

# THE OAKS

Fall 2007



Newsletter of the  
**Oaks Homeowners  
Association**



*At the northern end of Phase 1 on Live Oak East, where the distribution line comes up from below.*

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## More Power to the Oaks

Rainer Standke

Many of you have seen the DWP work crews around the Oaks off and on since early this spring. As announced at our annual meeting in March, the DWP is upgrading the electrical system in the neighborhood in several phases. We asked the DWP's Transmission & Distribution District Supervisor, Jay Puklavetz, for an update.

The focus is on the high-voltage lines that feed the four distribution circuits that are connected to the homes in the Oaks. While each of those circuits has its own supply lines, they can also interconnect. This means if there's a problem with the supply in one circuit it can be fed from another direction.

A major cause of power outages in the summer of 2006 was the failure of an underground feeder line between the intersection of Western & Franklin and Live Oak East above the American Film Institute. Replacing that line constituted the first of five phases of upgrades, and it has been completed. The redesign and replacement of the overhead high-voltage lines on Canyon Drive between Canyon Cove and Spring Oak was Phase 2 and is also completed. Many homes on that stretch of Canyon got new service connections at the same time. They are of the newer and more robust triplex type that combines all three wires into one strand. As part of this phase many transformers were also upgraded with a larger operating capacity.

Work on Phase 3 is underway since early August and will take six to eight months to complete. The plans for Phase 5 are complete and work is to start in June of 2008. Both of these phases will entail replacement of underground distribution lines. Those lines have been in place since the area was originally developed, which would peg their age to around seventy years or more. Because the DWP strives to keep everyone connected at all times, a lot of the work is done "hot", while the lines are energized and the power is on. This is often impossible in the confined spaces of the underground vaults and conduits which house the power lines and transformers that DWP technicians will be working on in phases 3 and 5. It doesn't help that in the Oaks there is only one conduit per line. In newer neighborhoods, conduits are always done in pairs, one for the lines, plus a spare.

Mr. Puklavetz hopes that replacing the underground lines will be as easy as pulling them out and pulling new ones into place. But based on his extensive experience with projects like the



one in the Oaks, he does anticipate some problems. Over the decades the ground has appreciably shifted in many areas and trees may have put roots into conduits. This means that there will likely be some digging and open-trench work.

By the time that you read this temporary conduits should have been put into place in the area of phase 3, and crews should be replacing the permanent cables. This work is anticipated to be finished by the end of November.

*continued on page 6*



*An underground electricity vault in Oaks, probably installed in the 1930's. B.P. & L. stands for "Bureau of Power and Lighting." The ground has quite visibly shifted over the years.*

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[www.oakshome.org](http://www.oakshome.org)

# NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Gerry Hans

I've lived over twenty years in the Oaks, but not until the last few years could I say I know my way on each and every street. If you haven't lived here as long as I, you'll find that the Oaks grows on you. I love the quiet hills, the valleys, and the winding narrow streets of the Oaks. I treasure the trees, gardens and the open space that allow us to share Griffith Park's birds, mammals, and reptiles. It's amazing that such an off-the-beaten-path nook still exists so close to what is rapidly becoming a high-density urban area, Hollywood. Being tucked into Griffith Park's borders on two sides, our unique hillside setting continues to be one of the most sought after areas in all of Los Angeles.

The people of the Oaks are an eclectic bunch ranging in age from newborn to 99+! Lately, I'm seeing more strollers and hearing the friendly sounds of kids. It's no wonder so many young families seem to be taking root in the Oaks. Go meet your new neighbors! Everyone seems to have a good story, so listen to your neighbor's story, if you haven't already. You'll be amazed!

For those getting our Oaks Newsletter for the first or second time, you will quickly get a sense of the issues on which we are focused. The Oaks Homeowners Association has a dedicated and resourceful board which you can call upon with any questions or issues. We try to represent the best interests of the community through our relationships with our Council Office, City agencies, and the

Hollywood United Neighborhood Council (HUNC). We also participate on other community boards and committees, such as Parks, River, and Open Space (PROS), a "shared resource" advocacy committee of three local Neighborhood Councils.

