

GLOW City

Illumination: Symphony of Light returns bigger and brighter

By Lauren Wise

To date, 96 Guinness World Records have been set in Arizona. They include some odd but awesome accolades: largest cornhole shot (110 feet, set in Cottonwood in 2015); fastest speed barefoot water skiing (135.74 mph, set in Chandler in 1989); most Caesar salads made in one hour (108, set at Yuma Territorial Prison in 2010); and longest leg hair (8.84 inches, set in Tucson in 2015).

Anthem's annual drive-through outdoor holiday light show, "Illumination: Symphony of Light," features more than 1.7 million lights. Though that's not officially a Guinness World Record yet, it's hard to argue with the attraction's "World's Largest Holi-

day Drive-Thru Light Show" tagline. And it's definitely more brag-worthy than "World's Longest Leg Hair."

More than 1.7 million lights form a desert-style winter wonderland, and each bulb has the dazzling ability to adjust to 16 million different shades of color. Cars cruise through scenes of jumping reindeer, gigantic gift boxes, swirling snowflakes and sky-high forests of animated saguaros and Christmas trees, undulating with light. Towering tunnels and curtains built from tiny bulbs encompass vehicles, celebrating peace, love and joy. Lights are synchronized to classic and modern-day remixes of holiday songs, pulling from differ-

The Illumination displays include more than 1.7 million lights.



ent cultures and languages spilling through FM radio. Families stroll down Holiday Boulevard, with teetering mounds of sparkling cotton candy rivaling the giant snowmen dancing through the streets and Santa Claus chortling nearby.

"The creativity we get to pour into Illumination is so rewarding; to see families getting to feel and experience the vision we had in mind," co-founder Simon Kreisberger says. "Seeing it come to life is awesome, but most rewarding is seeing children's faces light up as they stick their heads out of a sunroof in amazement."

It took time to find the right team to create something of this magnitude and vision, but in the summer of 2016, Kreisberger shared the idea with Yakir Urman, who became the other co-founder of Illumination. The inaugural Illumination launched in November 2017 and quickly became a new holiday tradition for many Arizonans. The popularity made it clear they would quickly need to accommodate more – so for the 2018 holiday

and gingerbread decorating stations. And of course, there are visits and photos with Santa.

The second Illumination experience is equally as massive and features different displays and experiences. It will debut at Tempe's Diablo Stadium a few days after the original location opens.

In 2017, approximately 76,000 vehicles drove through the festive display, which brings up another improvement in Illumination over last year: maintaining the flow of traffic and wait times to get into the drive-thru.

"I think we all underestimated the power of what we created," Kreisberger admits. "We knew it would be popular, but once we opened and people experienced Illumination firsthand and word spread, it seemed like every family in the Valley showed up on Thanksgiving weekend! We were overwhelmed quickly. While 90-minute wait times can be standard with events like this, it is something we vowed we would not accept this year."

To make traffic run as efficiently as possible, Illumination consulted with ADOT and traffic experts to implement plans to keep traffic moving, and cut wait times in half. This year, not only have they improved their on-site traffic system, but they also worked to implement an online reservations system that gives them full control of traffic each night.

Admission to "illuminate" your holiday season costs \$29 per car. A special-priced bundle package to visit both locations will also be available for purchase online, and every Tuesday brings a "Twice-Thru Tuesday" promotion, so visitors have the option to experience the same drive-thru attraction twice in the same evening for just one price.

The North Phoenix attraction is open nightly beginning at 6 p.m. through January 5. The Tempe location remains open nightly through December 31. For more information, visit worldofillumination.com.

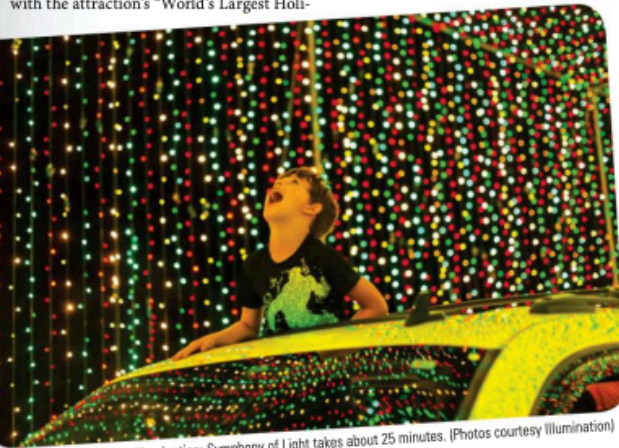
season, there will be two Illuminations for two different holiday experiences: the original in North Phoenix, and a second in Tempe. Both locations will continue to use the most cutting-edge lighting equipment in the world with RGB LED light displays in a 25-minute drive-thru of spectacular fanfare.

"We knew the park couldn't accommodate the growth we could expect in year two – not to mention, we had amazing elements we wanted to create and integrate, but couldn't fit it all into one show," Kreisberger says.

They continued to push the limits, with the original Illumination sprawled across 14 acres. New additions include a 100-foot-wide nativity scene and an expanded Holiday Boulevard. In 2018, the boulevard offers free parking and free admission separate from the Illumination drive-thru. Patrons can indulge in treats such as candy apples, hot cocoa and brick-oven pizza; dance through gigantic ornaments; visit the Elfie selfie stations or the post office to write a letter to our troops; bounce through Christmas-themed inflatables; and try their hands at ornament



Illumination's lights are timed to classic and modern holiday tunes.



A drive through Illumination: Symphony of Light takes about 25 minutes. (Photos courtesy Illumination)