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## Festival History Backgrounder

The Ontario Power Generation (OPG) Winter Festival of Lights was founded in 1983 by a partnership consisting of the Niagara Falls Canada Visitor and Convention Bureau (now known as Niagara Falls Tourism), the City of Niagara Falls, The Niagara Parks Commission and a number of private businesses in Niagara's tourism sector. The Festival was created as a way to extend what had for more than a century been a summers-only tourism season in Niagara Falls.

During those early years in the mid-1980s, the fledgling Winter Festival of Lights drew a respectable 250,000 visitors annually and around 35 motor coaches. Today, the Festival attracts over 1 million attendees and over 300 motor coaches each year as Niagara Falls continues its evolution into a year-round tourism destination now featuring millions of sparkling lights along an 8km illumination route that travels along the Niagara Parkway through the Niagara Parks, past the mighty Falls, into Dufferin Islands and through the surrounding tourist districts.

The OPG Winter Festival of Lights operates as a year-round, not-for-profit corporation with a board of directors that still reflects the unfaltering support of its founding partners, with seats reserved for representatives of The Niagara Parks Commission, the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara Falls Tourism.

Over the years, the Festival has earned countless travel and tourism industry awards including Top 100 Festivals in Ontario, Sponsor of the Year (OPG), Best Volunteer Program, Most Innovative Partnership and the prestigious Events of Distinction Award from Festivals and Events Ontario (FEO). In addition the American Bus Association (ABA) has long recognized the OPG Winter Festival of Lights as one of its Top 100 Internationally Known Events (2005 – 2015).

A research study conducted during the Festivals 2015-2016 season by Enigma Research Corporation found that the Festival attracted 1.2 million attendees last season and had an economic impact of \$58.5 million. In 2015 the Festival received very positive feedback from visitors with record vehicle traffic which was up by 42% over the previous year.

Lighting improvements made for the 2015/16 Festival included the illumination of the Toronto Power Generating Station with a choreographed sound & light show, a new interactive display of Reindeers leading Santa's Sleigh and fifty fully wrapped trees in Dufferin Islands. In addition the Festival's new 3D Projection Mapping Show on the Oakes Hotel was unveiled last season, this 15 minute long show was projected onto the façade of the hotel using state-of-the-art projection mapping technology. The show entitled the Spirit of Niagara Sound & Light Show was awarded with top place, the Gold Award in the Arts & Entertainment category at the Digital Signage Expo APEX awards held Las Vegas in March 2016.

This is just the start of the many changes taking place for the Winter Festival of Lights as we have only completed year three of a five-year plan on making the festival bigger and brighter.

**For more information contact:**

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