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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**McKee Botanical Garden’s 19th Annual JUNGLE LIGHTS Brings the Amazon to Vero Beach**

*Immersive holiday experience celebrates McKee’s remarkable history*

*and the countdown to its Centennial*

**Vero Beach, FL – August 2025** – This holiday season, McKee Botanical Garden will once again dazzle the Treasure Coast with its most ambitious light display to date. The **19th Annual JUNGLE LIGHTS**, opening December 3, transforms the Garden into a luminous tribute to its extraordinary founding, inviting visitors to journey through six of the eight countries of Amazonia once explored by McKee’s original plant collectors nearly a century ago.

Commissioned by founders **Arthur McKee** and **Waldo Sexton**, these daring expeditions brought back exotic botanical treasures for their commercial nursery, many of which helped landscape their early Vero Beach developments, including the Vero Beach Country Club. These rare specimens were later masterfully integrated into the Garden’s native Florida hammock by renowned landscape architect **William Lyman Phillips**, giving rise to the lush jungle paradise that continues to enchant visitors today.

**A Journey Through the Amazon**

This year’s JUNGLE LIGHTS offers an immersive journey through **Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela**, each represented with vivid flora, fauna, and soundscapes. Guests will encounter macaws soaring in Brazil, toucans perched in Bolivia’s canopy, tree frogs singing in Colombia, monkeys swinging through Ecuador, flamingos wading in Peru, and owls calling in the Venezuelan night. Illuminated butterflies, hummingbirds, frogs, macaws, and an alpaca join McKee’s menagerie of glowing lanterns, while beloved holiday traditions return throughout the Garden’s historic hardscapes.

Two lighting experts—**Teddy Roepke** of *Tech-Tronics Production* in Fort Myers and **Tony Schnur** of *Elite Christmas Lighting* in Vero Beach—have brought the vision to life. Roepke’s vibrant jungle lighting and soundscapes create an atmospheric walk through the rainforest, while Schnur’s work on the hardscapes delivers a festive red-and-white glow. Across the globe, artisans have handcrafted the intricate animal lanterns that now dot the trails.

**Holiday Magic, McKee Style**

Visitors will be welcomed by a grand entrance framed in twinkling white lights leading to a 30-foot tree, before following winding paths through kaleidoscopic foliage. The **Spanish Kitchen** hosts Santa and his sleigh (courtesy of Riverside Theatre), while the **Hall of Giants** becomes the *Great Reindeer Hall*, with a 12-foot illuminated Rudolph keeping watch. Oversized glowing moose graze beneath the banyan tree, while candy cane lighting accents the historic architecture.

**Other highlights include:**

* **A 15-foot living Christmas tree** made from 375 bromeliads and orchids.
* **A large-scale model train** weaving through Swiss Alpine villages on premium nights starting December 18.
* A possible new feature— “**Ned Whitlock**,” a 1926 McKee plant explorer brought to life as a projected welcome for guests.

**A Growing Holiday Tradition**

What began as a modest, homegrown display has evolved into one of Florida’s premier holiday light events, growing from 9 nights to an unprecedented **25 nights** in 2025. Last year’s JUNGLE LIGHTS drew a record **17,000 visitors** despite heavy rain on two evenings. Behind the scenes, hundreds of volunteers work alongside staff to create the magic.

**Event Details**

**Dates & Hours:**  
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

* Dec. 3–7
* Dec. 9–14
* Dec. 16–21
* Dec. 23 (Closed Christmas Eve & Christmas Day)
* Dec. 26–28 (closed New Year’s Eve & New Year’s Day)
* Jan. 2–3

**Admission:**

* Dec. 3–17: Adults (17 plus) $30, Children (3–16) $20
* Dec. 18–Jan. 3: Adults (17 plus) $35, Children (3–16) $20  
  Tickets available in advance at [**www.mckeegarden.org**](http://www.mckeegarden.org/)

**Sponsors:** JUNGLE LIGHTS is made possible, in part, by The Family of Arthur G. McKee, John & Kathy Harris, John’s Island Real Estate, Cooksey Gould Fennell, Jim and Jean Ueltschi, Piper Aircraft, Wilmington Trust, Rossway Swan Tierney Barry Lacey & Oliver and Florida Power & Light.

With **McKee’s Centennial in 2026** and the **25th anniversary of its reopening** on the horizon, this year’s JUNGLE LIGHTS bridges past and present celebrating the bold vision of its founders and inviting the community to share in a story of imagination, exploration, and wonder.

**END**

McKee Botanical Garden is the first and oldest visitor attraction in Vero Beach. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and a Florida Heritage Landmark, McKee is also the recipient of The Garden Conservancy’s Jean and John Greene Prize for Excellence in American Gardening and is one of only seven Gardens in the world with 51 cultivated waterlilies Certified as a *Collection of Excellence* by the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society. Founded in 1922 by early developers and conservationists, Arthur McKee and Waldo Sexton, McKee began as the Royal Park Exotic Nursery in 1926, then became McKee Jungle Gardens, an internationally renowned visitor attraction from 1932 until it closed in 1976 and was sold to developers. The 18-acres that remain of the historic garden served as collateral until the final payment from the developer was received. When plans to bulldoze what was once the heart of the garden were announced, an unprecedented community effort ensued to rescue, restore and reopen the historic garden. McKee Botanical Garden now features 10,000 tropical plants, internationally renowned exhibits, the Treasure Coast’s largest holiday light display, JUNGLE LIGHTS, the Children’s Garden, the Garden Café, the Garden Gift & Book Shop and year-round educational programs for adults and children. Supported by over 7,000 members, hundreds of volunteers, and enjoying record-breaking visitor attendance, year after year, McKee remains a testament to the resilience of nature and dedication of the community it serves.