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Deacon Dave marks 25 years of making seasons bright

- **LIVERMORE: More than 250,000 bulbs go into annual display**

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It's one thing to get the ladder out, drag the holiday lights up to the roof and pound U-shaped nails into a beam. It's another thing entirely to have enough bulbs to need your own PG&E transformer to run them all.

A combination of carefully crafted themes, hard work by a small army of volunteers and enough wattage to be seen from the International Space Station have made 352 Hillcrest Ave., on Livermore's east side, a popular holiday stop among light-display fans from all over the East Bay.

This is the 25th year Deacon Dave Rezendes has turned his house into a bright, constantly in motion amalgam of lights, holiday messages and animated features. He calls it "Casa del Pomba," Portuguese for "House of the Dove," and it's a labor of love in many ways.

"I like to call it a 'ministry of lights,'" said Rezendes, who plans and designs the annual display in part to touch people on a spiritual level. Though he's celebrating his 25th year as a deacon at St. Michael Catholic Church in Livermore, Rezendes said his display is "interdenominational."

Deacon Dave's display has a theme each year -- a secret until the ceremonial unveiling. Last year's theme, for example, was Santa's International Visitors Center.

This year, the unveiling is at 7 p.m. Friday, and it will be attended by a host of Livermore officials, including Mayor Marshall Kamena and Police Chief Steve Sweeney. There will be a pre-ceremony parade, too, on the street in front of the house. And at the moment of unveiling, Rezendes says -- of course -- "Let there be light!"

One thing he won't reveal: his December power bill.

Though there are plenty of sizable holiday light displays in the East Bay -- "Mr. Xmas" on Olive Drive in Concord, for example -- at least one holiday light expert thinks Deacon Dave's might be the biggest, most elaborate presentation in the East Bay.

"Thirty (thousand) to 40,000 lights is a pretty impressive display, but Dave's (displays) aren't just owing to numbers," said Livermore's Alex Dourov, who has operated the Web site <http://www.lightsofthevalley.com/> since 1999. "Quality, inventiveness and variety are important."

That Dourov and others have growing Web sites devoted to finding and showing holiday light displays reflects displays' growing popularity, Dourov said. Bigger, more creative, more technologically advanced -- even shows synchronizing lights with music -- are finding favor and drawing more visitors.

"I am constantly getting e-mails from people saying there are no light displays (on the Web site) from their town," Dourov said. "People just seem to be more interested than before."

Though Deacon Dave's display likely draws few overnight visitors to the area, many of the estimated 80,000 visitors to Hillcrest Avenue last year came from outside Livermore, even outside the East Bay. So, even if these lights isn't a boon for area hotels, other businesses feed off the energy of 250,000 bright lights.

"There are no stats directly related to this, but people come here from places like San Ramon and Pleasanton and make a night of it," said Alison Raymond, a spokeswoman for the Tri-Valley Convention & Tourism Bureau. "It's only common sense that people coming in are going to leave some money at restaurants and gas stations."

Deacon Dave thinks he gives a little spark to the local economy -- nice, but far from the point of what he's doing. It's his gift to the community, he says, -- a spiritual one above all.

"One woman, several years ago, came walking through several times and eventually talked to me about an abusive relationship (she was in)," he said. "She said, 'I was feeling really lonely until the lights really brightened me up.'"

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Casa del Pomba

352 Hillcrest Ave., Livermore

DISPLAY HOURS: 6 to 9:30 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays; 6 to 10:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 6 to 9:30 p.m. Christmas Day; 6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 26 through Dec. 30; 6 to 9 p.m. New Year's Eve -- lights remain on until midnight unless there is heavy rain or strong wind; 6 to 9 p.m. New Year's Day, when the display closes for the season.

On the Web

www.casadelpomba.com

www.lightsofthevalley.com

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