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## Owner of Internet design company maps best holiday displays in region: LIGHTS ON AT WEB SITE

- **LIVERMORE:** Man launched Internet page after being new to region, not knowing where to go

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Alex Dourov, creator of the [www.lightsofthevalley.com](http://www.lightsofthevalley.com) web site, stands in front of his own light...



Tens of thousands of people have discovered the Lights of the Valley Web site since it started in 1999 -- and on it, they have found some of the best places to look at holiday lights in Northern California.

The man behind the site is Alex Dourov. He and his family moved to Livermore in 1992, and, being new to the area, they did not know where to look for good light displays. The first place they checked was the local newspaper listings.

"Some were fantastic, but some were stinkers," Dourov said.

After a while, Dourov decided to start his own listings online. He took the list of where to find lights from the newspaper, took photos and put them online. With help from a friend who worked at a Bay Area radio station, his site got plugs on the air.

His list began modestly, with about 25 houses listed. It now has grown to include listings from more than 350 communities in the Bay Area, Stockton and Sacramento areas, and as far south as Fresno.

Dourov looks at newspapers and Web sites to see where the best lights are. He has people in various communities helping to take photos of houses to put on the site.

"I love it," Dourov said. "I love the joy of getting e-mails from people telling me how much the site helps them."

Dourov wakes up at 5 a.m. each day, makes coffee and checks the site to see how many new visitors there were the previous day and where the traffic came from. People out of state visit the site and then e-mail him saying they are coming to visit relatives and asking which houses are his favorites.

Nine thousand people visited the Web site in its first year, and Dourov thought that was great. The number has climbed to 50,000 unique visitors this year. Dourov attributes the rise to coverage in the media and word of mouth.

Since the site began, Dourov, who owns a Web design company, has spent an increasing amount of time on it.

Before the launch this year, he and his team of programmers spent 100 hours doing a site overhaul to add new features. This year, they added a House of the Day -- the featured home is displayed on the Web site -- and there is coding available for people to put the House of the Day on their own Web sites. It is also featured at the top of three radio station's Web sites.

In addition, there is a key that goes with all the houses, so viewers can see which ones have an FM broadcast, more photos, video, etc. Some are marked "must see," including the Hillcrest Avenue home of Deacon Dave Rezendes -- a perennial favorite in Livermore -- and the home of Pleasanton rivals Bob's World and Widmer's World, aka Bob's World Two.

Also, people can type in their address and find directions to the home they want to see.

Dourov balances the Lights of the Valley work with his regular job.

"My family has gotten used to seeing a little less of me this time of year," he said.

Dourov often works on the site on weekends and evenings. He does it all for free, and the costs come out of his pocket.

"It takes a lot of time, but to me, it's worth it," he said. "I know from the comments that people enjoy having this service readily available to them."

When Dourov receives submissions for houses, he looks for those that are unique.

"Most people put up a couple of strings of lights and a reindeer," he said. "I'm not looking for just a Griswold house, but it can be a Griswold house. Or it can be elegant."

Bob Stanley's house is more than a Griswold house. Stanley, a Pleasanton resident, has put on a show called "Bob's World" at his home every year for 18 to 20 years. His home can be seen on the Lights of the Valley Web site, but Stanley says it has to be experienced in person. He said that people can walk through his yard to look at all the displays. This year, he has animation going on in the garage and in a tent in his yard. A snowman blows snow in another area, and Santa comes sometimes, too. He estimated that 200 children and their families visited his home on a recent Saturday night.

"I've had a lot of new visitors this year," Stanley said, attributing the increase to Lights of the Valley, which he says is an important service for new people.

He also attributes the increase in new visitors to word of mouth, even from Bob's World Too, a display across town. Stanley says there is no competition between them.

"We all try to do something different," he said.

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[www.lightsofthevalley.com](http://www.lightsofthevalley.com)