

The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

Decking the halls in style

Published December 7, 2004

GENEVA, Ill. (AP) -- Greg Parcell said he isn't thinking about the 50,000 lights all around him, or the computer that has them blinking to the beat of "Let it Snow" on the radio.

Instead, his mind is on what's missing as he stands in what seems the one empty spot in his front yard.

"I still have to put up the penguins around the campfire," he said.

Mr. Parcell, 47, is a toy soldier in a growing army of Christmas enthusiasts becoming more sophisticated at turning yards into blazing monuments to the holidays.

New companies are cropping up with elaborate, automated decorations and the computer equipment to coordinate them, giving anyone with the money the ability to create scenes similar to a theme park.

Tens of thousands of people also have found a way to skip all those hours out in the cold hanging lights -- opting to hire private companies to deck their halls for anywhere from a few hundred dollars to thousands. One such company, Texas-based Christmas Decor, has grown from 300 customers to more than 32,000 in the past eight years.

For anyone lacking ideas, the Internet has plenty to offer.

PlanetChristmas.com shows displays across the globe and gives homeowners a chance to swap ideas, see the latest gadgets and register for the next "Lights Up" symposium.

"It's taken off like wildfire, and I'm quite excited about it," said Chuck Smith, the Web site's creator and a pioneer of huge computerized home displays.

Melissa Williams, co-owner of Christmas Done Bright in Sevierville, Tenn., said customers, particularly middle-aged men, "want to decorate everything. They compete with their brothers and neighbors."

For Miss Williams' company, that has translated to well more than \$1 million in sales of lighted wire silhouettes every year since 1999, up from \$42,000 in 1992. The silhouettes range from a simple wreath to an elf that appears to be shooting presents from a cannon into a sack.

The price tag isn't the only enemy of holiday decoration enthusiasts -- there also are the neighbors.

Throughout the country, people upset about the noise, traffic and garbage that come when people descend on their neighborhoods to view the displays have fought back in recent years.

In Little Rock, Ark., some residents were so upset about a display with 3 million lights -- said to be visible from 80 miles away -- that they got the state Supreme Court to agree that the display was a public nuisance and order it scaled back.

In Monte Sereno, Calif., a couple whose huge display attracted thousands of passers-by angered neighbors and led city officials to require a permit for any exhibit lasting longer than three days. This year, the yard holds a 10-foot Grinch, its spiny finger pointing at the



house of the neighbors who initiated the complaints.

Meanwhile, Greg Cornwell has nothing bad to say about Mr. Parcell's house across the street, but he is bracing for the crowds and the looks from people when he tries to get his car into his driveway.

"They think I'm trying to cut in line," he said.

Copyright © 2006 News World Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

[Return to the article](#)



[Want to use this article? Click here for options!](#)

Copyright The Washington Times .