

# The Ruthmere Record

THE RUTHMERE FOUNDATION, INC. • 302 E. BEARDSLEY AVENUE • ELKHART, INDIANA 46514

FALL/WINTER 2021

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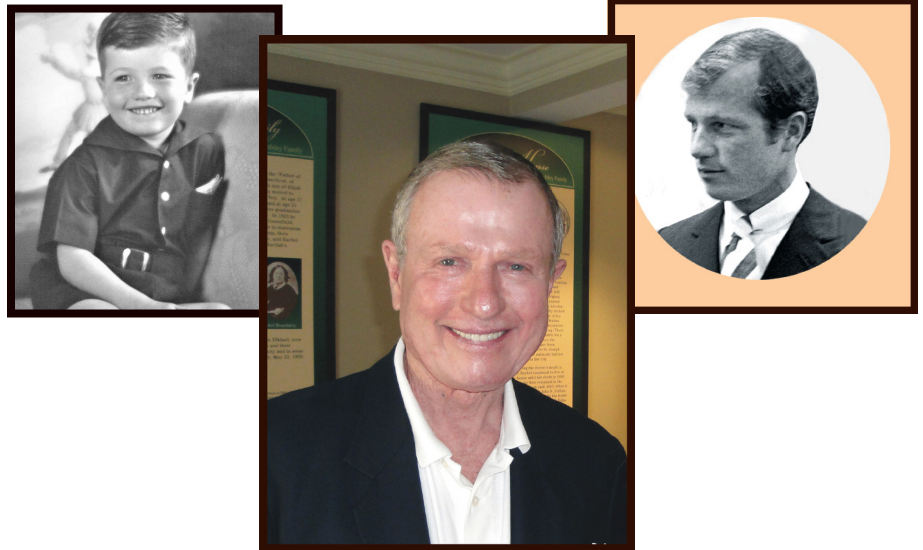
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## REMEMBERING OUR FOUNDING DIRECTOR

By GEORGE E. FREESE, RUTHMERE BOARD TREASURER



I cannot put into mere words the connection between Robert Beardsley and Ruthmere Museum. Robert is gone now, as he died on June 1, 2021; but for those who knew him, even slightly, he can be seen, heard, felt, and sensed when entering, or even thinking about, Ruthmere.

Here was a man, adopted at age 5, who found himself among wealthy and well-connected people and applied his innate talents to create a community asset. It wasn't always easy. Robert was sent off to various schools at a very early age. He attended Elkhart schools, Howe Military Academy, Fessenden School, Phillips Academy, Princeton University, and the University of Chicago. Although schooling took him away from his family members much of his early life, he traveled with them, visiting cities and locations in many foreign countries. His love of travel never ended. It demanded constant reinforcement throughout his life. He envisioned people like himself visiting Ruthmere.

Robert was cultured, yet with a light touch. He had an ear for music and an eye for art of all kinds. He enjoyed playing the piano and did it well. He read and appreciated a wide range of literature, in several languages, ancient and modern. He appreciated the talents of others.

In 1969, at age 36, he proposed to recreate Ruthmere. Every surface reflects his effort. His idea was not only to recreate its original 1910 historic look but to improve upon it, primarily by adding fine art which could capture an international audience without apology. To guide the restoration, he amassed the arts reference library of relevant writings on art, architecture, and furnishings of the times. Ruthmere opened on September 8, 1973, Robert's 40th birthday. (cont'd page 4)

*Ruthmere Record Editor*  
Carolyn Bonanno

# A GRAND FIRST NIGHT!

By JANET EVANEGA, FIRST NIGHT AT THE ARIA EVENT CHAIR

A very special event took place at The Hotel Elkhart Friday, August 27th. The event was a beautiful “First Night” for both Ruthmere and The Hotel Elkhart! Great food, drinks, music, an incredibly beautiful location and a festive crowd of approximately 150 people made the evening unforgettable. To create a magical evening like First Night at the Aria there are a large number of people to thank. This evening was blessed with tremendous underwriter support from the following sponsors: Rex Martin, 1st Source Bank, Kent and Becky Bontreger, Jack and Karen Cittadine, Jeff and Nicole Cripe, Robert and Mary Pat Deputy, George and Kathy Freese, Connie Fulmer, Gibson Insurance, Janet Evanega and Jim Rieckhoff, Tom Myers, Patty Brotherson, Bill and Lori Firstenberger, Ray and Mary Pat Mathis, Karen Nicholson, Cheryl Waldman, Jeff and Phid Wells, and Ed and Willy Welter. Corporate Tables also included Talent Source and Yoder, Ainlay, Ulmer and Buckingham. The underwriters and ticket attendees together ensured that this one-of-a-kind fundraiser was a smashing financial success for the museum.

