University Celebrates Holiday Traditions

Hundreds of Columbians braved the biting winter winds on Dec. 7 to participate in the traditional yule log and treelighting ceremonies. The history of the yule log has its roots in medieval Scandinavia, where lighting a log was a pagan celebration of the warmth and spirit of the season. At Columbia, the tradition dates back to pre-Revolutionary War times, during the first decades of Columbia’s founding as King’s College. Because of the tie to colonial times, during the first decades of Columbia’s founding as King’s College, the yule log ceremony was revived in 1910 by University President Nicholas Murray Butler to provide cheer for students unable to return home for the holidays.

The tradition is enhanced by the annual reading of 1788 College alumnus Clement Clarke Moore’s poem A Visit from St. Nicholas, also known as Twas the Night Before Christmas.

President Bollinger illuminated the trees along College Walk, while Notes & Keys, the Kingsmen, Piannion and the ClefHangers performed and the wind-whipped crowd warmed up with apple cider and chestnuts.

On Dec. 7, the campus welcomed Chanukah by kindling a giant ‘can-norah’—a 10 foot menorah made out of more than 1,000 cans of food. The weather was equally squall.

A task force of engineering students devised the complex design of the can-norah. A wide range of student groups, including sororities, fraternities, political groups and Community Impact, collected the cans over several weeks to demonstrate the holiday’s message of triumph of freedom over oppression and light over darkness. After the kindling, the food was donated to the Food Bank of New York City. Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields participated in the lighting ceremony.

The story of Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, dates back more than 2,100 years and recalls the Jewish people recapturing the Temple of Jerusalem from the Syrian Greeks. Tradition held that a flame be lit in the temple and that it not be allowed to extinguish. But there was only enough oil to keep the flame lit for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted eight days until new, pure olive oil was produced. Today, the menorah, an eight-branched candelabra, carries a message of hope and religious freedom to all people.

Local Students Lend Ideas with Workshop

This fall, Columbia hosted an interactive workshop on Columbia’s proposed expansion into the Manhattanville section of West Harlem for local high school students participating in a design program sponsored by the Smithsonian Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum.

At the start of the daylong workshop in Premix Hall, students posed over the architects’ design plans for Columbia’s proposed expansion. They also took a tour of Manhattanville, an area that runs from 129th Street to 135th Street, between Broadway and Old Broadway.

Afterward, Jeremiah Stoldt, director of the University’s campus plan, gave the group packets that included background information on the project. The students brainstormed options for best utilizing the open spaces in the proposed plan. After hours of discussion, the students reconvened to present their ideas to their peers.

Before the students took the tour of Manhattanville and started putting their ideas on paper, Stoldt said, “we asked them questions about what drew them to their favorite places in New York and what could be done to make Manhattanville a place that benefits the University and the community. Their proposals demonstrated a lot of insight into the communities that make up Manhattanville and the importance of urban design elements.”

The students’ designs included diverse retail offerings and open spaces. “(This) environment provides a great laboratory for young people to explore communities and to discover their own voice and place, within the context of their own worlds,” said Bonnie Harris, director of education at Cooper Hewitt.

“Students were afforded the opportunity to experience and study the project from its early stages and to learn, firsthand, from the architects who are shaping the community’s future,” Harris continued.

Stoldt has been involved in many presentations to the community, but this was his first to a high school audience. “I was really impressed by the students,” Stoldt said. “Their proposals focused on accomplishing our goal of making this area a University space and a community space.”

For the latest information on Columbia’s proposed expansion plans, go to www.manorvilleextension.columbia.edu/campusplanning/home.php.