

Kelly's Korner: Light Up the Lantern an annual thanks

Monday June 27, 2016 12:01 AM

By [Dan Kelly](#)

Every spring, the Reading Recreation Commission holds its Light Up the Lantern fundraising event.

At the end of every summer season, "The Rec" as city kids call it, holds a traditional Lantern Parade. It started in the 1930s when kids made lanterns out of 5-gallon ice cream tubs and candles and marched down Penn Street from City Park to mark the end of another successful season of fun and games, arts and crafts, swimming, basketball and other activities at the city's playgrounds.

Times got lean and after the great recession of 2008-09, the Lantern Parade was discontinued in 2010 and 2011.

But Daphne E. Klahr, executive director of The Rec, and her staff brought the tradition back in 2012. That's the same year that recreation was transformed from a failing city department with two employees and a \$347,000 budget to a partnership between the city and Reading School District with dozens of full- and part-time employees and a \$1.3 million budget.

Klahr said the newly formed Reading Recreation Commission needed a new logo, and the old Lantern Parade idea flashed to the forefront. The logo features a child marching and holding out a lantern like those in the Lantern Parade.

The Light Up the Lantern dinner this year was held in the city's new DoubleTree by Hilton hotel on Penn Street. Klahr confessed the dinner is less about raising funds than it is about thanking employees, supporters and donors to the program.

"It also helps us get the message out there about the amazing programs we have for city children and the great kids who participate in our summer camps," she said.

The Rec message got out, all right.

The dinner was populated by well-dressed men and women sipping cocktails and sampling appetizers that were circulated by the hotel staff. Amid the muffled merriment of cocktail conversations, there

was the occasional high-pitched squeal and tittering of children. Klahr thought inviting the children to the dinner would give attendees a firsthand look at the city kids their contributions were helping. One of the neat things about the DoubleTree is that general manager Craig Poole insisted that, as much as possible, it would hire city residents to staff the place. Many of those city residents can walk to work.

Alneasa Jordon, human resources director for the hotel, said the staff remarked to her on the night of the dinner that the children were not only very talented, but also well-behaved.

"One member of the staff said that she wanted to send her kids to camp, but she couldn't afford the \$40 per child tuition," Jordan said.

The wheels started turning, and before long, the staff was passing the hat. They raised enough to send 15 children of hotel staffers who live in the city to summer camp at one of the eight playgrounds offering the program.

"I think that the most impressive part of this story is how the DoubleTree employees were so moved by the kids at our Light Up the Lantern event, that they raised the money to support city kids to attend summer programs," Klahr said.

"We know that kids who are involved in two or more activities are more likely to be contributing members of the community as adults," Klahr said. "The depth of commitment that the DoubleTree employees have shown to improving the lives of city children is humbling and impressive on all levels."

That's not to mention the art produced by the kids is nothing short of amazing.

In Kelly's Korner, Dan Kelly writes about the people and personalities that make Berks County special. Contact him 610-371-5040 or dkelly@readingeagle.com.

DAN KELLY | REPORTER/COLUMNIST

Reporter Dan Kelly covers consumer issues and government waste and corruption for the Reading Eagle.



Phone: 610-371-5040

Email: dkelly@readingeagle.com