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# Schneider Co. invests \$2 million in Christmas spectacle; Moseley expects attractions to draw 80,000 visitors downtown

Premium content from Business First by John R. Karman III, Reporter

Date: Friday, November 25, 2011, 6:00am EST

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Since summer, **Weber Group Inc.**'s plant in Sellersburg has resembled a Santa's workshop of sorts as the design, construction and specialty fabrication company put together a special project for the **Galt House Hotel** in Louisville.

No, the firm's artists, designers, architects and construction personnel aren't in the toy-production business, but they've been using their expertise to create an exhibit to transform the downtown hotel into a winter wonderland — just in time for the holidays.

Galt House officials decided last year that they wanted to celebrate Christmas in a big way. They introduced the city to KaLightoscope, an attraction featuring lighted holiday sculptures created by Chinese artisans.

The event drew 40,000 people during a 47-day run.

## **Bigger, better Christmas festival**

That was good, according to Mary Moseley, president and CEO of Galt House parent **AI J. Schneider Co.** But this year, the company wanted something even better.

Enter the Weber Group, which also designs exhibits and displays for amusement parks, zoos, museums and other entertainment venues.

The company, which dates to 1983, has built an elf-sized Christmas Village and a Snow Fairy Castle as complements to the returning KaLightoscope extravaganza.

Together, they are being marketed as parts of "Christmas at the Galt House Hotel," which also includes a retail outlet called Mistletoe Marketplace, a life-sized gingerbread house and interactive games and activities for children.

Moseley projects that the Christmas features — which represent a more than \$2 million investment by her company — will draw 80,000 visitors during its Nov. 17 to Jan. 2 run. She declined to say how much revenue it is expected to generate for the Schneider Co.

### **A magical tour**

The English-themed Christmas Village is built so children can look inside the houses and stores and see holiday preparations in high gear. Its highlights include a blacksmith's shop, bakery and church.

The Snow Fairy Castle is home, of course, to the Snow Fairy, a popular character at Galt House Christmas festivities in recent years who is said to grant children's holiday wishes. The castle showcases her chambers and magical potions.

"I think the kids are going to enjoy it," said Weber Group president Tom Weber, who owns the firm with younger brother Donny Weber. "It's down where they are."

### **Kid-tested**

As the Christmas Village — which stretches for 50 lineal feet — began taking shape at the Weber Group's workshop, Tom Weber said, he felt a childlike excitement every time he saw it. The village is designed in intricate detail and assembled with exacting craftsmanship.

Many of the Weber Group's 60 employees brought their own children in to see the display under construction, and their reactions were priceless, according to Penny Peavler, the company's director of brand development and marketing.

"It's really exciting to see the kids' eyes wide with wonder as they look at it," she said.

At first, Moseley was concerned that the exhibit was too small when she saw the unfinished version at the Weber Group headquarters. Then, she remembered to look from a child's perspective.

Moseley said the finished product takes her back to her childhood, when she and her sisters used to come downtown with their father, the late developer Al Schneider, to look in the storefront windows during the holidays.

"It's for anybody who's young at heart and loves the magic of Christmas," she said of the Weber Group's exhibit.

## **Local project a point of pride for Weber Group employees**

The Weber Group does work all over the world. Its design and construction projects can be found at several Great Wolf Resorts and **Six Flags Inc.** amusement parks across the United States.

The company also is involved in the design and construction of more traditional projects, such as apartment complexes and senior-living facilities in many states.

The Galt House Christmas project is especially important to the company, Tom Weber said, because it is local.

"It's nice to see a venue doing something like this ... in the city I live in," he said. "You're always trying to find something to do as a family. Sometimes, it's very difficult."

Peavler said the Galt House exhibit will give Weber Group employees the chance to let their children and grandchildren "see what we do firsthand without going on vacation to do it."

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## **Christmas at the Galt House Hotel**

**Events:** KaLightoscope, an attraction featuring lighted holiday sculptures; Christmas Village and Snow Fairy Castle, interactive children's exhibits; Mistletoe Marketplace, a retail and dining center; other games and activities for children and adults

**Dates:** Through Jan. 2

**Location:** Galt House Hotel, downtown at Fourth Street and River Road

**Costs:** \$15.99 for adults Monday through Friday, \$17.99 for adults Saturday and Sunday, \$9.99 for children ages 5 to 12, children 4 and under admitted free

John R. Karman III covers these beats: Economic development and government, commercial real estate, transportation, utilities, sports business, lottery, tourism/conventions, higher education, nonprofits, Jeffersontown, Downtown, Central Area.