



CULTURE BRIGHT – HOLIDAY EVENT SERIES RECAP 2025

Content by guest writer Jen Lewis-Snyder, president and CEO, The Cultural Trust



Culture Bright Week felt different this year — fuller, warmer and alive in a way you could feel from the smile on your face to the warmth in your toes. Arts Alley has never seen a crowd like the tree lighting on Wednesday. It was shoulder-to-shoulder with families, performers and partners who showed up ready for the season to begin. That energy carried through the entire week.

On Thursday, we hosted a Culture Champions preview at the Botanical Center — a night that moved their 2030 strategic goals forward in real time. Vendors filled the gardens, an ice sculpture greeted guests and the banquet center looked like a Hallmark scene brought to life. A violinist played under painted windows as we revealed Gracie Mae Goes to the Garden — written for the garden gift shop as both a financial lift and a memory token for every child who walks through those doors. The full-immersion Culture Bright Neon Forest was also previewed for the first time — months of collaboration on display.

We carried that momentum into Friday for the Premiere Party. It was, without question, the strongest it has ever been. Guests said it all night. The energy was electric, the generosity high and the impact real. The Figge helped us celebrate with an after-party that kept the night going. The next morning, sharing the VIP parade space with my kids was a moment I'll keep close.

We closed Culture Bright Week with the final score from one of the most famous wizard movies in recent history — epic, emotional and organic in the way we love most.

This week wasn't a string of events. It was proof of what collaboration can build in the Quad Cities when everyone brings their best. Culture Bright isn't a tagline — it's a rhythm, a way of working and a reflection of the people who lift this region every day.

And we did all of it while dreaming forward with Doug Warner from Explore Charleston and Spoleto USA. How do we take these ingredients and make them nationally known? We know every \$1 invested returns \$20. How do we create even more opportunity for our Legacy Partners and for the Quad Cities?

Culture Bright Week may be over for now, but we are just getting started.

Because culture matters here — and it always will.

