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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2010

Christmas Tree and Lights Grace Featherbed Lane for the First Time



Local children, wrapped up in hats and hoods, sung carols at the tree-lighting ceremony. (Photos: J. Fergusson)

Kathryn Speller has lived in Morris Heights since the '60s. This year, she says, is the first time holiday lights have been put up on Featherbed Lane, one of the neighborhood's few commercials strips.

"It's making a lot of residents happy," said Speller, a BronxWorks employee and Community Board 5 board member. "To me, it's a symbol that the community is being revitalized... that it's on the upswing."

On Monday evening, 30 or so community residents and leaders - Speller included - gathered in the bitter cold at the intersection of Featherbed Lane and Macombs Road to light the Christmas tree, another first for the street. It's a real tree, planted about five years ago, that's never before been decorated.

But there was a hitch. Actually, two hitches. Because of the last minute planning, the city's Department of Transportation was unwilling to hook up the tree's lights to the main line. To get around this, organizers borrowed a generator so they could keep it lit during the ceremony. The problem this time: the generator failed.

The event went ahead anyway. James A. McGraw, pastor at the First Bible Church of the Lord's Mission in Mount Hope, said a prayer, and children from a nearby shelter for homeless families sung carols. Each child received a party bag for their efforts.

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Featherbed Lane, a small commercial strip off University Avenue, is home to about 40 businesses

Organizers included Community Board 5, local resident Amelia Ramos, and Davidson Community Center, which is leading an effort to create a business improvement district (BID) on Burnside Avenue. The street lights, which extend to parts of Macombs Road and University Avenue, cost between \$7,000 and \$10,000 to rent. Affinity Health Plan, a non-profit health care provider, came up with the money.

Featherbed Lane is home to about 40 businesses, including an Internet cafe and a Rite Aid Pharmacy, as well as a brand new co-op building.

Local merchants are hoping the lights will encourage Morris Heights residents to shop local this holiday season.

And while pizza may not be a traditional Christmas food or gift, George Soydan Akkum, owner of My Pizza on University Avenue, said he liked the new look because it made the neighborhood "feel more upscale." He said he felt "proud" to be a merchant in the area.



James A. McGraw, a local pastor, gives a prayer

POSTED BY JAMES FERGUSSON AT 4:45 PM

LABELS: AFFINITY HEALTH PLAN, BRONX BUSINESS, CHRISTMAS TREES, DAVIDSON COMMUNITY CENTER, FEATHERBED LANE

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