

# Alton's Middletown Continues Decades-Long Christmas Eve Luminary Tradition

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - Alton's [Middletown Historic District](#) will once again light up the night with their Christmas Eve luminary.

Now in its 22nd year, the luminary includes over 5,000 candles burning all night throughout the blocks of Middletown along Henry, East 12th and surrounding streets. The tradition is “breathtaking” to behold, according to luminary chair Shannon Sholar.

“It just puts a glow and makes everybody feel festive and peaceful at a time where we have a crazy, crazy world. You can just drive through and take a deep breath in and take in the glow,” Sholar said. “We are kind of showcasing our historic neighborhood. I’m a lover of Christmas and everything Christmas, and it just really is breathtaking and beautiful and unique. I think a lot of other areas in town have started doing it.”

While the luminary has grown, the tradition itself has stayed largely the same. Duke’s Bakery donates paper bags every year, and the Middletown Neighbors organization purchases candles that burn for ten hours.

Sholar has been a “block captain” since Margaret Hopkins started the luminary in 2001. The block captains are in charge of setting up the luminary along their block. Sholar explained that Hopkins and the original block captains wanted to “show off the neighborhood” and celebrate Christmas, and they decided the luminary would be a fun way to do that.

Sholar explained that each block has their own way of putting up the candles. Some neighbors do it together on Christmas Eve afternoon. Other block captains give each house a luminary kit so they can do it themselves. Sholar’s block works together to put out 105 candles, and she jokes they “have it down to a science” after 22 years.

“We have a well-oiled machine,” she laughed. “This time of year, not only is everybody busy but the weather kind of keeps everybody indoors, so it’s just nice to get out and socialize with the neighbors.”

Over the past 22 years, the luminary has only been canceled twice due to inclement weather. Sholar has heard from many people who come out every year to see the lights.

It’s a powerful experience for a lot of people, but none more so than the neighbors who make it happen. To see the luminary, visit Middletown after 4:30 p.m. on Dec. 24, 2023.

“It is quite the sight if you’ve not seen it,” Sholar added. “We make sure everybody places the bags in the same direction and the uniformity just makes it breathtaking. It really is just peaceful and beautiful.”





