

Tri-Valley

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Now, maps to decorated Tri-Valley houses lit like stars

- Tri-Valley man's Web site guides folks to the best holiday-decorated homes

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LIVERMORE -- For years, Alex Dourov relied on newspaper listings to find valley homes twinkling with holiday lights that he and his family could ogle.

The paper certainly was helpful, the Livermore man said, but inevitably, the carload of Dourovs would get lost or, worse yet, stumble on a stinker.

"What may be excellent and beautiful to me may not be for the next person," Dourov said. "People sometimes nominate the neighbor or themselves just for the heck of it."

What seasonal sightseers needed, he thought, were maps and pictures to determine for themselves which houses were worth a visit.

With that idea and 20 hours of work, Dourov created the Lights of the Valley (www.utkaduck.com/valleylights) site on the World Wide Web.

Visitors to the Web site can preview Livermore and Pleasanton houses with holiday decorations before rounding up the family and hopping in the car.

More than 30 lighted displays were listed on Dourov's site as of Friday. Clicking on small photos of the houses yields larger views, while addresses provide links to instantly-generated maps.

Dourov, a Web page designer by trade, takes the photos while checking out the lights with his family. He scans them in and posts them to the site.

There are the cartoon characters on Leland Way and on Candy Court in Livermore. There are the animated figures on Calle Reynoso in Pleasanton.

And of course, valley fixture Deacon Dave's place is listed. As if the glow from the Dave Rezendes house on Hillcrest Avenue weren't enough to attract attention, Lights of the Valley offers up several previews of the 193,000-light spectacle. Captured in the snapshots are 33,000 more lights than last year; they need to be powered through an industrial transformer that PG&E recently installed nearby.

Also appearing on the site is the Jefferson Avenue house of Dave & Donna Van Arkel, whose relatives back East and in Albuquerque, N.M. can share the spirit online, Donna Van Arkel said.

"I thanked (Dourov) so much because I think it's a wonderful idea, especially for the people who can't get out," Van Arkel said.

Julie Fairclough, whose house on Alysia Court is part of a neighborhood decorating effort, said getting a map to exhibits of exterior illumination is invaluable.

"We go out several times a season," Fairclough said. "We usually drive around a lot."

Dourov said response has been heavy since the site went up last weekend. About 2,000 people from places as far off as the United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan have visited the site.

They're not likely to make their way to the Tri-Valley to look at the lights. But the folks from places like Dublin, Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill have been asking Dourov when the site will include houses in their locales.

"We've got eight houses we're going to visit tonight," he said Friday. "But if I can get volunteers to send in pictures, it can spread into Contra Costa."

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