Over the past few years our Association has stepped up our involvement to protect the unique character of the Oaks neighborhood. We strive to keep a balanced perspective on the need for new housing for our community with that of Oaks residents' desire that new housing be contextual with the existing home stock. We believe that the Planning Department has been highly responsive with their recommendation that our area receive a significant level of temporary protection (see ICO article) until updated Hillside planning codes can be finalized.

We have also scrutinized developers that have been known to "bend the rules", including the illegal cutting of our native Oak and California Walnut trees. Also, several times in the recent past we have leveraged opposition to the granting of variances when there is no basis of hardship. The Association has been effective each time in representing residents from different parts of the Oaks in these variance proceedings.

If this sounds like an advertisement to pay your membership dues, so be it. The Oaks paid membership has grown steadily over the last few years, which the Board takes as an

affirmation that we are acting as productive advocates for the community. The nominal \$25 per year fee goes to pay for the newsletter, website, mailing postcard notifications, and other expenses. We also want you to participate in some of our social activities, including the popular Halloween Walk, the Summer Picnic, and our Holiday Party. Dues mailed in now will go toward year 2008. We also have a convenient means to pay your dues at our website, OaksHome.org.

If you haven't visited the website recently, we hope you will take a look. Much thanks to board member Rainer Standke for the timely updates and improvements to the site. For those that do not have access to the internet, please ask any board member to assist you with any resource information that you may need.

Finally, a big thank-you goes to board member Marilyn Johnson who has devoted her time and her English editing skills to this newsletter for so many years. This newsletter is her last, as she will then help transition the responsibility to new hands. I'm sure you will agree that Marilyn has brought our newsletter to new higher standards, and we all appreciate her good work.

Have a safe Fall and Holiday season!



## How to Throw a Party (and still be a good neighbor)

Rainer Standke

We're all good neighbors, right? At least, we think we are. And we throw good parties, too. You may wonder what this has to do with the Oaks. Well, the Oaks is special in so many different ways, and two of the most important ways have to do with topography. The two differences are the way that sound travels around our hillsides and the way we navigate our narrow streets.

Any sound in the canyons is heard clearly and loudly by many more people than you would think. When you play your favorite heavy-metal song it bounces around the sides of the canyon, enveloping everybody in that

groove—whether they are your guests or just happen to live in the area. So it is certainly a good idea to let your neighbors know in advance when you'll have a party, and how long it is intended to last. Any sort of annoyance is a lot more bearable when its end is in sight. Around 10 pm seems a good time to move the party indoors.

Another big impact your party may have stems from your guests' transportation. You should encourage them to be considerate to your neighbors, and to park only where it is legal. Keeping road access open to the neighborhood is important for everyone around, not only for conven-

ience and courtesy, but for any type of emergency. If you expect your guests to arrive in more cars than your immediate vicinity can reasonably absorb you might want to hire a valet service. When you get a quote be sure to tell them about your specific area, and how far away they may have to park the cars. Make sure they know you want all cars parked legally and that the drop-off area can still be passed by traffic. Another option is a shuttle van taking your guests to your house from a remote location and back.

As you can see, all it really takes to throw a party in the Oaks and still be a good neighbor is some reasonable consideration.

# Walk the DWP Light Festival

Gerry Hans

It has been announced that November 21-25th will be the trial period for a pedestrian-version of the DWP Light Festival at Griffith Park. The holiday event has been considered a tradition for many families over the last 10 years, in spite of the long lines of idling vehicles, and the traffic congestion getting to and through the one-mile display of lights.

Many community organizations, including Oaks Homeowners Association, have pointed out to DWP that they may want to walk the walk based upon their well advertised commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Not only is the endless idling of cars contributing to

global warming, but there are many children in these cars, and they are the ones most sensitive to pollution. In addition, with overweight a major concern with our children and Type II Diabetes sky-rocketing in LA, maybe its time for kids and families to get out into the fresh air.

The DWP has listened. When the month-plus event starts this year (earlier than in the past), the WALKING ONLY premier will kick it off, timed with the Thanksgiving weekend. We hope that everyone goes to see the lights, by foot, November 21-25th. This is a test run and its success will assure further transformation in

the future. So join your neighbors and enjoy the new earth-friendly Walk Only Light Festival!

