

AROUND LIVERMORE: MARK TARTE

Web page highlights holiday sites

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN when it gets increasing cold, the skies darken earlier ... and it's still very bright at night.

Yes, it's Christmastime, and colorful lights are going up on homes around town to celebrate the holiday season. Most homes, like ours, have a few strings up, and they look nice, but they are not very labor intensive. Others, like some energetic neighbors of mine, seem to have wrapped their entire homes in Christmas lights and decorations. Every year, people make local pilgrimages to those homes where the owners have pulled out all the stops to decorate and illuminate for the holidays.

For eight years now, Alex Dourov with his <http://www.lightsofthevalley.com/> Web site has brought homes with unique or bright displays of Christmas lights to the Internet and thereby to the entire world. His first year, in 1999, there were about 9,400 visitors to his then-new site from as far away as the United Kingdom, Sweden and Japan, looking at homes that struck Alex and his family's fancy in and around Livermore and Pleasanton. By 2005, there were tens of thousands of visits to his site from around the world and more than 20 cities listed.

For 2006, 26 cities are listed, with dozens of ornate, whimsical or spiritual displays for people to enjoy from the comfort of their homes.

Alex noted in his e-mail and on his Web page of the fun and joy he gets out of doing the Web page strictly as a community service. Alex wrote, "As a side note, I have truly enjoyed myself these past eight years by putting together this site. I am overwhelmed at the kind comments that I have received from many people telling me how much this site has helped them, or how it even helps "shut-ins" be able to get a virtual tour of the Bay Area's best Christmas light displays."

Alex, I know my family and I enjoy looking at your site and picking out the areas around the valley we want to go see, so from the Tartes, thank you for a kind and wonderful Christmas tradition!

CASA DEL POMBA: Speaking of holiday lights, this past Friday, Christmastime in Livermore became official once again with the lighting of Deacon Dave Rezendes' "Casa Del Pomba," or "House of the Dove" on Hillcrest Avenue. Every year for 24 years, Deacon Dave's home has been a must see on anyone's Christmas display trips. This year is no different.

Casa Del Pomba is located at 352 Hillcrest Ave. and is open Sunday through Thursday evenings from 6 to 9:30 p.m. and Friday and Saturday nights from 6 to 10:30 p.m. On Christmas night, it will close at 9:30 p.m. and it will run through New Year's Day night, when it closes for the season.

A CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE: I received an e-mail from the Lucky Buck Poker Room about their employees' efforts to raise money for Christmas donations. The Poker Room and its employees are raising money for local servicemen and servicewomen and donating it to the Tri-Valley Adopt-A-Unit.

The employees are asking other small-business employees to think about donating to Adopt-A-Unit, which will see to it that gifts get to those men and women who are serving overseas. If you would like, contact Marilyn Carter, the program's coordinator, at 925-447-6221 or visit its Web page at <http://www.adoptaunitrivalley.org/>.

ANOTHER WORTHY CAUSE: There is an "Angel Hotline" in town that matches donors with needy families. If you would like to help adopt a local family in need during the holiday season, call the Angel Hotline at 925-960-4595 and ask for Fran Pickett, who is coordinating the adoption efforts. While we live in a nice area that is somewhat affluent, many people and families every year struggle to make ends meet, especially now. Give them a call if you can.

REMEMBRANCE: This coming Thursday is the 65th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. The light atop Mount Diablo will be lit at dusk to commemorate and remember those who gave their last full measure of devotion that day and throughout WWII.

Take a moment to remember their sacrifice for, and devotion to our nation.

Until next week, be alert, be safe and God bless America.

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