**A Couple’s Idea is Inspiration for The 12 Days of Christmas, Dallas’ Newest Holiday Tradition**

This November will be a busy month for Tom and Phyllis McCasland. First, Tom is being inducted into the prestigious 2014 Oklahoma Hall of Fame on November 13 along with country singers Blake Shelton and Wanda Jackson and actress Alfre Woodard. In addition, the couple will see a personal dream become reality at the Dallas Arboretum with the opening of The 12 Days of Christmas.

The McCaslands, both from Duncan, Oklahoma, met at the University of Oklahoma and married. After Tom spent two years in the United States Navy Civil Engineering Corps, the couple returned to Duncan so he could work in the family oil business. During his 40-year career, he built a nine-rig drilling company, developed several service companies and further developed Mack Energy Company. Under Tom’s leadership, the next generation developed and built additional businesses. When he retired, he tapped one of his sons to lead the business. “It came time for me to turn over my business to my son, and we moved to Dallas in 1998,” said Tom.

Growing up in a small town, the McCaslands took their two sons to Dallas to experience the arts, especially The Dallas Opera, the Dallas Museum of Art and the Dallas Summer Musicals—all organizations that they support and in which they’ve become involved. They also discovered the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden. “Phyllis has always liked gardens. She’s a master gardener, and we were drawn to the Arboretum for that reason,” remarked Tom. “When we moved to Dallas, we joined the Dallas Arboretum.”

Phyllis added, “We thought the Arboretum was a wonderful venue for people to see a lot of plants and flowers they could grow in their yards. The festivals are outstanding, and we enjoy the opportunity to meet many people and join in activities throughout the year.”

"We decided that we wanted to invest in our new city, so we met with Mary Brinegar, Dallas Arboretum president, and said, 'Show us what you have.'  She had plenty of ideas, and we decided to support the Sunken Garden.  The Sunken Garden (at the Arboretum) has been the perfect place for weddings and other momentous events."

As the McCaslands continued to get involved with the Dallas Arboretum, Phyllis had an idea that she ran by Tom. “About two years ago, I thought about something spectacular for Christmas. It seemed to me that Dallas didn’t have anything grand. The 12 Days of Christmas would be perfect, and the Dallas Arboretum has the space to house it. The exhibit could be educational, telling you about England, the countryside, traditions and more. It would be a perfect thing that Dallas could be known for during Christmas.”

The couple approached Mary Brinegar, and she loved the idea. “Some of our best ideas come from our supporters, and we appreciate Tom and Phyllis helping us become an even more prominent botanical garden with this remarkable idea and their many years of support.” Their collective involvement earned them the prestigious Founders Award from the Women’s Council of the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden this past spring.

When Tommy Bourgeois, designer of The 12 Days exhibit, and props designer for The Dallas Opera, sketched his ideas, Tom said, “We didn’t have any really solid idea of what it would look like. Once we saw the initial plans, we said that the exhibit is going to be even more elaborate and showy than what we anticipated.”

Unique in the world, The 12 Days of Christmas exhibit will open on the botanical grounds on November 16. The $1.6 million exhibit will run through January 4, 2015. Dramatically designed 15-foot-tall gazebos have been made for each day of the popular carol and include either life-size Victorian-costumed mannequins or whimsical animals, with accompanying music. Building upon the audience appeal of the Chihuly installation, which the Arboretum showcased three years ago, and the infrastructure of outdoor lighting that was created in the garden for it, the Arboretum has conceived and commissioned this gift to the city with support from Amegy Bank of Texas and some of the garden’s major donors.

Phyllis likes that the exhibit will be protected by being enclosed in glass.  Also, of the exhibit, she said, "You'll be able to see it from a distance, and more people could be able to see it. I think a lot of children don't know what life is like in the country, and Maids-a-Milking shows what life used to be like in the country.

The McCaslands look forward to spending Christmas with their sons and daughters-in-law and five grandchildren. They look even more forward to showing them Phyllis’ dream as a reality at the Dallas Arboretum.

Tom added, “I think there will be a wow factor because it’s just so grandiose.”

Phyllis concluded, “I think word of mouth will help people learn about this exhibit.”

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The 12 Days exhibit opens on November 16 and runs through January 4, 2015. The 12 Days of Christmas Presenting Sponsor is Amegy Bank of Texas, and its Supporting Sponsor is the Dallas Tourism Public Improvement District.

Tickets go on sale August 15. There will be a significant discount available until September 1 for those wanting to take advantage of the early bird pricing.  Reservation dates may be selected at any time after purchase but will be subject to availability. Individual evening tickets include parking, and more information can be found at http://www.dallasarboretum.org/. For inquiries regarding discounted tickets for groups 15 or larger, contact groupsales@dallasarboretum.org or 214-515-6520. For information, including purchasing tickets, visit <http://www.dallasarboretum.org/>.