Parking will be available at both the Zoo parking lot (best accessed from I-5) or at various parking lots near the Merry-go-round and Ranger Station. The Zoo lot is the closest parking lot to the Light Festival. Of course, the physically-impaired will be accommodated with shuttles. Find more details at OaksHome.org.

Support a PEDESTRIAN Light Festival on November 21-25!

## No, There's No One Trimming a Tree, It's Just a Sign

A local tree trimming company with the word "Green" in its name has been leaving signs attached to plastic pylons in our streets off and on for the last year. Most of us pass by these signs in our cars and figure, "Oh, they put that sign there to warn me that they're working up in the trees and I should slow down."

Well, here's what's interesting... In most of the cases, they're NOT up there in the trees working. The signs are put there as an advertisement of their services — which is illegal, of course (otherwise we'd have billboards all over the neighborhood) — and they hope they'll get away with it because we'll all assume it's a safety notice about workers in the trees above.

It's pretty clever, you have to admit. But we've had our disagreements with this "Green" company before. I'm sure you remember. They were the trimming service that was involved in illegally cutting down those oak and walnut trees on Live Oak East in June 2006.

Anyway, those of us who are onto this new game have been taking the signs down as fast as the company can fraudulently put them up. And you're welcome to, also. If you see one of the "Green" signs, and you look about and don't see any tree-trimmers working in the trees above, you'll know it's an illegal advertisement and you can chuck the sign into the nearest blue trash can (they're recyclable). Or if you prefer, you can return the signs to the Green Leaf Tree Service.

It's all part of the continuing fun of living in The Oaks.



Homeowners Association



## Fire Season Is Upon Us — Let's Be Ready!

Oaks Homeowners: The big Fire Evacuation Drill we held July 28th showed up a number of shortcomings in our preparedness for the real fires that might come this autumn. So let's look ahead and take preventative action to make sure we're ready!

- During the evacuation drill, the fire trucks had a tough time maneuvering past tree branches that have grown out into our streets. Take a look at the trees outside your house and see if there are branches hanging over the street. If there are, get them cut back now – it's your responsibility, not the city's!
- Throughout the Oaks, mostly on the narrower streets, there are new Red Flag Day No Parking zones. On Red Flag Days, as announced by the Fire Department, your cars will be towed if parked in a Red Flag Day Zone. Let's get our cars off of those marked streets so fire trucks can get through.
- Too many of us have no room left for cars in our garages. Our cars are parked on our narrow hillside streets – and that makes it much more difficult for fire trucks and emergency vehicles to make it through to put out fires. If you don't have a driveway to park your car, now is a really good time to clean out your garage, so your car can be in the garage and the streets can be clear for fire trucks!

The Oaks Homeowners Association thanks for you doing your part in making this a safer brush fire season!

# A Scientific Look at Griffith Park

Gerry Hans

A survey of Griffith Park's flora and fauna was well underway prior to the May 8th fire which ignited a good portion of the Park. The Griffith Park Natural History Survey (GPNHS) is a privately funded project whose mission is "To promote knowledge, appreciation and understanding of Griffith Park wildlife and natural resources, and to provide a source of information for informed stewardship of the Park's ecosystems." A permanent website is under development and already partially operational as a



Cooper's Hawk in Griffith Park.

means of accessing the scientific data collected. The website will become an educational resource for Park users seeking information about the plants and animals they see in the Park, and eventually interactive tools such as a blog and sighting report forms will be incorporated.

So who is responsible for making the Survey happen? The project's roots actually evolved from the Franklin Hills Residents Association which set up and funded a non-profit "wildlife fund." The Oaks Homeowners Association was one of the early supporters of the project, as were



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Neighborhood Councils (HUNC and GGPNC), LFIA, and various private individuals.

Leading the project is Dan Cooper, President of Cooper Ecological Monitoring. Dan is a Harvard graduate (A.B.) with a Masters of Science from UC Riverside. Dan was involved with the creation of the Audubon Center at Debs Park in Lincoln Heights prior to organizing his own consulting firm. He is a well-known birder, recently authoring the book, "Important Bird Areas of California."