The First Night at the Aria Committee, Ruthmere staff and the Hotel Elkhart staff worked intently to attend to every detail. Months before the event, Margaret McCarthy designed a stunning invitation. Social media gurus and gala planners extraordinaire Becky Bontrager, Shelley Moore, Melanie Jackson, Tom Myers, and Nicole Cripe spread the word and helped plan all the details! The event took place throughout the hotel with all the public rooms open and looking beautiful with flower arrangements by Camille’s and enhanced by the Elkhart Dahlia Society. Navarre Hospitality provided their customary outstanding food and service for dinner and the hotel provided appetizers for the pre-cocktail party. Janet Hines-Norris and her band provided great dancing music with many guest staying right until the end of the evening. Anderson Photography captured the magical event and showed that a good time was had by all!



# RUTHMERE CHAMPIONS - FROM SUSTAIN TO SUMMIT

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The goal put forth in 2018 for a major giving campaign for sustainability was unprecedented for our organization. If successfully achieved, the proposed goal of \$10 million would ensure that the Ruthmere Foundation with its museum campus operations would be self-sustaining for future generations to enjoy. The public campaign began in earnest at the 2018 Breakfast of Champions event held the morning of May 10, 2018, at the historic YWCA. While raising this money, of course, we also needed ongoing support to keep our doors open and meet our annual expenses. Many local donors became Ruthmere Champions on that day helping us to fill both of these needs, and the campaign was off and running.



By the summer of 2019 the Ruthmere Champions campaign had raised almost \$1 million, and the Board decided to take a second bold step to prove to our constituents and ourselves that we were serious about achieving our goal. At the suggestion of Founding Director Robert Beardsley, and after several months of feasibility research, the Board unanimously decided to make good on an old promise from Robert's late father Walter Beardsley, and sell the Auguste Rodin sculpture piece in our collection known as the Fallen Caryatid.

This sale was executed through a partnership with Sotheby's in November of 2019, with an unexpectedly high net outcome of \$5.89 million to Ruthmere. Fortuitous timing and wise placement of investments in 2020 has yielded exceptionally positive growth over the past 18 months.

Lastly, the death of our Founding Director Robert Beardsley on June 1, 2021, and his planned estate legacy gift to Ruthmere has led us to the point where we can report to our constituents that our bold goal of sustainability for the Ruthmere Foundation has been achieved.

There is a difference we can all recognize between the achievement of attaining a plateau of sustainability and reaching the summit of our full potential. There remain many reasons to continue being a Ruthmere Champion or to become a new Champion. First and foremost, donors know that their gifts have been well-placed in an organization that is financially stable and secure—Ruthmere Campus will be serving the community for generations to come. Second, we are committed to living within our means. We maintain a conservative fiscal approach to our programs and our special projects, ensuring that everything we do is filtered through the core objectives of our mission. Finally, from this solid foundation, we are well-positioned to develop and deliver meaningful high-quality experiences to our community in areas of history, art and culture at a level not previously witnessed. We need Champions to help us reach this summit, and we are thrilled to share this opportunity with those who believe as we do that Ruthmere's best days lie ahead in the future we build together.



## INSPIRED BY JONATHAN TUFF

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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On the morning of April 25, 2019, (yes, it feels like so very long ago) Ruthmere Board member, the late Jonathan Tuff, took to the podium to share his “Inspired by Ruthmere” story with the crowd assembled for the 2019 Ruthmere Breakfast of Champions. Without intending to, he stole the show.

