

Dormant light spectacular waits for savior

By Kevin W. Burke
Daily Nebraskan Press Staff Writer

For almost 15 years, the lights strung for everyone to see. Now they are neatly packed away in a garage, waiting.

When John Doerr retired from his job, he needed something to help pass the time.

He found a hobby in Christmas decorations. And what a hobby they became.

John Doerr, of his farm to his sons in the late 1960s and moved to Lincoln. His hobby started with a few strings of lights on the house and hedges. The display quickly grew.

As the hobby grew, so did the interest of neighbors, and then townspeople and then northeast Nebraskans. In the end, at least one body from all 50 states had seen his lights.

Every year Doerr added a decoration or piece to his collection, according to his son Myron in Lincoln. Soon the yard was full of Christmas decorations that delighted both young and old.

He would visit Hardware's hardware store owner, Mervin Hammussen. Together they would plot and plan to display a new decoration.

A lighted nativity scene, a cross with lights designed so it appeared to glow with flowers blowing down and a Santa Claus hat came brand-out of the chimney, were just a few.

Also included was a replica of his house and garage. The garage door would open and a tiny Model T Ford would drive in and out. A replica of Zion Lutheran Church in Lincoln was set out for visitors to see.

Doerr had made the church with the help of Zion's pastor, Martin Hoyer. A replica of Zion's earlier church was also included.

Soon the hobby took most of his time, according to his daughter-in-law, Shirley. New additions and constant repairs taxed Doerr.

Then in the early '70s, his wife became sick and died. He lost interest in his hobby.

His sons, at one time, tried to keep their father's hobby going but failed. It took too much time.

John Doerr died in 1979 and his decorations remain in the boxes. He left a request that someday his lights would shine again. Maybe they will.

A grandson, Doug, has expressed interest in reviving the Christmas hobby. Someday.

Hannukah...

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Schuster, a member of the South Street Temple, said it was important to keep the perspective that Hannukah "really isn't that big of a deal."

"The commercial effect is too bad," he said, "but it's probably true that if Jews were in the majority, there would be an incredible commercialization of Hannukah."

"My daughter knew she wanted a Barbie doll," he said. "Any old Barbie doll wouldn't do, it had to be a certain kind... obviously a result of Christmas advertisements."

Gerald Grant, Lincoln certified public accountant, said individuals in a society take on the aspects of the environment around them.

"The majority in this society enjoy Christmas gifts," Grant said. "So Jewish kids get some in their homes, too."

Rabbi Ian Jacknis, of the Tifereth Temple, said there is one "sort of positive effect" of Christmas commercialism on Hannukah.

"It does encourage the observance of the holiday," Jacknis said. "Jews have to make Hannukah seem really great. It's no one's fault; it's not all bad. It just puts more emphasis on a traditionally minor holiday."

"As a rabbi, I kind of wish the whole congregation would join in this much the rest of the year. Now, sometimes I feel that they come to the synagogue for Hannukah because their kids are feeling so bad about not having a Christmas," he said.

"Thank God we have a holiday in December," said Jacknis, with a twinkle in his eye. "But really, even if gifts aren't intrinsic to Hannukah, I don't mind. We have to make special times to give gifts, or we might overlook people we really appreciate."

Allen, an 18-year resident of Lincoln, said Christmas has become such a major social event, that Jews have tried to construct a holiday to be "psychologically competitive to Christmas."

"We're trying to beat back the waves," he said. But Allen added that there was "no way Hannukah can be made competitive to Christmas."

"Christmas is an overpoweringly beautiful time," he said. "The decorations are nice, the music is wonderful, I enjoy the lights... but it's not my holiday."

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