

December 2, 2015 Capitol Christmas tree Lighting - Recap

It was going to be a fabulous Capitol Tree Lighting— and the weather was unusually mild for the traditional December event. Anticipation was rising as the special Tree Lighter from Sonora, Jeffery James “J.J.” Paris, his sister Sonny, and mother Maren, walked over to the State Capitol from their hotel on Tuesday, December 1st, for the first of many activities planned to honor the 9-year-old boy with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Tourette’s syndrome.

Over at the Capitol, J.J. and his family (minus his father Jeff and younger brother Austin) were joined by Paul Billodeau, the Executive Director of VMRC, and Melinda Gonser, the President of VMRC’s Board of Directors. The group was first treated to a VIP tour of the Capitol, followed by afternoon legislative meetings with staff to State Senators Berryhill, Anthony Canella and Cathleen Galgiani, and Assembly Members Frank Bigelow, Kristen Olsen, Susan Eggman, and Jim Cooper. In addition to these visits, J.J. was presented with a Joint Resolution from Senator Tom Berryhill and Assembly Member Frank Bigelow on the floor of the Senate. (PIC 1)

The following morning, the Paris family went on Good Day Sacramento (CBS TV-13) where J.J. was interviewed live by local fun news personality Mark S. Allen (PIC 2) and practiced lighting Christmas trees on-air. Older sister Sonny (who is also on the Spectrum) was interviewed along with Maren and Paul Billodeau of VMRC who explained the types of services available for persons with I/DD.

After some additional press visits on the West Steps of the Capitol, J.J., his sister, and mother were joined by J.J.’s father Jeff and brother Austin. Unfortunately, in the wake of a tragic shooting at Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino that day, Governor Jerry Brown canceled the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. However, Governor Brown (PIC 3) and Secretary Diana Dooley, of the Health and Human Services Agency (PIC 4), invited the Paris family back to the Governor’s Office where J.J. presented the Governor with an ornament and holiday poster that his class had made for this occasion. The Governor’s Office staff brought J.J., his family, and VMRC representatives out to the tree and J.J. lit the tree (PIC 5) on the West Steps of the Capitol in front of a crowd of cheering fans. (PIC 6).

The Paris family discusses how they handled the dramatic change of plans in this video report. <http://www.modbee.com/news/article47884755.html>

The Department of Developmental Services would like to thank Governor Jerry Brown and everyone who took part in making J.J. Paris feel special and for contributing to a modified but memorable Tree Lighting.