



Staff photo/Brian Larsen

The culmination of the annual "Light up a Life" celebration is the tree lighting ceremony held outside of the Johnson Heritage Post after all of the candles inside have been lit, and the words of remembrance said for loved ones lost.

Before the tree is lighted, there is a moment of silence. Some scripture is read, and a song or two sung by the crowd. Even though it was cold outside, people stayed after to talk about the event, sharing memories of people gone, but for a while at least close once again.

Large turnout for Light Up a Life

Brian Larsen

More than two dozen people came forward to light a candle and say a few words about a loved one they had lost at the 11th annual *Light Up a Life* celebration held at the Johnson Heritage Post on Thursday, December 12.

As people came forth from the darkness, they lit a candle and told a brief story about someone near and dear to them who had passed away. As more candles were lit, more darkness was dissuaded, more blackness defeated by the light, a combination of a candle and story of someone treasured and often taken too soon.

Some shared memories were sweet soliloquies, prayers of thanks, and unbroken love. Some were sad, tinged with tenderness; some were funny anecdotes of loved ones lost by illness or accident. Goodbyes and hellos came in the same breath, tributes to those who were gone, but not forgotten.

One woman lit a candle for her daughter, who she said was her best friend, a person who loved people and was loved by people. A couple lit two candles for two daughters who had passed away. Gone way too soon.

Dr. Mary Ellen Ashcroft, who led the ceremony, talked about

losing her son to cancer when he was 37. Friends of her son, all about his age, would come by and tell Mary Ellen that they didn't know what to say to him to make things better. "What can you say that would make things better?" she asked rhetorically.

Yvonne Mills opened the ceremony with several heartfelt songs. She sang and played the guitar beautifully.

A tree-lighting ceremony was held outside. The service ended with a song after Mary Ellen Ashcroft read some words of scripture.

Now an annual tradition, this *Light Up a Life* ceremony seemed more

than a short celebration of reflection, connection, and music. Grief suffered in darkness is a wound that will not heal. This was a chance for people to come together and support each other, shedding darkness, beginning or continuing the process of healing, bringing it into the light.

For most, the experience of sharing memories about someone they loved and then lost with others who came to do the same was cathartic, uplifting.

The event was sponsored by Care Partners to support the end-of-life services in Cook County. More than \$1,300 was raised for end-of-life care in Cook County.