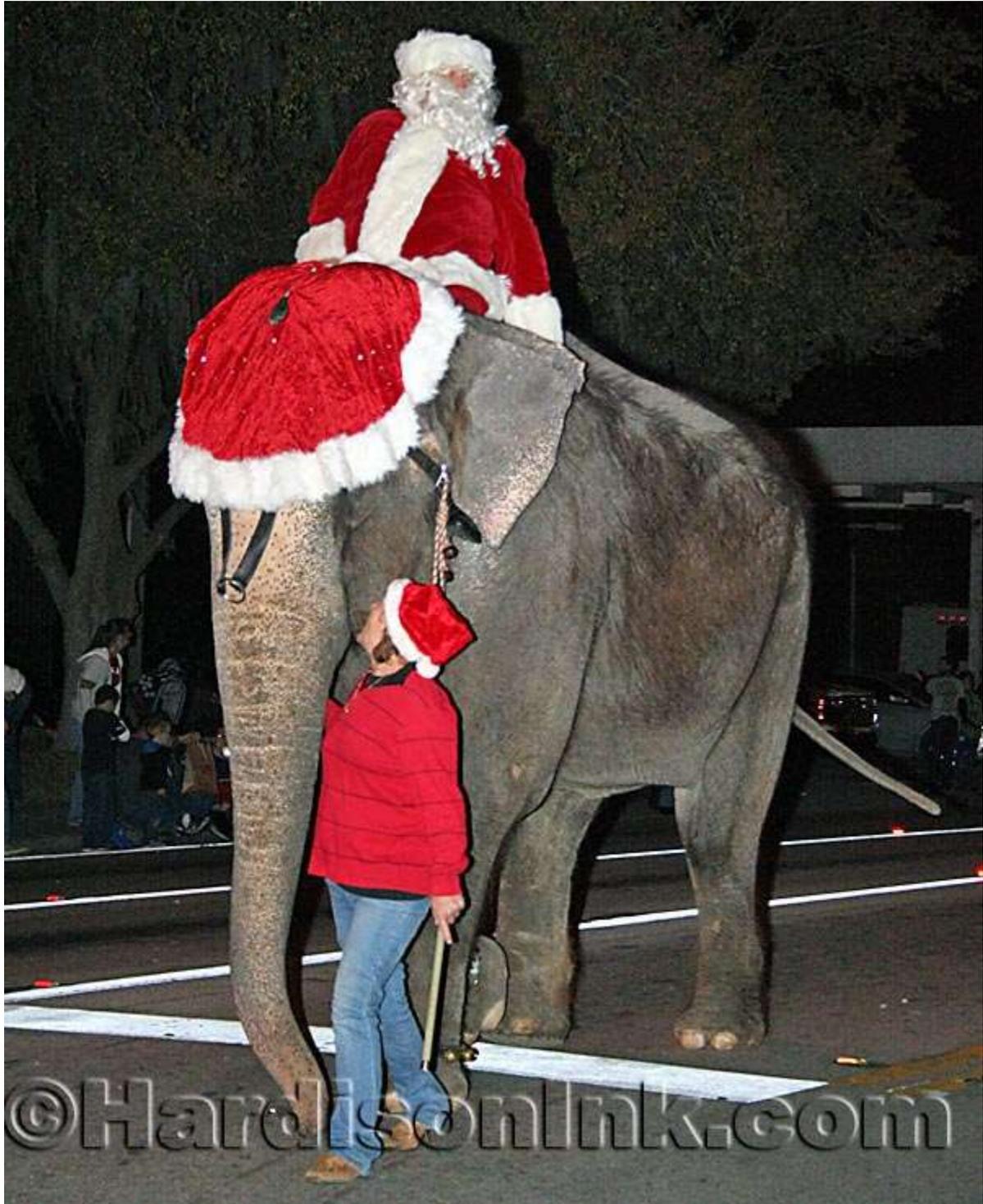


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Light Up Williston heralds arrival of Christmas Season



One of the crowd favorites in the Christmas Parade was this elephant from Two Tails Ranch carrying Santa.

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Story and Photos By Terry Witt

Senior Reporter © Dec. 4, 2016 at 11:27 p.m.

WILLISTON -- The annual Light up Williston Festival and Parade attracted a big crowd of people to the downtown area Saturday night (Dec. 3) to partake of the holiday spirit, and to eat a bowl of delicious chili if they were so inclined.

