



NEWS RELEASE

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Morrison Bridge lights shine in boy's memory

By all accounts, J.J. Stewart was a remarkable boy. Precocious, courageous, and grown-up are words his family use to describe him. Seven months after he was born in Portland in 1983, J.J. was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. The rest of his short life was spent fighting a terminal cancer. Through it all, J.J. found time to pursue his passions: playing board and video games, watching Johnny Carson, and learning about Portland's bridges.

Before he died in 1989 at the age of six, one of J.J.'s favorite pastimes was to be driven across Portland's downtown bridges. He knew them all by name and could point out their unique features. When he was in the old Bess Kaiser Hospital, J.J. asked for a room with a view of the bridges. Seeing the colorful architectural lights that were added to the Morrison Bridge in December 1987 was a special moment for him.

After J.J.'s death, his family and friends decided to do something to honor his memory. Barbara Chester, his aunt, contacted the leader of the local group that had designed the lights for the Morrison Bridge. Could the group use some help lighting the other downtown bridges? Paddy Tillett with the Willamette Light Brigade said yes, they certainly could. "So we held garage sales and sold t-shirts until we raised nearly twelve thousand dollars," recalls Barbara.

The Light Brigade used the funds to design lighting for the Hawthorne Bridge towers and a new system of LED (light emitting diode) lights for the Morrison Bridge. The new Morrison lights were installed in 2007 through a project funded in large part by Pacific Power. The new lights reduce energy use 600%, extend fixture life from 12,500 hours to 100,000 hours, reduce maintenance costs, and are powered by renewable energy.

The new lights can also be programmed in a nearly infinite spectrum of colors. After groups and citizens began requesting special lighting displays, Multnomah County started a program last year that allows anyone to rent a lighting display of their own design. The program is administered by the Willamette Light Brigade, which is raising funds to light the Burnside Bridge. One of the first families to rent a special lighting display is the family of J.J. Stewart. This month the Morrison Bridge is washed in red and gold light in the memory of J.J. Stewart and other children who fight illness. J.J.'s family chose February because he was born on Valentine's Day.

(more)



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Morrison Bridge Lights – Page Two

“We know how difficult it is for families fighting a childhood illness,” said Barbara Chester. “The lights remind us of J.J. but we also hope they can provide some comfort and inspiration for other families that are going through difficult health issues.”

For information on the special lighting program for the Morrison Bridge, visit www.lightthebridges.org. Multnomah County maintains the Morrison Bridge, five other Willamette River bridges and 300 miles of roads. For more information, visit www.multco.us/bridges.

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Note: Interviews with J.J. Stewart’s family can be arranged by contacting Mike Pullen at Multnomah County.

Click the links below to download photos of J.J. Stewart:

- [J.J. Stewart on his fifth birthday in 1988](#)
- [J.J. Stewart on a tour of the Hawthorne Bridge operator’s station in 1989](#)
- [J.J. Stewart touring the Hawthorne Bridge in 1989. Multnomah County Bridge Maintenance Manager Bart Bonney is the man carrying J.J.](#)