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Gift Lights Up Neighborhood

Geoff George has decorated his Rock Hill home with 23,000 lights set to holiday music

by Linda Jarrett

Rock Hill's Geoff George began his holiday light display years ago with salvaged lights. He now lights up his home with 23,000 lights set to music.

George, who lives at 1337 McKinley Road between Manchester and Old Warson roads, got the idea for a musical display from a TV news show. Last year, he saw Tim Heitz of Fenton being interviewed on television about his display - one that was set to music.

After calling Heitz and getting the information about how to do a musical display, George went to work.

"I went to the Web site he suggested, got the computer program and control box. It seemed like a neat thing and I wanted to take my display to the next level."

George's foray into the realm of holiday light displays to rival that of Clark Griswold began with dumpster diving.

"The whole thing started with Tilles Park Winter Wonderland," he said. "They throw their lights away every year. It costs them more to take them down, roll, stack, save and put up again next year. I asked them if I could have some and they said fine. So I went dumpster diving!"

The good news was that he got a pickup truck bed full of lights for free. The bad news is that he spent many a weekend during the year unstringing the "tangled, knotted, horrid mess," as George described it.

That was the first and last time he dumpster dove.

"I found out how cheap lights cost the day after Christmas!" he said.

Now, his lights number almost 23,000 and pulsates to the beat of 11 programmed Christmas songs. He has incorporated an FM transmitter that is hooked to a computer. Motorists can tune in 89.5 on their FM radio when they drive by and hear the same songs playing on George's display.


"I do have outside speakers, but I only turn them on for a nice evening when people may be out walking," he said. "If it's 15 degrees and people don't want to freeze to death, it's nice to listen in the car."

George starts creating his masterpiece after Halloween





Geoff George stands in front of his house at 1337 McKinley in Rock Hill. Visitors to his house can see his light display and listen to holiday music on FM 89.5.

photo by Diana Linsley

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when the weather is still nice, but he doesn't turn it on until after Thanksgiving.

"It took me 180 hours to program the 11 songs I have, and about 40 hours to put up the lights," he said. "It's easier to do when it's warmer. Those strings can get pretty stiff in the cold."

Besides the 23,000 lights, he has 3,200 feet of extension cords and three control boxes with 16 channels to control the music. Each show lasts 23 minutes and runs continuously.

After the first of the year, George puts the lawn ornaments away.

"I wait until it's warm before taking down the lights. I don't want to walk around on an icy roof," he noted.

Can you imagine trying to untangle 23,000 lights? He did it once - never again, he said. He carefully winds, ties and labels them, then puts them in four large Tupperware tubs.

Not content to stop with this display, George's goal is to have 50,000 lights within a couple of years.

"Next year, I'll create a grid to cover the whole roof, and then make a cascade of lights to the ground," he said. "I want to line my fence and big tree in the back yard."

He also plans to have a larger music repertoire and, with all those lights, he will have to raise his amps from 100 to 200.

"This is my gift to everybody," he said. "As a kid, I loved seeing lights. I guess I'm a kid at heart and I like seeing everybody enjoy these as much as I do."

George's show runs from 5 to 10 p.m., Sunday through Thursday; and 5 to 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Two signs in his yard instruct motorists where to tune their radio to hear the accompanying music.



A lighted tree and Santa and his reindeer are among Geoff George's decorations.

photo by Diana Linsley