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## PROLOGUE

# Santa's Campus Helpers Too Busy for Bah, Humbug!

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**S**hortly after dark on an evening in early December, an unseen hand throws a switch and 500 multi-colored lights spring to life on the two big evergreens flanking the Bizzell statue on the south oval. Simultaneously, if all goes well, a star atop the library clock tower blazes into light and begins its rotating vigil over the campus. The University of Oklahoma holiday season has begun.

To students who can't make it home in time to help decorate the family tree, the annual University tree lighting has become very special — so special that one group of OU students is determined to share the spirit with the other inhabitants of their adopted hometown, Norman, Oklahoma.

The students focused their attention on the aluminum Christmas tree that has stood on the grounds of the City of Norman's municipal complex for the past few holiday seasons. Surely, reasoned the residents of OU's Cate Center, a classy city like Norman could do better than that.

When school began in August, a Cate Center committee planned benefit dances, sold Cate Center caps and collected aluminum cans to purchase a 30-to 50-foot living tree for the city. A grower contacted in Wisconsin estimated the cost, including transporting and planting the desired evergreen, at between \$1,200 and \$1,500. The promoters had most of the money in hand by early November.

With the blessing of the city administration, the students sought the help of other community groups to stage a tree lighting of memorable proportions — civic organizations to purchase lights, the fire department to string them, school children to make decorations and join the Cate Center choir in caroling in the holiday season.

That this surge of Christmas spirit

should have emerged from Cate Center is no surprise. The 975 residents of this housing unit, about half upperclassmen, have been Santa's Helper role models for some time. Their "Hanging of the Greens" party for the area's handicapped children is an established tradition, and last year they set a new high for the entire community with their efforts in behalf of Norman's Christmas Store.

The Christmas Store is a unique project to make available to low-income families new and near-new donated gifts and food items. In pleasant surroundings decorated and staffed by volunteers, family members are allowed to make their holiday purchases for either an extremely low cash price or through service to the store. The idea of providing assistance while preserving dignity has been especially appealing to faculty, staff and students who organize fund-raising benefits for several weeks each fall.

Last year Cate Center residents blitzed Norman neighborhoods door-to-door, and in three hours, with no advance publicity, they returned with 10,000 cans of food, the largest single donation made to the Christmas Store. This year more than 300 dorm dwellers, wearing Cate Center ID badges and clutching city street maps, will board buses and trolleys provided by OU parking and transportation to canvass for 15,000 cans in three hours. This time, however, the neighbors will know they are coming.

The next time the old holiday *Bah, Humbugs!* set in, it might help to remember the young man from Cate Center who visited the Christmas Store last year to report back to his colleagues on the result of their philanthropic efforts. "This is the first time," he said, "that I ever knew what Christmas was all about." —CJB

### JOSEPH A. BRANDT

*Sooner Magazine joins with the University of Oklahoma family in expressing our condolences to the family of Former OU President Joseph A. Brandt, who died at his home in Laguna Hills, California, on November 1, 1984. He was 85. The sixth president of the University, Brandt was also the founder of the University of Oklahoma Press and the Sooner Magazine.*