A good deal of initial field work has been completed by two young scientists, Stephanie Spehar and Paul Mathewson. I myself was instrumental in recruiting them after spending time with them in the Park discussing wildlife corridors and other technical issues relating to the re-drafting of the Master Plan for Griffith Park. Stephanie is a PhD, New York University, and has extensive international field work experience, especially in primatology. Paul is a Masters candidate in Ecology, also with lots of scientific field work under his belt. These two have worked for peanuts and take great pride in producing an impressive Mammal and Herptile Report, which can be reviewed at the website.

Martin Byhower is a team member who participated in GPNHS bird surveys in Griffith Park. He's a walking encyclopedia on birds, plants, and mammals. Martin is involved with Audubon in Palos Verde/South Bay; he also teaches and does private guide services.

Lastly, the team includes Chief Park Ranger Albert Torres and Ranger Anne Waisgerber. Their full support and park-specific knowledge is invaluable.

To give a sense of the expertise of the team members, here are some examples of email exchanges that took place during the early stages of the project this year:

*March 20th, Martin Byhower: "One thing that was particularly exciting for me was finding a group of wintering Western Meadowlarks on the Toyon Landfill site. This (and other) native grassland breeding species are seriously declining in our region. The site seems ideal for restoration to a native grassland community, which I believe is currently absent from the park (not to mention most of Southern California)."*

*April 2nd, Dr. Stephanie Spehar: "We think that if the park is to be characterized and preserved as an urban wilderness, it is essential to maintain the park as a functioning, connected ecosystem, rather than just an "island" within an urban matrix. If you want to maintain healthy populations (particu-*

*larly of terrestrial animals, like deer, bobcat, and mountain lions(?) they need to be able to immigrate and disperse in and out of Griffith Park. As Gerry mentioned in his email, wildlife corridors are really the only way to maintain this connectivity."*

*May 5th, Dan Cooper: "Thought you'd be interested in some preliminary bird numbers. There appear to be ca. 150 regularly-occurring bird species in the park (including the L.A. River portion), and of these, between 50 and 70 nest. This season's surveys should clarify this. There are an additional 45 or so species that are best considered vagrants, meaning that there are just a handful of records and they probably do not occur annually. So, the total list should approach 200 species."*

*June 1st (post-fire), Dan Cooper: "We're wrapping up Phase I (data gathering and historical research). Phase I yielded many interesting things about the natural history of the park, virtually none of which had been studied/synthesized before. For birds, the bird community is surprisingly intact, with nearly everything one would expect to find in the eastern Santa Monica Mtns. present in good numbers. Quail, Wrenit, and California Thrasher are among the sedentary (non-migratory) birds that are especially common, and all three are highly dependent on the undeveloped lands in the park. We confirmed the presence of Rufous-crowned Sparrow, which has been considered a State Species of Special Concern on previous lists, and may yet be. The whole Mt.*

## Oaks ICO Progress

### Oaks Residents Hope It Reaches City Council Sometime Soon... Maybe

On September 18th, the Planning and Land Use Management Committee (PLUM) of the City of Los Angeles considered, among many other items, The Oaks' Interim Control Ordinance (ICO). At the hearing, planners Blake Kendrick and Kevin Keller of the Community Planning Bureau presented the basis for the ICO (the Oaks neighborhood's desire to control out-of-scale development) along with their research into the character and size of all the existing homes in The Oaks and the Ordinance they designed to preserve that character. After a recommendation for the Ordinance by Renee Weitzer of Council District 4 and comments pro and con by neighbors (mostly pro), the PLUM Committee



Endangered species Nevin's Barberry in Western Canyon.

Lee/Cahuenga Peak area appears especially important for this distinctive sparrow. As for non-birds, we are starting a mammal and reptile/amphibian survey as part of Phase II, but I can say that from incidental observations, the community looks pretty good. There are anecdotal reports of the extremely imperiled Coast Horned Lizard which we will be following up on in Phase II. We will also try to investigate the nightbird community which is especially poorly known (e.g., Barn Owl, Western Screech-Owl, Common Poorwill)."

June 13th, Dan Cooper: "Went out with Paul and Steph today. They are a delightful team! Paul was turning over a charred log and came face-to-face with a coiled rattlesnake. Plants are springing up everywhere—shrubs sprouting from the top of the rootstalk. It's amazing to watch."

