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Homeowners put holiday spirit on display

By **Scott Aust**, Journal staff **Sunday, December 23, 2007**

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It wasn't long after Halloween when Harry Geise started decking his house and yard – front and back – with lights, penguins, snowmen, a manger and large star.

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"It takes me three or four weeks to get it all up. I'm 77. I'm not as fast as I used to be," he said.

Geise estimates he has 7,000 lights at his home at 4214 Mary Drive, one of the points of interest along a 23-mile tour of Christmas lights sponsored by SmartAlec Tours.

The brain-child of Ken Jones, SmartAlec offers a GPS-guided tour featuring the decorations of several homes in the city as well as a contest. People who take the tour will vote on the best decorations, and the winning homeowner will receive \$250 for the People's Choice. Cash will also be awarded to the Best Traditional, Best

Humorous, Best Light Show and Best North Pole decorations.

Jones has been pleased with the response to the tour, something he thought was natural for Christmas.

"People are always driving aimlessly around neighborhoods to look at Christmas light displays," he said.

Geise said putting up lights makes the holidays much better and puts him in the Christmas spirit. He doesn't really have a theme, but he always tries to include something that ties into the meaning of Christmas such as a manger scene and angels.

"I just enjoy Christmas," he said. "The toughest part is getting up on the house and the trees. Lots of people drive by and enjoy things like that, going out to see the lights, so why not."

Neighbors' displays

Neighbors Philip and Kelli Wold and Joe and Pam Ferber have so many lights up at 4511 and 4517 Ridgewood St. that the homes seem to blend together.

"Kelli loaned us some decorations last year, because they have so many they can't put them all up," Joe Ferber said. "She said, 'Here, take some of ours.'"

"They were so happy we moved in because they had so much fun putting lights up. Half my stuff is over there in their yard," Kelli Wold said. "We didn't have a theme; it's just basically color."

The homes feature LED lights in a kaleidoscope of reds, greens, and blues. There are also penguins, Christmas trees and snowmen.

Joe Ferber said his family has always decorated the house during the holidays to make it look nice and help get themselves in the Christmas spirit.

"I liked it when my folks did it when I was little so I kept going – and my wife pushes me," Ferber said with a laugh.

Ferber spent two Saturdays in November putting out the decorations. He said hanging lights in the trees were much easier than crawling up onto the eaves of his house.

"Those lights in the trees don't ever seem to burn out. Once you put the lights up on your house, there's always something that will quit working somewhere," he said. "It's a lot of fun. When the kids come back, they like to see it."

The gift of lights

The display at 914 St. Andrew St. might not be called spectacular, but it is unique. The lights have been configured to resemble a package.

"It fits the house," said Andrea Wolff. "Because the house is a square, I just asked my husband to wrap it up like a present."

Wolff said her husband, John, looked at her like she was crazy a few years ago when she asked him to put a

Wolff said she loves to decorate the house. For Halloween, it was decorated with spiders. On Easter, her front portico became a basket. But her husband drew the line at making the house a turkey for Thanksgiving.

"I've already been told: no more decorating," she said with a laugh. "I haven't even proposed the idea to my husband. He looked at me one day and went, 'Don't even think about it. I know you can make a turkey; I'm not doing it.'"

Santa's home

Joe Lanoue's home at 1703 11th St. features more than 5,000 lights, brightly lit deer and a river meandering through the yard. This year, Joe has also been dressing up as Santa on occasion, waving at people and handing out candy.

"I look forward to it. Part of the enjoyment is watching everybody come by and seeing their enjoyment," Lanoue said. "We get car after car coming through. I think it gets everyone else in the spirit. I hope so, anyway."

The stream -- a combination of flashers and chasing lights strung along the ground -- is Lanoue's favorite, though the most challenging part is keeping real deer from trampling over it.

"It's kind of one of my trademarks, the running stream of water. I try to make it look real. I always have a theme and try to make it as natural as I can or mystic," he said. "I try to vary it every year."

If you go

SmartAlec's Ken Jones plans to offer a Christmas Eve tour. Tonight is the last night of the contest, but the tour will continue nightly from Dec. 26 through Dec. 29.

Tours start at the Roam'n Around Travel Store, 616 Main St. Contact SmartAlec at 348-4456, or online at www.smartalecpgstours.com Reservations are recommended, but walk-up tickets are available Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

What: GPS-guided tours using your own vehicle at \$15 for two hours or guided tours lasting an hour and a half aboard the Tour of Lights coach for \$7 per seat, or \$6 per seat for groups of 30 or more.

When: Bus tour runs Thursdays through Saturdays at three departure times, 5:30 p.m., 7 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

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Rock

wrote on Dec 23, 2007 9:43 PM:

" Home on MT. VIEW off Jackson is covered roof to foundation with lights, pretty amazing - also Mt. View Neighborhoods have nice displays of lights throughout the blocks behind cementaries - little know secret stash of lights - such a treat to go for walks during the evening hours. "

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Story Photo



This home is one of many festive displays riders will see along a 23-mile tour of Christmas lights, sponsored by SmartAlec Tours. Journal photo

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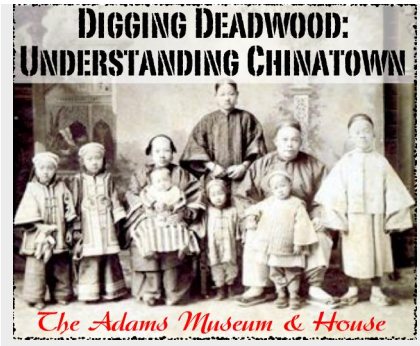
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