throughout the festival. There are outdoor and indoor recreational activities, horse drawn trolley rides on weekends and a great New Years Eve celebration. For those families struggling to make ends meet it is a welcome opportunity to join in the festivities. The Spirit of Christmas is definitely alive and well in Norfolk County.

The Simcoe Christmas Panorama's success and longevity is due to the support of local Government, business owners, service clubs, board members and dedicated volunteers who recognize the value this event provides to the community's pride and economic stability. Our step- on- guides entice tourists to visit year round by promoting the experiences and amenities this small town community has to offer. We know that when we work together we all benefit from the increase in tourism.

It is thrilling for us to hear from visitors that generations of their family make an annual trip to the Simcoe Christmas Panorama and it is an integral part of their holiday celebration. After all we are all about honouring old traditions.