

Stringing the lights for a cause

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Photograph by Sheila Masson

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You never know where the next bright idea is going to come from.

Sean Bafford was stringing Christmas lights in his front yard a year ago with the help of his friend, Allen Biscotti. Sean had started to complain about the huge PG&E bill the lights would generate, when his friend reminded him, "Well, at least you'll be here to pay the bill. I may not be here next year."

Sean's friend was battling cancer, and Allen's comments hit home. Sean had lost his mother, Muriel, to cancer earlier in the year.

"It made me realize that I can come up with the money to pay a \$1,000 PG&E bill, but battling cancer — so, to help with that I thought we could put up a little mailbox to collect funds for the American Cancer Society."

The two men first strung around 10,000 lights, then 15,000, then 20,000, and installed the collection box. Sean's wife, Melanie, suggested that not everyone who comes to see the house may want to donate money, but might want, instead, to donate food for the needy. The couple contacted the Marin Community Food Bank and picked up a donation drum, which they placed in front of the house.

The public response took Sean by surprise.

"I was pretty shocked," he said. "We raised almost \$2,000 for the American Cancer Society and collected 800 pounds of food for the food bank."

Sean said he was pretty moved by how many people came to his door and thanked him. The owners of Able Tire & Brake, where Sean Works, wanted to help.

"Bob Silva and Bob, Jr. pulled me aside and said, 'We see the good you're doing and we'd like to help you,' they were really supportive," Sean said. "They paid my \$1,200 PG&E bill so that all the money we raised could go to the American Cancer Society."

Soon, Novatan Julie Dietz, a cancer activist, contacted Sean and brought him onboard for the Novato Relay for Life fund-raiser for the American Cancer Society. Dietz convinced Sean to serve as chairman of next year's relay.

Success breeds success, and Sean and his friend Allen decided to go for it again this year. Lighting the house will be used to raise money for the American Cancer Society, and there will be a collection bin for the Marin Community Food Bank.

"I'm doing it in memory of my mother, Muriel," he said. "My wife was born on Christmas Day and we're Christians. We have two little boys, 2 and 5, and it's magic for them."

The magic seems to be contagious. Apex Motors and Napa Auto Parts, two Novato companies Sean interacts with through his work at Able Tire, came forward to help financially and with spreading the word about the fund-raiser.

Sean says many of his neighbors have joined in and are decorating their homes. One told him she felt he had really brought out the Christmas spirit in the neighborhood and that she was going out to buy more lights to put up on her house.

He says he's not decorating to compete with some of the other mega-decorated homes in Novato, but, rather, for something else.

"I'm just trying to raise awareness and some money for a good cause," he said. "Some guys fish or go hunting. I put up Christmas lights."

You can view the Bafford's home at 130 San Felipe Way in Novato. Take Novato Boulevard to San Marin Drive, turn

right onto San Marin Drive. Turn right onto San Ramon. Turn left onto San Felipe Way. Hours: 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Other decorated Novato homes worth noting:

701 Arthur Street

34 Devonshire

2095 Vineyard

For more decorated homes, visit the Lights of the Valley Web site at <http://www.lightsofthevalley.com/> and click on "Novato."