Jonathan was a humble person whose life’s work was to make every place he touched aesthetically more beautiful than it was before he arrived, a challenge which he turned into a family business with the help of his sister Cynthia Tuff and his husband Brad Priest at Garber’s Interior Design. But very few people know that as a young man Jonathan found inspiration inside the walls of Ruthmere mansion. Like many Elkhart youth, his school tour of Ruthmere left an indelible mark, “Wow, we have THIS kind of beauty here in Elkhart?!”

For Jonathan it did not end there—he wanted to learn more, much more. He came back to Ruthmere several times as a teenager, seeking knowledge of design aesthetics found in the architecture, the interior finishes, and the art objects—the wonderful art objects in Ruthmere’s collection. Pretty soon the Ruthmere staff asked Jonathan if he wanted to become a trained docent—this was the beginning of his volunteerism that boomeranged back over 30 years later when he began serving on annual Ruthmere gala event committees and eventually joined the Board of Directors in early 2019.

“I’m not sure if I would be an interior designer without Ruthmere.” His softly spoken words took everyone’s breath away, and echo for me to this day. The experiences we have today can and do make a difference in the lives of many others, sometimes immediately and sometimes a generation later. Even if you’re in the business of history such as I have the privilege to be, you often don’t get the opportunity to trace down those roots and give credit where it is due. That day in April of 2019, Jonathan gave us the gift to see that he traced some of his strongest roots for the appreciation of beauty to Ruthmere, and the light bulb came on in people’s heads, “What would happen if Ruthmere wasn’t here?” It was a seminal moment in the Ruthmere Champions campaign which turned a corner because Jonathan Tuff shared his story.

Jonathan was taken from us too soon on March 28, 2021, but his legacy of inspiring beauty lives on through the Jonathan Tuff Ruthmere Beautiful Fund. Contributions to this fund are used in a timely manner to raise the aesthetic of Ruthmere’s special events, programs and collections. Most recently, the flowers for First Night at the Aria were made possible entirely through the Jonathan Tuff Ruthmere Beautiful Fund.

## REMEMBERING OUR FOUNDING DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

By GEORGE E. FREESE, RUTHMERE BOARD TREASURER

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He craved quality for himself and for others. It was he who pushed for the addition of Rodins and Tiffanys as well as important paintings and pieces by many other well-known artists and sculptors. It was he who proposed piano competitions and concerts to draw people in. Robert wished for Ruthmere’s success as if it were his family.

After a lifetime of exceptional notetaking, he could recollect many intriguing life stories, many which found their way onto the pages of the Ruthmere Record and the recent Robert Recalls compilation.

His bronze bust and his initials on Ruthmere’s library ceiling will help remind me of his hand in all these things. Perhaps you have your own remembrances.

# TAKE HOME BEYOND WEDGWOOD BLUE

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Would you like to own a piece of Ruthmere’s blockbuster summer exhibition Beyond Wedgwood Blue? Silly question. Who wouldn’t?! Especially when we have two attractive options.

First, in the Ruthmere gift shop we have beautiful Wedgwood cameo stone jewelry. We offer necklaces in three different styles, earrings, and genuine Wedgwood cameo stones mounted to a commemorative card. All of these cameos feature the Antheia design, the Greek goddess of floral wreaths. We displayed virtually identical pieces of vintage Wedgwood Antheia cameo jewelry in the exhibition, but these cameos in the gift shop are “new old stock” circa 2000, and their mounts are new as well courtesy of Collections Manager Joy Olsen and her industrious team. Joy may soon be opening her own vintage jewelry store if we are not careful!

Another option for you to own an authentic piece of Wedgwood is to take part in history and purchase one of our Special Temporary Collection (STC) objects. These objects will be fairly priced, and within range of collectors at every level. Ruthmere has partnered with The Alasko Company to appraise the STC objects that were procured for the specific, intended purpose of being used in the Beyond Wedgwood Blue exhibition, and then “returned to the wild” so that new owners could enjoy them.

