**8 things to love about the La Crosse Rotary Lights**

A cooperative effort among the La Crosse area’s Rotary clubs, La Crosse Rotary Lights is a gift to the region that involves hundreds of volunteer organizations, sponsors and committees. And it is so worthwhile. From the stunning lights and beautiful music to the fun entertainment and all-around holiday cheer, here are eight things to love about the La Crosse Rotary Lights.

**1. Parade**
Any proper celebration must be kicked off with a parade, right? The La Crosse Rotary Lights is no exception. Starting at 5 p.m. the day after Thanksgiving, this is the true kickoff to the holiday season. Enjoy animals, floats and carriages decked out in Christmas lights making their way through the parade route, followed by fireworks and the opening ceremonies.

**2. Carriage Rides**
The only thing better than enjoying holiday lights is enjoying holiday lights while on a carriage ride. Starting the day after Thanksgiving and continuing every Saturday and Sunday until New Year’s, visitors can hop on a carriage ride to take in the festivities and lights, all while donating a portion of each ride to the Rotary Lights!

**3. Live Nativity**
The Live Nativity tells the story of Christmas with a mission of collecting nonperishable food items to help feed the hungry in the greater La Crosse area. Work on the nativity set begins in mid-summer, and the production requires approximately 700 volunteers each year, all to put on a great display for the Rotary Lights visitors!

**4. Santa**
Children will enjoy having the chance to visit Santa every night through Dec. 23 — after that, he’s got a very important job to do! Santa’s reindeer friends — you know, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and so on — will also be joining him in Santa Village at Riverside Park.

**5. Hayride**
Gather the whole family, bundle up, grab some hot chocolate, and hop on a free hayride through the park! The rides are available from 5:30 to 8 p.m. on Nov. 27, Dec. 4, 11, 18 and 25, and they’re the perfect way to take in the beautiful decorations.

**6. Ugly Sweater 5K Run**
If you’re the running type, or just the ugly holiday sweater type (and who isn’t?), you’ll love the Ugly Sweater 5K Run. The race begins at 4:15 p.m. in Myrick Park and ends at Riverside Park amidst the twinkling holiday lights!

**7. “Ice Castle” Entertainment Stage**
As if the lights and decorations aren’t enough, the La Crosse Rotary Lights puts on an abundance of entertainment each weeknight from Nov. 26 through Dec. 20. Take in musical acts, such as Bone-a-Fied Brass, Giving Hearts Choir, the UW-La Crosse Wind Ensemble, the La Crosse Irish Music Sessions Players, plus middle school and high school band and choir groups, and so much more!

**8. Lights**
While there is so much to do at the La Crosse Rotary Lights, the main attraction is, of course, the lights! Nearly 300,000 visitors enjoy the sights each year, whether walking, driving, or taking a carriage ride. The sight of more than two million twinkling lights reflecting on the glassy surface of the Mississippi River is unparalleled.

There is plenty of time between Thanksgiving and New Year’s to make your way into La Crosse to take in the gorgeous scenes and amazing entertainment. What are you most looking forward to?

***Kristen Finstad*** *is a member of the Discover Wisconsin crew. Having grown up in River Falls, attending UW-Stevens Point and now living in Madison, she’s a Wisconsin girl through and through. Watch Discover Wisconsin TV Saturday mornings at 10 on Fox Sports Wisconsin. (Twitter:* [*@DiscoverWI*](http://www.twitter.com/DiscoverWI)*)*