



TOWN TALK

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‘A new tradition’: Three Lawrence organizations teaming up this year for big drive-thru holiday display with music and lights

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Usually when I see a singing snowman, it is because I've gotten into a bad batch of eggnog. But this year, it is at least equally as likely because I'm at a whole new type of large Lawrence holiday event.

Three organizations have teamed up to create a new holiday light display that will take motorists through a west Lawrence sports complex to see nearly 20 holiday displays that will be synchronized to music.

The event is being dubbed Lawrence Lights: Making Spirits Bright. The SERTOMA Club of Lawrence, the Lawrence Board of Realtors and the Lawrence Parks & Recreation Department are working together to host the event at the Youth Sports Complex in southwest Lawrence. Plans call for the event to start near the Thanksgiving holiday and run until New Year's Day.

"The reception we have gotten so far to the idea has been more than fantastic," said Tom Pollard, a member of the SERTOMA Club and an originator of the idea. "Our goal is for it to be a new tradition in Lawrence."

Several communities throughout the region have drive-through holiday displays that feature lots of lights, lots of colors, lots of blinking, all coordinated with a holiday soundtrack. But Lawrence hasn't had any such display, although a few homeowners have had small-scale shows in their yards.

This will be kind of like those homeowner displays, except it will be display after display after display, and instead of being in someone's yard, the displays will be set up in football, soccer, baseball and other fields at the complex, 4911 W. 27th St.

"We'll even have some of them hanging from goal posts," said Rob Hulse, executive vice president for the Lawrence Board of Realtors.

Some of the displays will be pretty big and elaborate. Pollard mentioned a 16-foot-tall singing snowman, in addition to a host of dancing stars, trees, wreaths and other such imagery. Hulse said plans also included a drive-thru lighted tunnel on a portion of the property.

"All the displays will be brand new, newly made, from our vendor," said Pollard, who has been looking and picking out displays since early this year.

"For me, every day since January has been Christmas," he said.

There are a variety of roads and parking lots on the YSC property that vehicles will meander through as part of the event. The main entrance is off the South Lawrence Trafficway, where it intersects with Wakarusa Drive and 27th Street. That lighted intersection can get a bit congested, but Pollard said the event planned to use a system where people buy tickets online in advance of their visit.

Plans call for the admission fee to be \$20 per carload. Hulse said all proceeds would go to the three organizations and would be used for not-for-profit causes. For decades, the SERTOMA Club has been a major funder of the Schiefelbusch Communication Camp at KU. The camp is for children with speech and hearing challenges. The Lawrence Board of Realtors Community Foundation funds a variety of nonprofit programs related to promoting housing security and preventing homelessness, Hulse said. The Lawrence Parks & Recreation Department plans to use its portion of the proceeds to fund its Wee Folks Scholarship Fund, which helps pay for recreation classes and programs for children in need.

For years, SERTOMA's major fundraiser has been a large barbecue competition in Broken Arrow Park in May. COVID-19 has disrupted that event. Pollard said a decision hasn't been made about whether the barbecue competition would return in future years, but the club knew it needed to look at other fundraising options.

"I always had wondered why Lawrence didn't have a light show like this because Lawrence certainly should have one," Pollard said. "I told the club members my crazy idea, and their reaction was they were really, really excited about it."