

# The Cape Codder is lighting up Hyannis



JULIA CUMES FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Nick Roberts works on the holiday lights display at the Cape Codder Resort and Spa in Hyannis.**

**By Linda Clarke** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 04, 2015

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HYANNIS — One of Debra Catania's fondest childhood holiday memories is of her mother taking her shopping in Downtown Crossing, where Filene's and Jordan Marsh anchored Washington Street with glittering displays. In particular, Filene's magical window scenes, which were known collectively as

the Enchanted Village, struck a lasting chord. In 2002, when Catania, who is the vice president of Catania Hospitality Group, decided to create a holiday display at the company's Cape Codder Resort and Spa in Hyannis, Filene's windows glittering in the December darkness was her blueprint. "I had those memories of the lights and the feeling I got when my mother took us along to see Filene's Enchanted Village at Christmas," recalls Catania. "I wanted to take the tradition I remembered and create something similar here on the Cape."

On Dec. 4, at dusk, the Cape Codder's Enchanted Village was to illuminate the long, late autumn night, marking its 14th year with thousands and thousands of lights. This winter wonderland includes Santa's Village, where animated reindeer await the big night and giant toy soldiers stand guard, and the cheery snowmen thrive in the chilly air. The nostalgic holiday scene extends inside the resort's lobby, where a 32-foot tabletop model Christmas Village, complete with electric train winding through the snow-covered countryside, idealizes the season in miniature. For adults, the best view is to crouch down and see it at child's-eye level.

Not surprisingly, it takes weeks to pull it all together. While most people are thinking about Halloween costumes, Catania's crew is bringing boxes of holiday decorations out of storage. "We start pulling things out in the fall to make sure all the lights are working, and everything is in order," says Catania. "The day after Thanksgiving, it starts going up, and we open the first weekend of December."

Every weekend leading up to Christmas Day, the Enchanted Village's entertainment includes caroling by the Cape Cod Surftones, who give traditional tunes a beachy spin, and Santa holds court to hear children's wishes. On most evenings a bonfire is lighted, creating a gathering place to warm hands and chat. What you won't see are fireworks, lasers, and high-tech

bells and whistles. The Cape Codder's Christmas scene speaks to the imagination and does so quietly, and offline. One thing that has changed over the years is its size: "It has grown quite a bit. I think we're up to about 200,000 lights now. Each year, we're always adding to it," says Catania.

Last year someone donated the train, which winds its way through the tiny houses in the lobby display: "It wasn't working and cost a fortune to repair, but we got it running again," says Catania.

The Cape Codder, which the Catantias bought in 2000 and is the sister hotel to the Dan'l Webster Inn and Spa in Sandwich Village, and the John Carver Inn in Plymouth, has several suites with fireplaces. Those come into their own when snow covers the resort's 15 acres of grounds. It is a whole different world compared with the busy summer season and with what visitors normally think of as a Cape Cod vacation. But it's become popular with hotel guests: The resort's seasonal Enchanted Village package allows Catania to monitor how much business it brings in. "It's been very successful," she says. "So many people will stop me in the hallways and tell me how much it means to them. They come back year after year. They usually tell me not to change anything," she adds.

The Enchanted Village doesn't only give the resort added revenue; hotel guests bring valuable wintertime business to surrounding Cape shops and restaurants too. "Obviously, we started it because we were looking for ways to bring people here for the winter, but it is an opportunity to do something for the Cape's economy too," Catania adds.

The Enchanted Village isn't just for hotel guests, though. Everyone is welcome and locals visit each year, as part of their holiday tradition. Visitors are encouraged to leave a new, unwrapped gift or a gift card under the Giving Tree to help Hyannis's Independence House, which works to prevent domestic and sexual violence.

Another aspect that remains unchanged is the entrance charge: It's free. Catania wondered whether the resort should charge non-hotel guests to offset some of the considerable expense of setting up the village, but figured it would detract from the spirit of the season. "With Christmas being so commercialized and so expensive for parents, it's something people can come to and they don't have to pay. There are so few things around the holidays that are free," she scoffs.

"The biggest thing for us is maintaining tradition. It brings that old-fashioned Christmas feeling back. Our staff enjoys it; visitors enjoy it. We get so many letters, even in the summer, from people asking if we'll be doing it and wanting to book."

**THE ENCHANTED VILLAGE** *Cape Codder Resort and Spa, 1225 Iyannough Road, Hyannis. 866-976-8454. [www.capecodderresort.com](http://www.capecodderresort.com). Open through Jan. 3. Enchanted Village overnight package available through Dec. 20, starting at \$119 weekdays, \$179 weekends, including \$100 Catania Hospitality Group dining and shopping certificates.*

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