This groundbreaking collection method gives Ruthmere visitors a rare and meaningful way to engage with our exhibition—where else can you literally own a museum exhibition object with a provenance that you experienced? The Alasko Company is providing an independent 3rd party

appraisal for every auction lot. The auction sale will be conducted entirely online via eBay under the search name “Beyond Wedgwood Blue” starting November 1, 2021, at Noon ET. All proceeds from this sale will return to support Ruthmere collections by replenishing the funds for future STC purchases that will enhance future Ruthmere exhibitions.

So when you experienced Beyond Wedgwood Blue this past summer, did you see a “must have” item for your personal collection? Are you looking for that perfect unique holiday gift for someone? What better than an authentic piece of Wedgwood that was just featured in a world class exhibition!?



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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE  
RUTHMERE MUSEUM CAMPUS!**

**IF AN UPDATE IS  
REQUIRED, PLEASE CALL  
574-264-0330 EXT. 107**



## ANOTHER EXCITING COMPETITION FOR RUTHMERE!

By MARK DODDINGTON, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

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### ***2021 ROBERT B. BEARDSLEY PIANO PRIZE WINNER - DANIEL LIN***

Once again, Ruthmere has been privileged to host some of the most talented young pianists in the Midwest and beyond. On Saturday, September 18, we presented the Fourth Annual Beardsley Piano Prize competition, also the first in memory of our Founding Director, Robert Beardsley.

From among ten entrants, this year's judges selected six finalists to delight the audience in the Ruthmere Game Room. Taking the top prize of \$1000 and an opening-night performance in our 2021 Fall Concert Series was Dr. Daniel Lin of Indiana Wesleyan University. Dr. Lin dazzled all with J.S. Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in F-sharp minor, BWV 883, Book II," Maurice Ravel's "Scarbo from Gaspard de la Nuit," and Franz Liszt's "Transcendental Etude No. 10 in F-minor."

Five other Finalists gave stellar performances, too, but in the end only one could take top honors. Second prize of \$300 went to Helena Hye Soo Kim, while William Chiang, also a finalist in 2019 and 2020, claimed third prize of \$200. Also competing that afternoon were Euna Choi, Curtis Pavey and Chenyu Wang.

Judging this year's Beardsley Prize were three distinguished doctors of music, Dr. John Blacklow of Notre Dame University, Dr. Youmee Kim of Ohio Wesleyan University, and Dr. José Mendez of Northwestern University. After a short deliberation, the judges pronounced their choices. Each has agreed to judge future Beardsley Prize competitions, joining a growing list of illustrious experts.

For a twist, hosting duties this year were performed by Ruthmere Board Vice President Janet Evanega, stepping in for Executive Director Bill Firstenberger, who was out of town. The afternoon went without a hitch, a wonderful success in that the museum was also hosting an outdoor wedding at the same time. As has become tradition, First Presbyterian Church, Ruthmere's neighbor, opened its doors to our Finalists to allow them practice time on the church's piano before their individual performances. We wish to express our thanks to them for their generous spirit of support.



## ANOTHER EXCITING COMPETITION FOR RUTHMERE! (CONT'D)

By MARK DODDINGTON, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Daniel Lin will return to Ruthmere for a full concert on Thursday, October 14. Joining him this season are 2018 Beardsley Prize winner Nick Susi on Thursday, October 28; Frank Huang and “The Odyssey of Dissent” on Thursday, November 11; and, of course, Nicholas Roth on Friday, November 26. All concerts begin at 7:00 p.m., and are followed by a meet-and-greet with the artists.

Fall Concert tickets are available online at [www.Ruthmere.org](http://www.Ruthmere.org), or by phone at (574) 264-0330. Tickets are \$25.00 for Ruthmere members, \$40.00 for non-members. Season passes are also available to Ruthmere members for \$100.00 apiece. Due to COVID restrictions, seating is limited. We encourage you to book your seats as early as possible. For more information, please contact Ruthmere by phone or email.



