

Let there be singing lights

Brownsburg man's display blinks to music

By Josh Duke

Posted: December 25, 2008

Ryan White uses 15,000 lights, more than a mile of extension cords and many homemade displays to deliver a little holiday cheer to anyone who wants to drive pass his Brownsburg home.

But his home is far from the traditional display.

In fact, his high-tech creation almost seems to have a life of its own. A computer software program allows the lights to dance to music broadcast from a low-wattage FM transmitter, which allows visitors to enjoy the show while listening inside their car on the radio.

"It really is just a lot of fun for me to bring a novelty to the area that will bring some spirit out in people," said White, who has had the computer-animated display for three years, with the last two at his current home in the Fox Chase subdivision. "It does provide a little more of a concert that people really enjoy."

White, 36, said he has had an interest in holiday lights since decorating his parents' home as a kid growing up in Connersville. His interest was rekindled the past couple of years after his daughter, Sienna, was born.

At about that same time, he saw a commercial on television with holiday lights dancing to music and decided to look into it. He started small three years ago, and his display has grown each year.

He currently has nine songs that are synchronized with the lights, including some Trans-Siberian Orchestra Christmas tunes, a David Foster song called "Carol of the Bells" and a "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" melody that he added this year for his 4-year-old daughter.

But getting the sights and sounds to come together in an eye-popping, ear-pleasing rhythm is no simple task. While the computer does much of the work during the season, White's hobby keeps him busy virtually year-round.

White spends much of the late winter and spring months dreaming up what he will add in the coming year. When he finds a song he may want to incorporate into his repertoire, he must sit down at the computer and decide how his strands of lights will be synchronized to the beat of the song. It usually takes him 17 to 20 hours to program a 3- to 4-minute song.

"In the spring and summer, I kind of just dabble two or three mornings a week where I work on it for maybe an hour at a time," said White, who is in his second year of residency at St. Francis Hospital in Indianapolis.

When his songs are ready, he begins to work on his new displays for the year. He builds most by hand.

White finally begins to ramp up his efforts by late October, and by the first of November most of his free time is spent outside decorating his house and yard. He usually is finished in about three weeks, just before his Thanksgiving night unveiling.

White said his display doesn't increase his electric bill as much as people might think. Last December, his bill was about \$68 more than a typical month. He said the lights flashing on and off to the beat of the music likely keeps the cost down.

He has spent about \$5,000 to \$6,000 the past three years for lights, extension cords and equipment. He also changes about 100 to 150 light bulbs a year.

As news of his display traveled mostly by word of mouth the past two years, more visitors have come. At its peak, the narrow neighborhood street has had as many as 20 cars waiting in line to get close enough to the house to view the performance.

"My neighbors have been incredibly tolerant," he said.

Jeff Boyd, who lives across from White, said the display provides more positives than negatives.

"It really makes our street festive, but it brings a lot of people too, which can be frustrating especially when they park in our driveway to watch," Boyd said. "But if I had my choice, I would keep it the way it is."

- Call Star reporter Josh Duke at (317) 444-2810.



It can take Ryan White 17 to 20 hours of programming to add a 3- or 4-minute a song to his holiday lights display.

What: Ryan White's computerized holiday light display.

Where: 935 Grayson Trail, Brownsburg.

When: 6 p.m. to midnight through Jan. 1.

Radio frequency: 98.9 FM. However, the transmission only works within 500 feet of the house.