

Holiday Homes Tours Throughout the Years

By Barbara Glakas

Learn about the history of the annual event, and read about the very first tour that took place.

Herndon's annual homes tour is a long-standing holiday tradition.

The first homes tour in Herndon was conducted in 1979, as one of many events that were held in celebration of the town's centennial celebration.

The homes that were showcased on the tour were 808 and 825 Elden Street, 1020 and 1000 Monroe Street, 953 and 951 Locust Street, 431 Van Buren Street, and 744 Dranesville Road. That celebration also included a parade, an arts and crafts show, a ball, and a display of historic artifacts.

In 1985, some of the residents who were involved in the 1979 event decided to organize another tour. Lois Schroff and Patsy Rust put an ad in the *Herndon Observer* newspaper to solicit volunteers who were interested in working on the tour. The committee members, in addition to Lois and Patsy, were Carol Bruce, Elizabeth Doe, Betty Hatfield, Kelly Markson, Janet Moore, and Marcia Teschner.

The tour, which was held in 1986, was called Victoriana, and—according to the program—the goal was to highlight Herndon's historic homes and buildings.

Local artist Pat Macintyre provided the program logo and the sketches of the homes. During the tour, light refreshments were served at the Herndon Old Town Gallery, which was located on the upper floor of the Nachman Building, across Lynn Street from the Depot.

The members of the Herndon Home Interest Garden Club provided a flower arrangement for each home. Several Herndon restaurants offered discounts to tour participants that day, and the Green Funeral Home was open to allow tour goers to view the collection of historic photographs of the town that were on display there. Those photographs, now known as the Berkley Green Collection, are now housed in the Herndon Depot Museum.

The Herndon Community Singers, now the Towne Square Singers, provided caroling in the tour homes.

The proceeds of the tour were donated to the Herndon Historical Society's Historic Registry program, which recognizes structures within the town that have been designated as historic.

The 1986 tour was planned as a one-time event, but several of the committee members decided to make it an annual event. Sponsored by the Herndon Historical Society, it was

renamed the Herndon Homes Tour, and it took place on the first Sunday of December each year.

Pat Macintyre continued to provide the sketches of the homes that appeared in the tour booklet, and proceeds continued to be used to support the Historic Registry program.

Throughout the years, the number of houses on the tour ranged from five to eight, and the number of downtown businesses that offered discounts on their merchandise on the day of the tour increased.

In 1990, various local florists began decorating the tour homes, and this turned into somewhat of a friendly competition among them for several years. In 1995, the Herndon Masonic Lodge became the new location for refreshments during the tour.

In 2006, after 20 years, the homes tour came to a temporary halt. In 2008 the Town's Cultivating Community Initiative—a group of resident volunteers and Town staff members who work to promote programs that encourage neighborhood beautification and build community spirit—revived it. Other Town committee-sponsored programs include Yard of the Month, the Good Neighbor Award, Dress Up Herndon for the Holidays, and the annual garden tour.

The original members of this new committee were Suzanne Baggett, Mary Burger, Anne Curtis, Diane D'Amico, Linda Figg, Barbara Glakas, Connie Hutchinson, Sharon Nachman, and Patsy Rust.

The tour was renamed the Holiday Homes Tour of Herndon, with proceeds going to support the Herndon Visitor's Center. Houses showcased on the tour included historic as well as newer homes.

Various community groups were enlisted, and each sponsored a home and provided the docents. Since 2008, participants have included the Herndon Woman's Club, The Herndon Fortnightly Club, the Herndon Rotary Club, the Herndon Optimist Club, the Herndon Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star, and the Friends of Laura Ratcliffe.

The Herndon Downtown Alliance (now the Herndon Chamber of Commerce), the Herndon Foundation for the Cultural Arts (ArtSpace Herndon), and the Adams Green Funeral Home also have assisted by providing snacks and/or space to house the tour's rest stop and post-tour reception.

After the Herndon Visitor's Center closed its doors, the committee began to donate the net proceeds of the tour back to the participating community groups.

The tour continues to be a much-anticipated annual event in which many individuals and organizations participate. Herndon resident Tony DeBenedittis created a new tour logo, and Pat Macintyre continues to provide sketches of the tour homes. Herndon Florist has

sponsored tickets, Meadows Farms has donated poinsettias for the homes, and Sign-A-Rama created the signs that advertise the tour.

The tour is now part of the Town's annual Hometown Holidays program, a series of events that take place during the first week of December to kick off the holiday season. Other events include the lighting of the Chanukah menorah on the Town Square, the Towne Square Singer's holiday concert, a Winter Open House and Santa's Workshop at the library, the annual tree lighting and sing-along, the Holiday Arts and Craft show, the Holiday Model Train Show, a Story Book Brunch with Santa at the Community Center, and holiday ballet and theatre performances.

After 27 years, the Holiday Homes Tour has become a much-anticipated annual, community-building event that showcases the beauty, history, and good will of our town.