

News

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Light displays brighten season

AROUND LIVERMORE: MARK TARTE

ONE OF THE FUN THINGS about the holidays is the decorations. One of the frustrations about the holidays is the decorations.

Although I have always thought about doing an elaborate Christmas display, usually a little time thinking about the project brings me back to reality. So I dutifully string some lights along the first-floor rain gutters and we decorate the inside of the house, and look like a thousand other homes who have pretty lights up and that's about it.

One of the things I have always liked to do is drive around town and look at the different and elaborate displays some folks have erected. They are breathtaking if for no other reason than to appreciate the time, energy and money involved in such spectacular displays.

I do believe the granddaddy of all displays in Livermore, if not the Tri-Valley, has to be Deacon Dave Rezendes' house at 352 Hillcrest Ave. Even without the street numbers, you cannot miss this amazing and bright display. People from all over flock to Deacon Dave's year after year and stand in awe of his latest achievement. You know you are close when the usually dim street is brightly lit and the traffic on Hillcrest seems like rush hour on a Friday night.

Now in the 19th year of creating his display, Dave starts early in the fall testing lights, stringing them and arranging his home-built decorations. He has plenty of help from volunteers who enjoy the completed project.

Deacon Dave's house is an easy find, but it is not the only one around the valley to look at. But just how do you find all of the more spectacular displays without wasting gas and driving around aimlessly?

Well, one way is to log on to <http://lightsofthevalley.com/>. This Web site was the brainchild of Alex Dourov, the CEO and founder of Utkaduck Design. He decided three years ago to compile a listing of the more elaborate or spectacular Christmas displays that homeowners have put together.

Dourov, like many other residents, relied on word of mouth and newspaper listings for these displays, and sometimes came away disappointed. So he decided to use the power of the Internet to get the word out to some family and friends to see beforehand the homes and their displays.

Dourov has now been taking photographs of various homes and posting them since 1999 on his Web site. He has homes from Tracy, San Ramon, Danville and Dublin as well as Livermore and Pleasanton on his site. Lathrop and Fremont have been recently added to encompass most of the South County as well as parts of San Joaquin County.

Last year, Dourov spent more than 50 hours of travel, taking photographs of homes around the valley and beyond. This year, he sent letters to homeowners with previous years' display sites to see if they were putting on displays this year. So far, Dourov estimates he has only had to spend about 12 hours on the road and about 10 to 12 hours updating his Web site.

So many people have e-mailed him digital photographs that it has become a community endeavor to keep the Web site up and running. He has even made signs for homeowners whose homes he has displayed that say, "My house is featured on lightsofthevalley.com."

According to Dourov's statistics, about 1,000 visitors a day are now logging on to check out the lights; there were

5,600 visitors last week, including some from Australia, China and other exotic spots around the world.

You can find more than 80 home displays listed in Danville, San Ramon, Livermore, Dublin, Pleasanton, Tracy and beyond. Some homes give hours of operation and a description of special features.

For Dourov, like Deacon Dave, this is a labor of love. He believes the displays are part of the holiday tradition and the more people who visit his site, the more people will be able to see, if only vicariously, these wonderful displays around the valley. Thank you, Alex, and you, too, Dave. You make this joyous time even more fun for all.

From me and my family, may you and yours have the most joyous Christmas of all. Please remember those who are serving us overseas and may God bless and keep you all. Until next week, be alert, be safe and God bless America.

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