



In the Governor's Residence front yard stands a 20-foot white spruce tree harvested from the Chengwatana State Forest in Pine County by the state Department of Natural Resources and members of Conservation Corps Minnesota. Photo: Chris Steller

Capitol renovation dims some holiday lights

By: Chris Steller December 11, 2015 0

Equipment and materials associated with the extensive renovation work underway at the Minnesota State Capitol building spill down the front steps and out onto the mall. Construction fencing blocks off much of the nearby open area.

So perhaps it's a miracle that the group that each year erects a Hanukkah menorah on the Capitol mall managed to find a spot — and a source of electrical power — for their oversized candelabrum.

Another annual holiday display, a decorated tree, wasn't so lucky. Its traditional space on the west side of the Capitol mall toward the State Office Building is currently a construction yard.

And the second traditional holiday tree location, in the rotunda inside the Capitol building, is out of the question. The entire building is now closed to the public for the renovation project — with the sole anticipated exception of the House Chamber, where House leaders hope to hold 2016 floor sessions.

But outside, on the east side of the mall, where Upper Midwest Merkos usually puts their giant menorah, there is still some free space — at least enough to accommodate the one holiday display application that the Department of Administration received this season, according to Adam Giorgi, deputy communication director.

The challenge, besides space, was supplying power to the menorah, which is outfitted with electrical light bulbs that can be individually lighted.

Difficulty with tapping into the electrical lines that run under the mall was another barrier for the holiday tree with its more extensive lighting needs. But workers with the Department of Administration's plant management department found a way to run extension cords from an electric box to the menorah site.

Former U.S. Sen. Rudy Boschwitz was set to take part in the public menorah lighting ceremony Dec. 6, according to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Feller, but at the last minute was unable to participate. U.S. Sen. Al Franken also had to cancel several years ago, but dignitaries who have been present for the lighting ceremony in past years include former Govs. Tim Pawlenty and Jesse Ventura as well as the mayor of St. Paul and members of the state Legislature.

The ceremony involves lighting the menorah with actual flames from tiki torches, Feller said, with the light bulbs installed afterward. This year there was especially mild weather for the occasion. "When it's 30 below it's a little tougher," he said. Reciting blessings before the lighting of a menorah displayed in a public place is in keeping with the principle of providing publicity of the Hanukkah miracle, Feller said.

Holiday trees are part of the seasonal decorations at the Governor's Residence, where the Department of Administration supplies custodial service for the displays. Inside is a live, 10-foot tree, donated by Happyland Tree Farm of Sandstone. In the front yard stands a 20-foot white spruce tree harvested from the Chengwatana State Forest in Pine County by the state Department of Natural Resources and members of Conservation Corps Minnesota. Rocket Crane Company and Rainbow Lawncare donated installation and decoration services, with over 14,000 LED lights hung on the tree outside.

The outlook for outdoor displays during the holiday season a year from now looks about as iffy as this year, Giorgi said, because renovation work at the Capitol will still be underway.



Despite construction work on the Capitol grounds, the group that each year erects a Hanukkah menorah on the Capitol mall managed to find a spot for their oversized candelabrum. Photo: Chris Steller

RELATED CONTENT:

- **State Capitol: From hearings to hammers**
 - **Capitol renovation meeting highlights coming disruptions**
-
-

Tagged with: MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL



**Don't miss the Capitol Report
Top News of 2015 lists!** [Click to
subscribe](#)