### 2021 RUTHMERE FALL CONCERT SERIES



*Daniel Lin*  
*October 14th*



*Nick Susi*  
*October 28th*



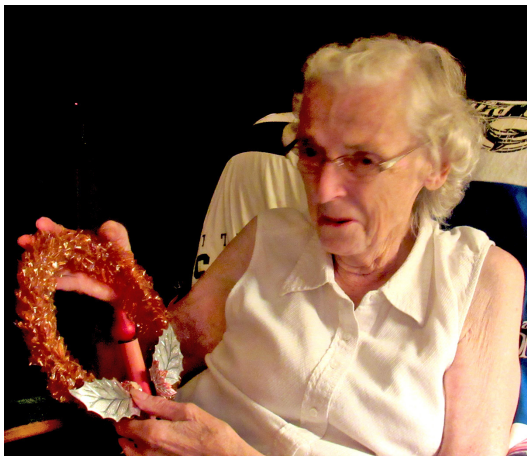
*Frank Huang*  
*November 11th*



*Nicholas Roth*  
*November 26th*

# A WREATH FOR VERNA

By MARK DODDINGTON, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR



It's amazing where a casual conversation may take you. A few months ago, I was working at the Havilah Beardsley House with volunteer Verna Greenlee. Quite by chance, the conversation turned to holiday decorations, and Verna began reminiscing about the red cellophane Christmas wreaths she adored as a child. As she spoke, I found myself falling under the spell of her tale. In an instant, I made up my mind to interview her. This story needed to be preserved.

“Poor as a church mouse we were, when we were kids,” recalled Verna, a child during World War II. “We used to live on Wolf Avenue, and we'd come up over the bridge to go to Grandma and Grandpa's out on the old Fort Wayne road.” The route always took them down Beardsley Avenue—Verna was emphatic that they travel that way every year. With a nostalgic gleam in her eye, she spoke of seeing the wreaths in all the windows of the big houses lining the street.

One year, her father managed to acquire two of those wreaths, a treasure worthy of the name in Verna's estimation. “I can look back and remember Christmases with the Christmas tree and those two red wreaths. One year at Christmas, we had no tree, just those two red wreaths. During the war, we couldn't even get the bulbs to go in them, but we had those wreaths.”

“We had some really tough times back then, and those wreaths were very, very special.”

“When Ray [her late husband] was alive, we always had real trees that touched the ceiling,” Verna said. This brought back memories of my own childhood, traveling out to a tree farm in western Maryland to cut the perfect tree.

Over the years, Verna's beloved wreaths faded into the mists of time, but the memory remains as clear as a crystal ornament adorning the trees of her youth.

As we spoke that afternoon, I decided that an interview would simply not be enough. As soon as I got home that day, I got on my computer and began searching eBay. There were many red cellophane wreaths available, but surprisingly, only one from the 1940's. No longer the scarlet of its heyday, the wreath had faded to a rusty gold color, but the socket and wiring were still in working order. I made the purchase almost immediately.

Once it arrived, I arranged a meeting with Verna at her home on Crawford Street, just around the corner from the Havilah Beardsley House. I knocked on her door around 7:00 p.m. with my “interview case,” the wreath concealed in a brown plastic grocery bag. We talked for over two hours that night, while her dog, Dusty (“a little bit of this, a little bit of that”) examined me from every angle. I made sure the wreath remained hidden until just the right moment before pulling it out and passing it to her.

Instantly, she began to well up. And, I admit, so did I.

“Oh, my word!” she kept repeating through her tears. “Oh, my word! I'll bet my Daddy and Ray are both going, ‘I don't believe it!’ You know where this is going? Right behind your head,” she added, indicating the front window behind me.

We continued talking for another hour about holidays and all the great years she and her family had in the house on Crawford. “We've been here since 1961.” The tears never quite disappeared from Verna's eyes as she cradled the wreath in her lap. As happy as it made me to give it to her, I came away with an amazing gift as well that night. Remembering my own early years was as potent as any glass of eggnog could be.

As Verna expressed it about the wreaths she had as a child, “We felt like millionaires when we had these.”

# BEARDSLEY CARRIAGE HOUSE UPDATE - WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS!

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Okay, Ruthmere members, you've shared our roller coaster ride journey over the past couple of years, and we're about to show you exactly HOW MUCH we appreciate your stalwart support. In 2020 the historic Beardsley Carriage House just north of the Havilah Beardsley House sustained a major fire (read about the how Ruthmere acquired this property in our Spring/Summer 2021 issue).

