

Web site features best of Christmas lights in Valley

December 13, 2000

Many folks like to drive around to look at pretty holiday lights, but it takes a lot of time to find the really cool homes.

Alex Dourov has taken the hassle out of holiday light viewing by posting the best lights in the Valley on a Web site. It's a task Dourov, a Web-page designer, took on last year because of his passion for good holiday decorations.

"I've always enjoyed (holiday decorating), ever since I lived in a condo in San Jose many, many years ago," he said.

When Dourov and his wife were having their Livermore home built a few years back, he said, "my best friend came over and we determined where we were going to put the outlets in the eaves and outlets in the yard."

The result is a 40-amp circuit for the sole purpose of supporting the many Christmas and Halloween decorations at Dourov's Knottingham Circle home.

In years past, the Dourov family turned to the Herald's holiday lights list to map out their evening drives around the Valley to see waving Santas, prancing reindeer and holiday choo-choos.

"We went house to house, not knowing what to expect," he recalled. "Some of them would be truly beautiful and some of them would be lousy.

"I thought why not take the time to go look at all these houses, take a picture of them and post them on the Web site with the addresses. When you click on the address, you instantly get a map to the house."

Dourov, who owns an Internet-specialized business, is adept at the technical aspect of putting together a Web site. The tough part was the estimated 30 hours he spent scoping out homes and getting good photos.

When the Lights of the Valley Web site was up and running last year, he e-mailed a couple of dozen friends to let them know about it.

"Then I sat back and waited," he said. "Seventy people visited in first 24 hours. Some of them were as far away as the (United Kingdom), Japan and Australia."

Soon, the Herald started running Dourov's Web site and KKIQ morning DJ Jim Hampton promoted it on his show. Each time the site was mentioned, visits to the lights site spiked to a few hundred a day. A double-whammy newspaper-radio announcement on Dec. 19 pulled in a whopping 1,411 visitors.

Dourov got dozens of e-mails from folks who enjoyed his site.

"I got a couple of e-mails that said this is so great for people who can't get out of their houses, so they can enjoy the decorations like the rest of us can," he said. "That really melted my heart."

Bob Widmer had no idea his elaborately decorated home on Pleasanton's Chelsea Court was listed on a Web site until a friend told him to check it out.

"It seems like a good little site," Widmer said. "The (houses) that were on there last year, we drove around and looked at them. There was actually some pretty good stuff."

The photos are helpful, he said, because "it gives you a little bit of an impression of what kind of decorations you're looking at. I was kind of amazed that somebody went around and actually took pictures, scanned them in and did all the work."

Widmer, a decorating zealot, spends three or four months each year, preparing his handmade decorations that include a revolving Ferris wheel, spinning carousel and teeter-tottering Christmas critters. It takes him and five buddies three days to deck out his front and back yards.

"We enjoy people coming by and the neighbors have not thrown me out," Widmer joked.

Dourov plans to continue his Lights of the Valley Web site for many years, expanding beyond the Livermore Valley to Tracy and the Danville area.

Got a good column idea? Or maybe you're just curious about something around town. Send your ideas or questions to Zoe Francis at <mailto:zoef@home.com> or call (925)730-3356. Letters may be sent to 4770 Willow Road, Pleasanton, CA 94588.