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**PARA'S CHRISTMAS PARADE FILLED WITH COMMEMORATION OF  
THOSE LOST, THOSE AFFECTED AND THOSE WHO HELPED  
IN APRIL 27 TORNADO**

*TUSCALOOSA, Ala.* -- The Tuscaloosa County Park & Recreation Authority will present the 36th annual West Alabama Christmas Parade and Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 5 in downtown Tuscaloosa. Both events are free and open to the public.

The theme of the parade, "*A Christmas of Hope*" and the Christmas Tree on the lawn of the County Courthouse, are dedicated to the memory of victims and volunteers of the April 27 tornado.

For the first time, a commemorative flag, honoring everyone affected by the tornado will be representative of the Grand Marshal. Designed by Anthony Bratina of the Tuscaloosa News and sponsored by Walter Energy, it includes the number 52 to honor the memory of those lost in the storm, a ribbon in remembrance of those who were affected and a red rose to honor everyone who responded, gave aid, or volunteered to help.

The 42' Leland Cypress tree on the lawn of the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse was donated anonymously by a county resident in memory of those lost in the April 27 tornado. According to Dan Medders, building superintendent, the tree "was cut on December 1 and placed on December 2 by a 60 ton crane. The tree is decorated with 1,040 lights, bows, and garland."

The Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the steps of the Tuscaloosa County Courthouse begins at 5:15 p.m. The ceremony will begin with music by the Tuscaloosa Academy Choristers and directed by Emily VonRedlich. Mr. Bobby Wooldridge, retired Tuscaloosa County Public Defender, will be Master of Ceremonies. Robert Reed, local tornado relief hero, will "flip the switch" to light the tree. The celebration will continue with music by Tuscaloosa Academy Singers and Westwood Elementary Chorus directed by Jennifer Manning. Robert Reed, local tornado relief hero, is expected to "flip the switch" to light the tree.

A new feature for parade participants this year is a wristband ID for youth "under 16" years of age to wear during the parade as a safety measure. It is suggested that youth wear them during the parade with their name and an emergency telephone number for the time during the parade, indicated on the wristband. Wristbands are free of charge and are available at Belk Center in Bowers Park and PARA Building on Greensboro Ave.

The parade, recognized as West Alabama's largest, includes 105 floats, decorated vehicles, bands, marching groups along with costumed characters and horse groups. The parade route begins on Greensboro Avenue at 14th Street, travels north to University Blvd. turns east and ends at the corner of University Blvd. and 19th Avenue.

Parking is available in the city's Intermodal Facility/Parking Deck located at the corner of 7th Street and 22 Avenue, in the parking lot on the corner of Greensboro Avenue and University Blvd. and is a central location to meet your group before and after the parade. Additional parking is available along the parade route.

A "Lost and Found" station for children and other items is located in the PARA Building close to the corner of Greensboro Avenue and 6th Street.

Portable toilets will be located in two points along the parade route. The first location is in the Jemison House parking lot on Greensboro Avenue. The second location is in the city parking lot at the corner of Greensboro Avenue and University Blvd., which will also feature a handicapped accessible toilet. A handicapped viewing area is available in the parking lot across from City Hall on University Blvd.

Prior to both events, PARA will host a Grand Marshal's Reception. Piggly Wiggly and Buffalo Rock Pepsi sponsored the reception. Katie Malone, Miss Tuscaloosa 2011, provided entertainment.

For safety issues it is requested that downtown traffic slow speed and re-route on Greensboro Avenue between 15th Street and University Blvd. beginning at 5 p.m. as pedestrians and traffic will be lining up for the parade and the best viewing opportunities.

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The Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority is a county wide non-profit agency funded by the city of Tuscaloosa, the city of Northport and Tuscaloosa County, whose mission is to provide safe, clean, and beautiful facilities, parks and open spaces, along with professionally managed leisure activities for all people and to enrich the quality of life, provide economic value, and encourage long-term community stability and growth. Through strong partnerships, we will achieve exceptional services and foster an atmosphere of cooperation, trust, and innovation to better serve our community.