

Holiday Lights Go On In Sunnyside After 17 Years

According to Patrol Borough Queens North Commanding Officer Assistant Chief Diana Pizzuti, about 150 people gathered underneath the Sunnyside Arch on 46th Street in Queens on Thursday, November 20 for the Sunnyside Shines Business Improvement District holiday lighting event to herald the coming of Thanksgiving and Christmas.

As he waited for a few more board members to come to cut the ribbon and start the ceremonies, John Vogt, Sunnyside Chamber of Commerce president, jokingly said, "In the meantime, I'm going to sing to everybody." It proved an empty threat, however, the Sunnyside Children's Drum Corps played a few songs for the crowd instead.

The Drum Corps is a volunteer band that exists only because of the merchants of Sunnyside. Headed by Tony Lana, its members include children and adults alike. They played songs including, "When the Saints Go Marching In" and "God Bless America". They kept the audience warm with music for dancing while waiting for the lighting to begin.

"This holiday season, despite the difficult times, I know that local merchants know their customers best and I know that they will tailor their means to your needs," Evelyn Cruz, representing Congressmember Nydia Velazquez, said. "So let's keep Sunnyside shining, let's support our local businesses and let's make this a great season here in Sunnyside."

The Sunnyside Shines Business Improvement District (BID) is a new, nonprofit economic development organization dedicated to creating a vibrant neighborhood for the businesses and residents of Sunnyside. After five to six years of effort, the organization was off to an official start on May 13 of this year. The BID was created to keep the businesses of Sunnyside open and profitable. The residents want people to know that there are things to do in the neighborhood and it is not just a place to pass through.

The main goal is making Sunnyside a "point of destination", according to Vogt. "We want people to come here to eat and drink and shop," he said. Members want to make the businesses prosperous. Vogt and all the board members have many plans for the year to come, including entertainment and keeping the holiday lights tradition.

Sunnyside Shines Executive Director Alyssa Bonilla said, "I'm lucky for two reasons. I'm lucky because I live in a great neighborhood with all you wonderful people. And then, this wonderful thing happened to me, where I now get to work and represent the businesses and residents everyday in the community." Vogt then called all the board members up to the front to cut the ribbon in honor of the holiday lights and the beginning of a bright future for Sunnyside Shines. With a drum roll the audience counted from 10 down to one and the lights on 46th street were turned on to shine brightly after 17 years without holiday lights.

This celebration was held to let the people of Queens know that there are things to do in Sunnyside. The residents look forward to keeping the lights on, not only during the holiday season, for many years to come. —Amy Fisher



Photos Amy Fisher

Members of the Board before cutting the ribbon to turn on the lights and start the festivities.

The lights on 46th Street after they were turned on for the first time in 17 years.

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