

Deacon lights up the season each Christmas

By Chris Metinko
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Deacon Dave Rezendes' elves are featured in his annual Christmas display, which attracts thousands of people each year.

- [Audio: Rezendes discusses annual light display](#)

Many folks who set up old light-up Rudolfs or frame their houses in colored lights for Christmas set goals for when all the glitz and glamour should come down. Maybe New Year's Day, maybe mid-January.

Deacon David Rezendes has to set aside some major tear-down time.

"I wanted to get it all put away by Easter," said Rezendes -- known simply as "Deacon Dave" to many in the East Bay. He was on track last week, as only a few lights and props still awaited their summer resting places.

Procrastination is not the issue here. Few, if any, Bay Area residents have to take down more lights, props, buildings, animated scenes and electrical wiring than Rezendes, who uses more than a quarter-million lights as the focal point of his annual "Ministry of Lights" holiday show.

The display -- featured on the Home & Garden TV program "Extreme Christmas: Bigger and Brighter" in 2003 -- is so big that Pacific Gas and Electric Co. installed a special power transformer for the neighborhood just so Rezendes could power all those lights without blacking out his street. He estimates more than 87,000 visitors came to his home this past Christmas to see the display.

"It is one of the biggest in the Bay Area," said Alex Dourov, who created the Web site lightsofthevalley.com to track popular Christmas lights displays around the Bay Area. "And it's one of the best known. What makes Deacon Dave's so unique is it's different every year.

"Clearly, to do something like this, you have to love the holidays, but I think you also clearly have to love the community," Dourov added.

So it is with the 62-year-old Rezendes, a fourth-generation Livermore resident. "The house is probably a lot more well-known than I am," he joked.

While that may well be true, many say there is much more to Rezendes than Christmas lights.

In 1970, he started Security Eye Patrol Inc. in Livermore with one employee. The idea for such a business came to him after he literally ran into a security guard at a drive-in movie theater while getting some popcorn.

"I thought to myself, 'Someone is making money on having this man provide security at the theater,'" Rezendes remembered. "So I went to the old Hayward Detective and Patrol Co. and I said, 'I want to be an intern. You don't have to pay me anything, but I want to learn about this business.'" And so he did.

Today, Security Eye Patrol is a thriving security firm serving the Tri-Valley -- including the Alameda County Fairgrounds -- with anywhere between 75 to 150 employees depending on the time of year.

"I think, without a doubt, one of the reasons he's been successful is he's professional," said David Graber, vice president of Security Eye. "He expects others also to act that way. He also always treats everyone fairly, just like he would like to be treated."

In addition to being a successful businessman, Rezendes was ordained a Catholic deacon in 1982. He works in the Oakland Diocese office each week, and he has an office at St. Michael's Church in Livermore, where he has been a member of the clergy since he was ordained.

"He's so diverse," said Marilyn Fraser, a member of St. Michael's who has known Rezendes more than 40 years.

"Some people are amazed when they see him at church, and then the next time you see him, he is in his Security Eye outfit. But he's just a very, very down-to-earth person who's just nice to be around."

Ed Johnson, operations manager at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, has known Rezendes for more than 20 years and works closely with him during fair time in the summer dealing with security.

"It's an odd situation," Johnson said. "He has the collar on, then he has his uniform on. But he handles it great."

Just like he handles Christmas great every year, according to most who seek out his home -- named Casa del Pomba, or House of the Dove -- on Hillcrest Avenue. The house sits on little more than a half acre, and while Rezendes opens up the gates to his front yard for the holiday season, the back yard stays closed, and under tight surveillance, year-round.

"It's like my own oasis back there," said Rezendes, who raises pigeons, turtles and other animals in his back yard. There is also a pool, ponds and even a prayer chapel.

It is in the back yard where Rezendes also keeps a vast collection of doves, some whose history goes back more than 30 generations. Doves -- a symbol of the Holy Spirit -- are very close to Rezendes' heart. He has countless pieces of art depicting doves in every room of his house, and he always includes at least one live dove in his holiday lights spectacular.

"I would say that is what I enjoy collecting the most," said Rezendes, who also collects Pepsi and Daffy Duck memorabilia, American Indian art work, model trains and religious relics. He also is an avid reader of mystery books where the hero is a religious figure.

Even with his job, post in the church and his eclectic tastes in hobbies, it is the bright, busy Christmas displays for which Rezendes is best known. He started the Livermore tradition to celebrate his being ordained a deacon, and more than 24 Christmases later, the display continues to evolve and grow.

Work begins in August, and each year, Rezendes hopes to have everything from his lighting extravaganza taken down and put away by Easter. His favorite description of his display came from a friend who said the house at Christmas "is where the Vatican meets Las Vegas."

The Christmas theme goes far beyond the front yard at the House of the Dove. Rezendes decorates more than 30 Christmas trees in his home, including what he calls the Grand Library Tree, which stands more than 22 feet tall and has approximately 1,000 ornaments. Because he gets so many visitors, only invited guests get to see the inside the house. However, he emphasizes all are welcome, regardless of their faith, to wander around the almost parklike front yard -- with its "Proposal Bridge" where at least 50 marriage proposals have been made during the holiday season. Rezendes does not mind sharing the touching stories he has stored up throughout the years while putting on his light show. One is of a sobbing woman who told Rezendes her tears were those of "joy" because she and her husband -- who had died in a car accident a few weeks before -- loved visiting his light display every year.

"That's what makes this worth it," Rezendes said. "To see people's reaction and make them smile."

What he will not share is how much it costs -- for electricity, in particular -- to stage his holiday extravaganza.

"Every year, I make sure I'm sitting down when I open my electric bill for December," he said with a laugh. "This year, I should have been lying down. It was a humdinger."

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BIOGRAPHY

DAVID REZENDES

Age: 62

Occupation: Roman Catholic deacon and bishop's representative to the 100 deacons in the Oakland Diocese; president and founder of Security Eye Patrol Inc. in Livermore.

Residence: Livermore

Claim to fame: Puts on a massive light display each Christmas season, with more than a quarter-million lights covering his house and yard. More than 87,000 people visited his yard last year, and it was featured on the Home & Garden Television network in 2003.