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Pierre couple celebrating ‘Capitol Christmas’ at history book club meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – A South Dakota Capitol tradition for more than 30 years is featured in a book by a Pierre couple.

“Capitol Christmas” features photographs of the decorated trees at the Capitol taken by Dr. Jim and Sandy Szana of Pierre, along with quotes compiled by Jim Szana that were originally published in the features-oriented publication “River Life.”

The Szanas will be guest speakers when the History and Heritage Book Club meets at 7 p.m. CST Tuesday, Dec. 8, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

A display of decorated Christmas trees at the Capitol has been a holiday tradition since 1981, when the late Dottie Howe began the Capitol Christmas Tree project.

“This is the first souvenir of the trees,” Jim Szana said of “Capitol Christmas.”

At the book club meeting, he will discuss “Capitol Christmas” from inspiration to the final product, including the steps taken to get the book published and the myths of the creative process. The program is free and everyone is welcome.

“The decorated Christmas trees draw thousands of visitors to Pierre each holiday season. The stunning photographs in ‘Capitol Christmas’ capture the charm of the trees. It’s a book to be treasured by anyone who has experienced their beauty, or has yet to see the trees,” said Michael Lewis, president of the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation.

The foundation is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society, both located at the Cultural Heritage Center. The foundation sponsors the History and Heritage Book Club.

“Capitol Christmas” is available at the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol.

The Szanas will be available to sign copies of “Capitol Christmas” at the book club meeting. They will also sign copies of the book from 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 12, and from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 19, both at the Heritage Store at the Capitol.

“The Heritage Store at the Capitol is the perfect setting for a book featuring the decorated trees. People can marvel at the beauty of the trees as they walk among them

at the statehouse, then purchase a book to take home to remind them of the enjoyable experience,” Lewis said.

This year’s Capitol display consists of nearly 100 trees, and the theme for the decorations is “Christmas around the World.” The display is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. every day of the week through Saturday, Dec. 26.

For more information about the History and Heritage Book Club, call (605) 773-6006.

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About the South Dakota State Historical Society

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Education. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society’s world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.

About the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation

The South Dakota Historical Society Foundation is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota’s history and heritage for future generations.