So far with this project, we are nearing our Phase One goals of structural stabilization and arresting site degradation—that's fancy preservation talk for "We made the building safe to walk through, and we put a new roof on the entire house." We have also buttoned up all the doors and windows, removed the excessive trees that were too close to the building, and we've installed a handsome new project sign asking for community support. This was one busy summer, but now it's time to get serious!

The Ruthmere Board has recently contracted with the Johnson Center at Grand Valley State University to execute a new strategic plan for the future of Ruthmere Campus. Here's where YOU come in. As part of our new strategic plan, we want to hear fresh ideas for what people would like to see in the Beardsley Carriage House facility. In the coming months we will be asking for your opinion in a

number of ways—please give us your honest feedback. We want the Beardsley Carriage House to make the biggest community impact possible that is within our financial means. Send your wild ideas and thoughtful comments to Executive Director Bill Firstenberger at [bfirstenberger@ruthmere.org](mailto:bfirstenberger@ruthmere.org). At Ruthmere, YOU are part of making history happen.

## HISTORY HIKE FOR FITNESS A HEALTHY SUCCESS!

By LOIS TOMASZEWSKI, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The numbers are in and they are spectacular! Since the day our director Bill Firstenberger applied the first sidewalk stencil signs in Island Park on July 26th, the History Hike For Fitness (HHFF) has had over 2,000 visitors with a daily average of 30 people engaging with this groundbreaking initiative. Perhaps more impressive, the rate of new people trying the activity is gaining momentum as time passes. We believe that we are on the cusp of the HHFF exploding to many times more users through social media sharing. You can help us make that happen by trying it out yourself and sharing your experience with friends.

This popularity makes logical sense. The HHFF blends interesting historical information with light duty physical exercise into a manageable activity that users can come back to again and again. And because of a group of enthusiastic sponsors and partners, this high tech, easy-to-use activity is FREE for anyone who wants it. Simply plug "historyhike.org" into your URL box and off you go!

For me as Ruthmere's Program Coordinator, it's been especially gratifying to see the germ of my idea sprout and grow before my eyes, and the fact that it offers such a positive personal benefit is a reward in itself. The History Hike For Fitness has proven to me that Ruthmere, and our collective creativity of our staff, Board, members and supporters, can be a force for making Elkhart a better community. That is what we are all here for.



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*Ruthmere*

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## HOLLYWOOD HOLIDAY!

By *ANDREA BARBOUR*, OUTREACH CURATOR



It's time to roll out the red carpet – Ruthmere's 2021 Christmas Season, Hollywood Holiday, is making its debut at last.

This year's theme for Ruthmere's famous Christmas décor is all about the movies. We've done movie themes in the past – A Christmas Carol, for one – but could never justify decorating the entire house in the theme of some of the other beloved holiday films. When the team was planning Christmas themes for the 2020 season, we were riding the high of the incredible success of our 2019 “Christmas By Design” theme. That year, we asked designers from around town to each decorate a room in a little friendly competition. The winner (820 Antiques) earned their non-profit organization of choice (the Humane Society of Elkhart County) a \$1000 check, determined by votes collected from unbiased tour visitors. We decided that this model could be successful again but wanted to do it a little differently – so this time, the decorations for each room are based on a different favorite holiday film. Sadly, we had to push it back a year due to COVID, but this year it's lights, camera, action!

As with the 2019 competition, each designer will get to choose their room and their non-profit. However, this time we have some of our own Ruthmere staff members entering the designer pool and trying their hand at decorating. Some of our movies have already been determined; we'll feature rooms based on A Christmas Story, Elf, Polar Express, The Nightmare Before Christmas, A Charlie Brown Christmas, Frosty the Snowman, It's a Wonderful Life, and a few more surprises.

Visitors will be given a ballot at the end of their tour to vote on which room they liked the most (they can also base their vote on which charity they'd like to see receive the \$1000 prize; we let people vote based on whatever criteria they see fit). That drives the incentive for people to come for a tour and pay close attention to the efforts that go into our decorations.

Our “Hollywood Holiday” tours begin November 27th and end December 30th. When you come to cast your vote, make sure to get a campus pass to see the Havilah Beardsley House, which will also be decorated by our talented curator, Jennifer Johns.