As many of us are regretfully aware, Recreation & Parks does not have a Staff Ecologist for its many park assets. Because of Dan Cooper's involvement with the Survey at the time of the fire, he had already proven himself as an invaluable resource. Consequently, his firm received a one-year contract to formulate a "wildlife management plan" as a part of the Department's fire recovery program and as a permanent program for the Park.

These are exciting times, indeed, as important steps are finally being taken to study and protect the ecology of Griffith Park. Although Phase I and II

are complete, there is much scientific surveying/analyses to be done, and a website to be designed/maintained. The steering committee for Griffith Park Natural History Survey is tasked with making the Survey a sustainable, expanding project to benefit all Angelenos for decades to come.

For links to the Griffith Park Natural History Survey website, for periodic updates, Survey volunteer activities, Survey announcements, and donation details, go to [OaksHome.org](http://OaksHome.org).

**Your neighbors and Oaks specialists.**



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## Moves Forward is slow but steady

voted to approve the ICO and send it for consideration to the full City Council.

The City Council will consider the ICO at some point in the not too vastly distant future. When? No one knows. But if the Council does approve the Ordinance, the provisions of the Ordinance would take effect as of July 12, 2007, the date at which the City Planning Commission approved it. The temporary Ordinance would be effective for one year from the end of the publication period by the City Clerk, which is roughly thirty days after approval by City Council. The Ordinance could also be extended for up to two, six month terms beyond that.

The ICO limits the size of a home that can be built on any lot based on the relationship of home size to lot size, or Floor Area Ratio (FAR). The

ICO is intended to control out-of-scale development in the neighborhood for a temporary period while longer-term regulations for The Oaks are formulated by the Department of City Planning working in conjunction with the residents of The Oaks. The Oaks ICO is, in that sense, a pilot project for the City, to determine how more specific regulations might limit the uncontrolled development of oversize homes in built-out neighborhoods like ours.

The text of the proposed Interim Control Ordinance is available on The Oaks website, [OaksHome.org](http://OaksHome.org). We'll also be posting a list of Frequently Asked Questions about the Ordinance on the website. And if neighbors have other questions, they can write to Oaks Homeowners Association boardmember Bob Young at [Bob.Young@oakshome.org](mailto:Bob.Young@oakshome.org).

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## More Power to the Oaks

*continued from page 1*

Of course the DWP knows that this will be an inconvenience for anyone using the narrow streets of The Oaks. While underground work is underway, temporary overhead lines will keep the juice flowing to the affected homes. The DWP strives to keep disruptions to a minimum and promises to keep everyone informed ahead of time. However, if you have any concerns about the work, you can contact both the Oaks Homeowners Association and the DWP's Jay Puklavetz by sending an email to [powerupgrade@oakshome.org](mailto:powerupgrade@oakshome.org). Mr. Puklavetz can also be reached by phone at 213-367-6420.

