



Emily West

"Santa Bob" Stanley is at it again this year with a new show of music and lights to delight families of all ages.

# GUIDING LIGHTS

Website celebrates 10 years of featuring home holiday displays

by Emily West

Looking for a fun and free family outing to take in the holiday spirit? Let LightsoftheValley.com illuminate the area's best decorated homes.

Alex Dourov, the site's creator, has accumulated 436 homes, 128 confirmed to be decorated this year, throughout the Bay Area and beyond. His "must see" list of homes has expanded again, featuring displays from Alameda to West Sacramento.

In its 10th year, the website has gone from a high of about 1,400 unique visitors to over 5,500 in 2007, proving it to be a helpful resource. The official visitor tally for this year began Nov. 29 and the first week already showed more visitor sessions per day. That's big news, as last year's record visitor tally reached 123,000. With more publicity, including a phone interview on KGO radio Dec. 3, the site is on par to set records again this year.

Dourov moved to Livermore in 1992 and created the website in 1999 out of frustration over getting lost or seeing a "stinker" featured in newspaper listings. Originally it featured about 30 homes in Livermore and Pleasanton and word was spread through email and through KKIQ radio.

Dourov said he never expected the site to get this big as it has been and is becoming.

"Lots of radio stations and newspapers are promoting the site," he said. "The house of the day feature has been a huge success and promoted the site like crazy."

Owner and CEO of Utkaduck Design, an Internet solutions and web design company, Dourov is the sole worker of the site. In terms of financing, the hosting costs for Lights of the Valley are free, and he spends about \$150 each year on postage and postcards to verify that homeowners will be decorating again. As for the all the work and upkeep, he considers it a community service.



Search through featured home displays, listed by county and city, to plan a light show trip.

What keeps him going? Click on the link "Read Letters" to find his encouragement. There is a sampling of some 250 emails he's received over the years. People are glad to find once-hidden holiday gems. Dourov has also heard from people who are homebound and grateful for the chance to be able to enjoy the displays.

One new site feature this year is the chance for a home to have six photos instead of three. The cities are also divided up by county, which makes them easier to search. Several of the homes also have videos to accompany the listing.

As for Pleasanton, "Santa Bob" Stanley is back at it with his "Bob's World" display comprised of hundreds if not thousands of lights, animated decorations set to festive music and even a snow machine.

Each year the show is different, attracting dozens of people to his corner home at 2612 Calle Reynoso. Santa Bob has also attributed increased foot traffic to the Lights of the Valley website.

Then there's also Widmer World, which is also known as Bob's World 2, located at 3671 Chelsea Court. With so much to see, including an electric light show, Santa's workshop and much more, people are encouraged to get out of their cars to take it all in. And don't forget Candy Cane Lane on Walnut Drive near downtown.

The trends of inflatables and syncing music to moving shows are getting bigger and better this year, according to the site's submissions. Some of the music syncing is done through FM stations.

Dourov still prefers the old fashioned blow molds and it's what you'll find at his home in Livermore.

Another Livermore "must see" is Deacon Dave's at 342 Hillcrest. In its 26th year of decorating, there are more than 250,000 lights used in the display.

To find more displays, visit [www.lightsofthevalley.com](http://www.lightsofthevalley.com).