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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THIRTY-FIVE YEARS OF MAGIC**

 *The Junior League of Wichita Falls Celebrates Yuletides Past*

**Wichita Falls, TX (June 1, 2016)** – The In 1981, a group of local volunteers, led by President Sue Crosnoe and Chairs Sharon Fiscus and Gail Thompson Natale began a new project to fund the Community Plan of the Junior League of Wichita Falls, Inc (JLWF).

With a mission to create something that the community could benefit from not only through funds raised but through a family experience that they could share together, the ladies came together to create a little magic and raise over $33,000. At that time, it was the most money any event had raised in the history of the League. When the total amount raised doubled in just three years, the volunteers knew they were on to something big.

Thirty-four events later, the JLWF has gone on to raise over $3.2 million through Christmas Magic! Proceeds have been given straight back to community projects like River Bend Nature Center, YMCA’s Miracle League, Hospice of Wichita Falls, Patsy’s House, Safe Place, Wichita Falls Area Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity, Rathgeber Hospitality House, Foster Care Advocacy Services, Wichita Falls Symphony, Drug Free North Texas, Rainbow House Emergency Resource Center, CASA, Beacon Lighthouse for the Blind, First Step, and Crimestoppers, among other local organizations.

1983 Christmas Magic Chair and 2016 JLWF Sustaining Member and Steering Committee Advisor, Gale Richardson, recalls the early years. “We really started from scratch. League members would work to make decorations all year long, and made lots of homemade goods for a large bake sale at the center of the event. We also ran the concession stand and hand-wrapped customers’ purchases.”

Since then, Christmas Magic has become quite the production. “In 2015, about 10,000 people passed through the market during its three-day visit, and we filled the entire hall with 111 vendors. We’ve come a long way since our start in the old Dillard’s Department store with just 37 merchants.”

Like local Wichita Falls holiday shoppers, the merchants just keep coming back. Many have returned year after year, some from as far away as Arkansas, Colorado, and even Montana. Richardson attributes this to the League’s tradition of creating the perfect experience for them as well.

“We try to bring a unique mix of gifts to Christmas Magic, and we are fortunate to have a long waiting list of vendors eager to be a part of this show. We work with each vendor to create a unique space, often ensuring they will be one-of-a-kind at the show with no similar booths. We also provide meals and equip them with aisle monitors that can takeover if they need to step out for a minute or two.”

This year’s Christmas Magic themed “Winter Wonderful” will be held Friday, November 4 through Sunday, November 6, 2016. “In honor of the 35th year of this wonderful holiday event that raises money to benefit so many in our community, we planned the perfect snow day,” said 2016 Decorations Co-Chair Shanda Keating. “Think elegant, think serene, blanketed landscapes of winter beauty. A wonderland.”

Before and after there will be other festivities including a Preview Party on Thursday, November 3 from 6 to 9 pm, and a Christmas Magic Auction Gala on Friday, November 11. All events are open to the general public, with purchase of a ticket for each respective event.

“Our themes over the years have become more and more creative. We’ve had appearances from the Grinch, throwbacks to the chrome-lovin’ 1950s, rustic yuletide traditions and even a food-themed Stir Up The Magic in 2007.”

When the JLWF debuted its cookbook comprised of members’ favorite recipes, they went about creating a gumdrop-filled wonderland of cooking-themed decorations, and included events like cooking demonstrations by League members.

“In 1996 we moved the event to the MPEC Exhibit Hall and Christmas Magic was one of the first big events to be held there,” Chris Rains, a returning Sustaining Advisor for Christmas Magic said. “It was a great move to allow for the growing number of vendors and visitors.”

Christmas Magic events have changed over the years - bringing in new entertainment, choirs, painting classes, preview parties, silent auctions, and fashion shows. Two things that will never change? The opportunity to visit with Santa and snap that keepsake photo, and the focus on family.

“Christmas Magic has really become a generational celebration,” said 2016 Co-Chair Deandra West. “It’s something we remember going to as kids, and now bring our kids to each year to walk the booths, hear the choirs sing, and take photos with Santa. We consider it a big responsibility and privilege to continue to bring that family experience to our neighbors in Wichita Falls.”

Rachelle Cooper, also a Sustaining Advisor for the 2016 Christmas Magic Steering Committee, attended the first Christmas Magic when she was just ten years old. She went on to chair the event in 1998, and looks forward to helping current active members of the League with her insight and passion for the event.

“It’s stories like Rachelle’s that inspire us to keep the magic going and make each year even better than the last,” said 2016 Co-Chair Lauren Wuthrich. “For our 35th year, expect new special events and children’s activities, and an all-new layout to the main showroom. There will be quite a bit of extra magic in Christmas Magic on this special year.”

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**About Junior League of Wichita Falls**

The Junior League of Wichita Falls, Inc. is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving our community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Our purpose is exclusively educational and charitable.

For more information on upcoming events and information on how the Junior League of Wichita Falls supports our local community through acts of service, visit [www.jlwf.org](http://www.jlwf.org).