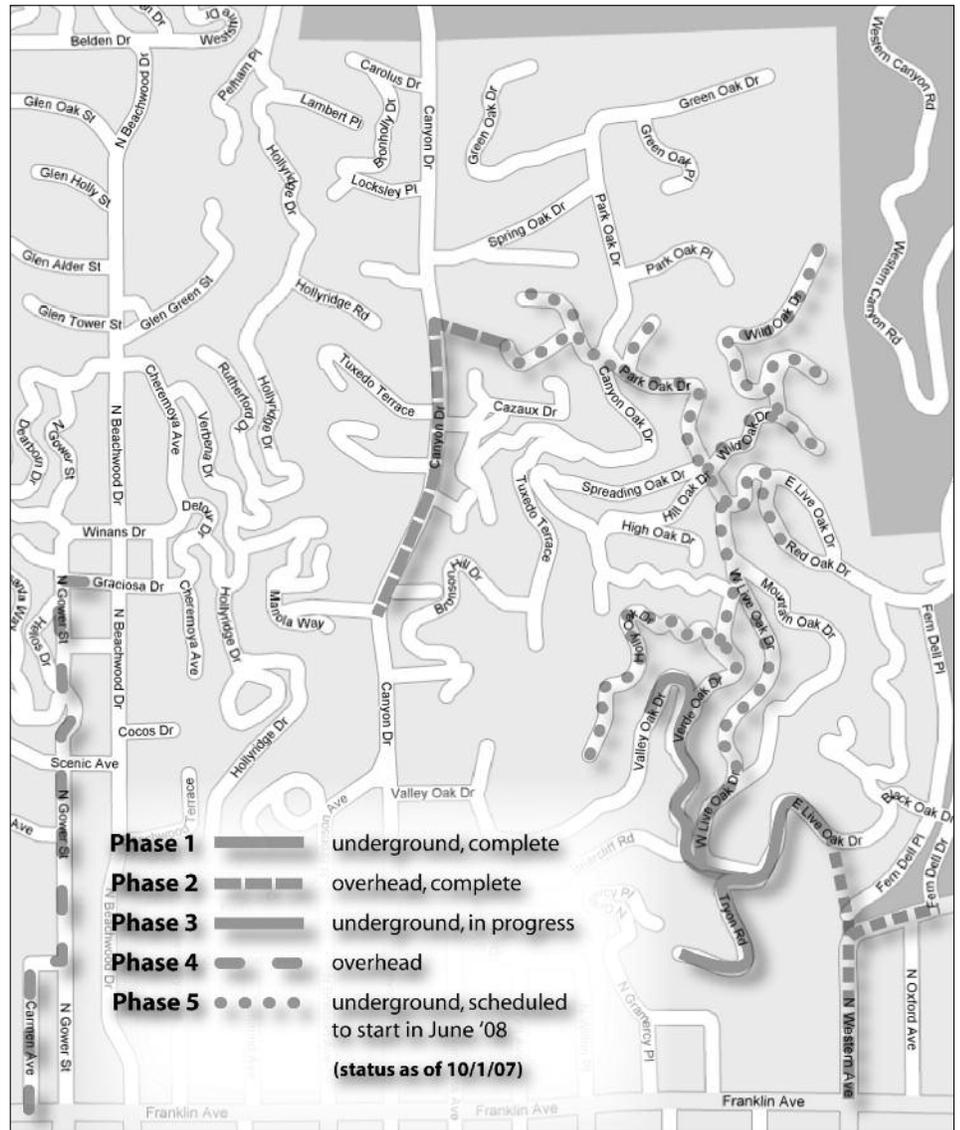
Plans for Phase 4 are currently designed, and the actual work is scheduled to begin in November. In this phase a high-voltage line feeding Beachwood Canyon will be upgraded. The Oaks will benefit by way of improved reliability and capacity of a neighboring circuit which can be tapped into in case of a failure.

On a side-note, Mr. Puklavetz mentioned the decision to have the power lines put in above or below ground was up to the original developer of the tract. Overhead lines are obviously cheaper both to put in, as well as to maintain. Nowadays the city mandates power lines to be installed underground in new developments. While it is possible to move power lines from overhead to underground, it is also quite expensive. The cost has to be borne entirely by the property owners.

Overall the power upgrade project is progressing on schedule. Some parts of the distribution system in the Oaks have reached the end of their useful lives and are due to be replaced, and they will be. The new lines will offer improved reliability, as well as about three times the previous capacity. That's really nothing to frown upon!

Yes, we will be annoyed by the occasional power disruption and by some open trenches, but we still owe thanks to the folks that make this happen. That would, of course, be the DWP, including their own crews as well as their contractors, as well as our DWP Liaison, Jay Puklavetz. We should hold them to their promise to be as considerate as possible, and to be as least disruptive as possible, but at the same time we should do whatever we can to help them do their job. Finally, we should not forget to thank our Councilmember, Tom LaBonge and his staff for their help in getting this project started.

The future in the Oaks promises to be brighter and more powerful than ever!



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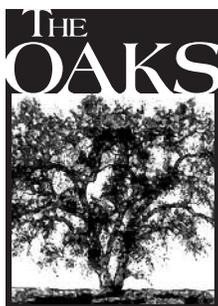
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POSTMASTER: DO NOT FORWARD

# THE OAKS CALENDAR



## THE ANNUAL HALLOWEEN WALK

Wednesday, October 31

## THE OAKS HOLIDAY PARTY

Sunday, December 16 from 5 to 8 p.m.

Invitations to Follow



**DWP LIGHT FESTIVAL**  
Walking Only Nights Nov. 21 – 25