



## Vermont Lions Club Memory Trees

December 22, 2020

By Lion Stephen Flanders



Memory tree, sponsored by the Norwich Lions Club

### Origin of Vermont memory trees

The state-wide tradition of Lions Club memory trees started in Vermont's District 45 when Norwich's Phil Wheeler became district governor in 1979 and encouraged clubs in the state to use memory trees to promote the holiday spirit. Phil had been inspired by the success of the Middlebury Memory tree, a tradition that started in the mid-1970s.

### Norwich memory tree

Norwich has had a memory tree since 1979, starting with the efforts of dedicated Norwich Lions and continued to this day with spearhead the acquisition, placement and decoration of the tree.



Erection and decoration of the tree, followed by admiration of the lights

Participants were invited to memorialize those who are special to them with a downloadable form or a note to be delivered by mail or in person to Norwich's town clerk, Bonnie Munday, who kindly offered to compile the memorials on a poster for display in front of the Norwich town hall in the New Year.



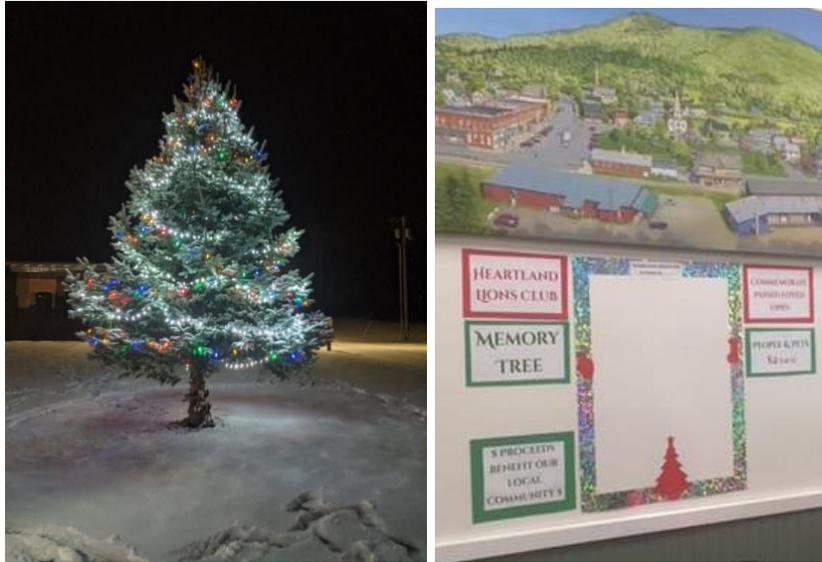
Memory tree with other Norwich lights

The club decided to direct donations to benefit the [19 Days of Norwich](#), which is an initiative of the town's general store, Dan & Whit's, to raise funds for the [Upper Valley Haven](#)—a non-profit, private organization that serves people struggling with poverty by providing food, shelter, education, service coordination, and other support. All donations were to be matched by the Jack and Dorothy Byrne Foundation, a charitable organization in the Upper Valley.

The club's initiative was complemented by another community effort to place a lighted garland around the town green with medallions to memorialize Vermonters, who had died of COVID-19.

### **Other Vermont memory trees.**

The **Georgia Lions Club** reports that they planted a blue spruce in front of their fire station to a memory tree. They mail postcards to town residents offering the opportunity to sponsor a light bulb in memory of a loved one. When the tree is decorated with colored and white strings of lights, they recite the names received in a tree lighting ceremony.



Georgia Memory Tree and Heartland Memory poster

The **Heartland Lions Club** (Royalton, Tunbridge, and Sharon) 44<sup>th</sup> annual holiday Memory Tree is being displayed on designated posters around town. The club offers the opportunity to memorialize a loved one or favorite pet by writing the name on a poster in exchange for a small donation.

The **Middlebury Lions** started their Memory Tree project in the mid-1970s. For one dollar per bulb sponsored, they usually have over 900 subscribers, whose names they print in a full-page advertisement in the local newspaper.



Middlebury Memory Tree

The **Pittsford Lions Club** decorates a tree growing in front of the Congregational Church as part of a more than 35-year tradition. They sell memory bulbs, hold a raffle and silent auction to raise funds for people in need in the community. The fire department holds a celebration with refreshments and a visit with Santa Claus.



Pittsford Lions Club (l) and Strafford and Area Lions Club (r) memory trees

The **Strafford and Area Lions Club** erects a memory tree in front of its community space, Barrett Memorial Hall. They usually have a lighting ceremony on a Sunday in early December, having received donations to sponsor bulbs. In 2020, the ceremony was held virtually by filming a small number of members conducting a ceremony. Strafford uses the proceeds of its fund raising to support the operation of the town's youth ski hill and rope tow, and the town pond, as well as District 45 and LCIF initiatives.

**Norwich Lions Club**

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