CULTURE BRIGHT:

A WINTER ESSAY SERIES

Reflections on art, culture, and the future *of the Quad Cities from* ***Linda Bowers,*** *Board Chair of The Cultural Trust.*

Jitters, Ottis and Empathy



"Familiar paths hold very different memories for the people who walk them."

Will you marry me?

Will you grow old with me?

It's his last outing.

Grandpa's not with us this year.

Can we have a quiet moment in the Children's Garden?

People bring all kinds of wishes and requests to the Quad City Botanical Center. Some arrive with the jitters of a marriage proposal. Others seek a familiar place to remember someone they love or say goodbye to a companion. Familiar paths hold very different memories for the people who walk them.

Executive Director Ryan Wille and the QCBC team understand the care those moments require.

Throughout the year, including during Winter Lights, nervous proposers ask for help with the question of a lifetime. They arrive unsure of which garden to choose, how to arrange the moment, or even how to pose.

Should they kneel? Stand tall? Sit beside their soon-to-be fiancée on a bench?

The team listens and helps each couple picture a moment that feels true to them. Each proposal deserves its own story.

That same attention shapes Winter Lights. Months before installation, staff consider how guests will move through the gardens, where they might pause, and what might surprise them.

This season, 400,000 lights, glow cubes, igloos, and a neon forest offer reasons to linger.

Music provided by the Quad City Symphony Orchestra, recorded and edited for the gardens, brings another partner's expertise into the experience.

The Cultural Trust helps support the organization caring for the place and the partnerships that bring new ideas into it.

Sometimes, the setting becomes part of a moment no one could have planned.

Last winter, a family brought Ottis to Winter Lights.

Their Golden Lab rode in a cushioned stroller as they wheeled him to a favorite spot among the prairie grasses. There, one by one, the family said goodbye.

The following day, Ottis would visit the veterinarian. He would not return home.

Ryan stood nearby, thinking of his own dog. His eyes blurred, but he could still see the love surrounding Ottis. The family had gathered around their four-legged brother for one final outing together.

The gardens gave them a familiar place to be close and say goodbye. Ryan understood the value of making room for that.

We often describe cultural experiences through attendance, tickets, and memberships.

Those measures help explain how an organization serves its community.

Then there are moments whose meaning belongs to the people who lived them.

A couple returns to the place where they became engaged. A family remembers an evening with someone they miss. A visitor finds a quiet corner when the season feels difficult.

Over time, the gardens become part of their personal history.

That is one reason The Cultural Trust invests in places people return to throughout their lives. Their value grows through those relationships, with staff who recognize that welcoming a guest sometimes means listening carefully to what the visit is really about.

The lights draw people in. The care gives the experience its meaning.

Learn more about Winter Lights at CultureBright.org.

Culture Matters Here.
And it always will.

Come see why Culture Matters Here. And why it always will.

To learn more about the Culture Bright Winter Series go to CultureBright.org.

The Cultural Trust

CULTURE BRIGHT