Williston Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat was on hand for the lighting of Heritage Park with a single flip of the switch by three queens – Junior Miss Williston Madison Ervin, Miss Williston Carlie Vining and Little Miss Williston Julianna Batule.



(left photo)With the flip of the switch pictured here, Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat and three queens set Williston aglow with Christmas lights. Pictured (from left) are Junior Miss Williston Madison Ervin, Miss Williston Carlie Vining, Little Miss Williston Julianna Batule and Mayor Hethcoat. (right photo) Junior Miss Levy County Fair Madison Brice was among the royalty present for the festive celebration.

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The parade was led by the Williston unit of the Army Jr. Reserve Officer Training Corps Color Guard, proudly led the parade carrying the American flag.

The rear of the parade featured a massive elephant from Two Tails Ranch, which is located near Williston. This particularly peaceful pachyderm is among those that make regular appearances in Williston parades – thanks to Two Tails Ranch, and its owner Patricia Zerbini, who has been a very active member and leader in the Williston Chamber of Commerce.

Many participants in Williston's Relay for Life groups, which as a singular entity is a fundraising organization for the American Cancer Society, manned booths at Heritage Park as part of their efforts to raise money for the fight against cancer.

Tami Wood manned a booth called Prevent, Attack, Cure. She said her mother-in-law Frances Wood of Jacksonville survived breast cancer. The cancer was missed in a mammogram but later found in an examination.

Doctors removed the lump on her chest wall and treated her successfully with radiation and chemotherapy.

One of the signs on Wood's booth said Snowmen for Cancer. She had used the same sign for the Peanut Festival but with the words Peanuts for Cancer. She wasn't able to erase the word peanuts -- so she painted over it with snowmen.

Patty Galyean who ran the booth Friends for a Cure said her father Joe Lewis and sister Sandy Nilsen both passed away from cancer. Several friends and family members are currently fighting the disease.

"Years ago when you heard someone had cancer, it was someone you didn't know," Galyean said. "Now it's often friends and family."

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The parade, always a crowd favorite, was alive with moving and blinking Christmas lights on a relatively warm night for early December.

First United Methodist Church of Williston won Best of Show for its float, the top award for floats in the parade.

The Williston Church of God won the Mary Kline Director's Award.

Regional General Hospital of Williston's float won the Showmanship Award.

The parade was sponsored by the Greater Area Williston Chamber of Commerce.

Williston's best chili chefs competed for honors in the 12th Annual Williston Chili Cook-Off.

First place spicy went to First United Methodist Church; second place spicy to Holy Family Catholic Church; honorable mention went to Noni's Chili Team.

First place mild went to Holy Family Catholic Church; second place mild to Dedee McLeod and First United Methodist Church.

Williston's Community Redevelopment Agency sponsored the chili competition.

The Ringing of the Bells Fun Run, sponsored by the Rotary Club of Williston, produced six winners.

First place in the men's division was Simion Hernandez, second Luke Stockman and third James Amos.

In the women's division, Elizabeth Diamond won first place, Reagan Hancock second and Jenny Wynn third.

The City of Williston was involved with all of the festival activities in one way or another. The city decorated Heritage Park with Christmas tree lights and arranged for the entertainment at the park.

Eighth Judicial Circuit Court Senior Judge Joseph Smith gave the spiritual message for the occasion, reading from the Book of Isaiah describing the birth of Jesus and how the angels of heaven heralded His arrival in a manger in Bethlehem.

Before starting to read, Senior Judge Smith gently asked the audience to show respect when the Word of God was read to them. They did as requested.

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First United Methodist Church won Best of Show in the Christmas Parade with this float.



Eighth Judicial Circuit Court Senior Judge Joseph Smith reads from the book of Isaiah that describes the birth of Christ in a manger.

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Williston Elementary School Safety Patrol members are in a holiday mood as they wave and smile at the crowd.



Santa Claus marched with the Williston High School Marching Band. This band put on another amazing performance, including the outfits and check out the lighted tuba.

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Students from the Williston School of Dance show their holiday spirit.



Two women in ride the colorful Clover Squares Square Dance float.

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(right photo) Tami Wood dressed in a Santa cap for her Relay for Life booth at Heritage Park.

(left photo) Patty Galyean shows off some of the merchandise she was selling for Relay for Life at Heritage Park.

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The Williston Church of God float won the Mary Kline Director's Award. Williston Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Mary Kline was the parade marshal this year, and she is retiring from her position with the Chamber on Dec. 31.