

North Side X-mas lights bring color, cheer to Indian Capital

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Friday, 23 December 2016 06:15



Grandma's Restaurant owners ringing IN THE HOLIDAYS

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The holiday season is full of tradition, perhaps none more noticeable than outdoor Christmas decorations.

Color is popping up around the Indian Capital, whether in the form of white lights hanging through Coal and Aztec avenues or the bright Santa Claus greeting passersby along West Wilson Street in Gallup or the similar displays in hundreds of people's yards in various neighborhoods around McKinley County.

For some Gallup families, spreading the holiday cheer through elaborate light displays is as important a Christmas tradition as any. "It's something we do every year at Christmas," Sylvestre Villegas, who lives at 217 W. Wilson Ave., in Gallup, said. "We like the lights. People who see them like them. This is something that we do especially for Christmas."

DECKED-OUT PART OF THE BLOCK

West Wilson is hardly lacking the Christmas flare. At the intersection of Third Street and Wilson, passersby might notice Santa taking off into the night sky, about to be pulled upward by a team of luminous reindeer. Owned by Sylvestre and Ester Villegas, the spacious yard decorations are a custom job. Both Sylvestre and Ester say they're still adding on to the display "until about a day before Dec. 25," Sylvestre jokes. The couple, who are from Guadalajara, Mexico, own and operate Grandma's Restaurant at 410 N. Third St. and another Grandma's in Crownpoint.

"There are a lot of light bulbs in the yard," the two say. "It's Christmastime."

It's hard to miss the extravagant light display, which Ester says is turned on every evening at about 7:30 pm and turned off at around 10:30 pm. A celebrity cast of characters surrounds the Villegas residence – Santa Claus, the Grinch and what appears to be the "A Charlie Brown Christmas" gang."

"We don't want to keep the lights on too long for too many hours," Ester quips. "We know that the electricity bill will be a little higher because of the lights. The longer the lights are on, the higher the bill."

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Neighbors and people who frequent St. Francis Church, also located on West Wilson, appreciate the light display. There are homes along West Wilson that have light displays, but not like that of the Villegas residence.

“It’s beautiful,” Moira Sanchez, 30, of Gallup’s north side commented. “You can tell they put a lot of time and effort into putting the lights up. They look very nice.”

In addition to looking at the decorations – most of them store bought – in the yard there are displays set up specifically so kids, if they want, can get their pictures taken. Now in their third year of outdoor light decorations, Sylvestre’s and Ester’s collection has expanded so much, neither can put a number on how many decorations they have. “I don’t know the exact number of lights that we have,” Ester says. “I stopped counting.”

The Villegas’ aren’t the only ones on the city’s north side spreading holiday cheer. Cutouts of holiday icons line the yards of homes for a good block or so on Princeton: ice-skating penguins, elves and snowmen, to name a few.

“We’ve seen the displays,” a telephone receptionist at St. Francis Church said. “But there are a lot of decorations on the north side. They all look good.”

Sylvestre and Ester said they’ll take the light display down on New Year’s Day.

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