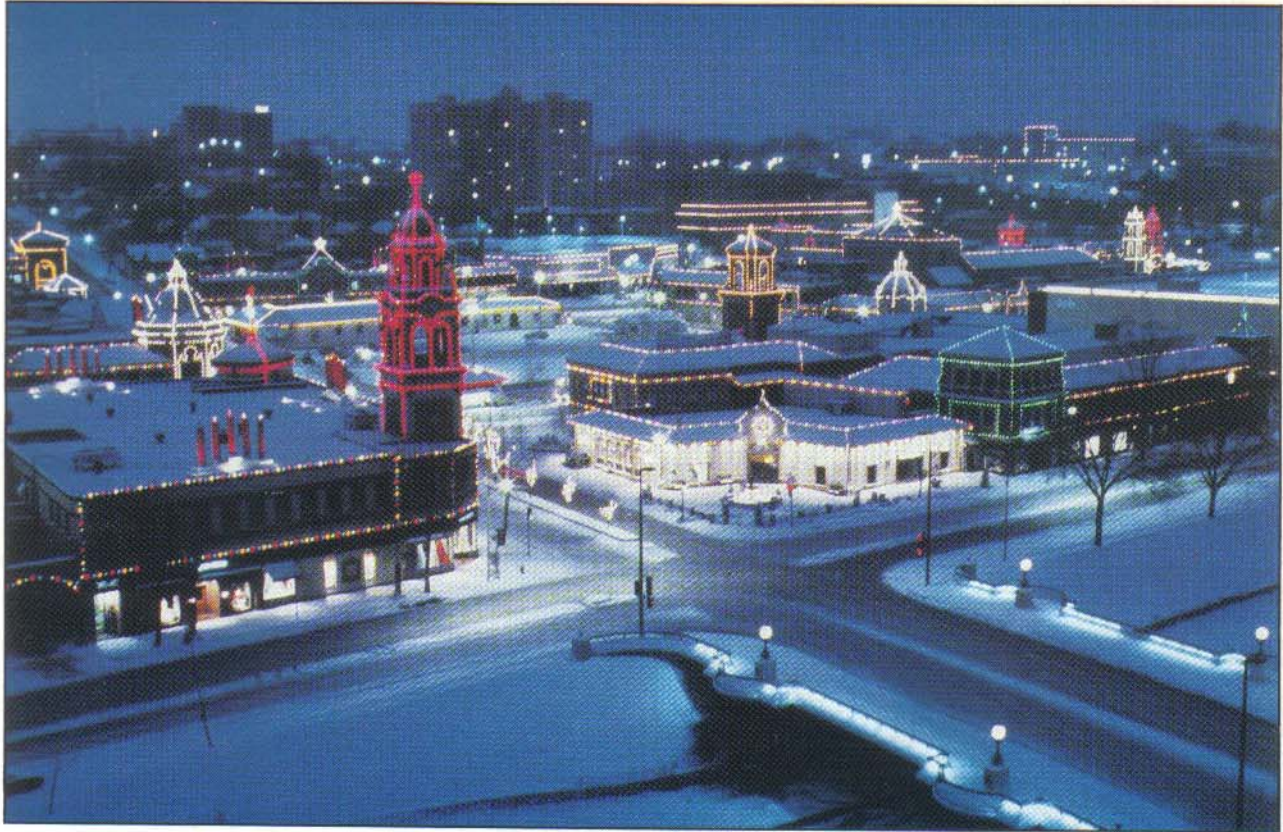


“LIGHT UP MIAMI” RECALLS MEMORIES OF KANSAS CITY TRADITION



By Deborah K. Goodrich

Memories of days gone by filled me with warmth when the first annual “Light Up Miami” celebration turned downtown into a rainbow of color. A similar tradition has spanned over half a century in my hometown of Kansas City, Missouri, where each Thanksgiving night the Country Club Plaza district is transformed into a festive glow of sparkling color that lasts through New Year’s Day.

The tradition that began in the 1920’s with just a single strand of lights hung across a doorway, has grown to the point that now, the Spanish-style architecture of the elegant Country Club Plaza shopping district is outlined with over 155,000 lights on 48 miles of wiring. History continues today as some of the newer buildings have lighting incorporated into their structural design, for

local developers understand the importance to the Kansas City economy of preserving the tradition.

Each Thanksgiving night, over 125,000 people crowd the streets to usher in the holiday season in Kansas City, when the Mayor is given the honor of throwing the switch at the Plaza lighting ceremony. Some enthusiasts enjoy a bird’s-eye view of the spectacular ceremony from chartered small aircraft. Others are lucky enough to receive coveted invitations to private parties in the suites of the Alameda Plaza and The Raphael Hotels, from where the lights are viewed in elegant style. As the former Reservation Manager of The Raphael Hotel, I booked suites over a year in advance for this occasion, and the hotel enjoyed near 100% occupancy throughout the four-week season.

The resplendent beauty of the Plaza holiday lighting boasts world-wide fame. Merchants’ coffers overflow as tourists from every corner of the globe visit the city during the holidays to shop in Plaza stores such as Laura Ashley, Saks Fifth Avenue, Brooks Brothers, Gucci and Gerhardt Furs. Some prefer to just sit back and enjoy the gloriously brilliant sight from the antique buggy of a horse-drawn carriage.

The economic impact of the Country Club Plaza lighting display on area stores, hotels, services and restaurants is overwhelming. This proves that with cooperation, good coordination, and aggressive marketing, success can be achieved with city lighting. I look forward to the forces involved with lighting up Miami to creating many future holiday memories for my family.