

Light display set to open Dec. 15

Written by Deb Egenberger
Wednesday, 08 December 2010 22:21 -



Miles of extension cords are carefully arranged with circuit splitters placed every so often throughout the KOA Campground.

Each day for the past several weeks, more lights are tested, strung and zip-tied in a variety of creative sculptures.

The holiday season may have crept up on Gwen and Barry McDiarmid but the Shining Light Celebration will be as magical as ever when it opens next week.

“We think about it now and then throughout the year,” said Gwen McDiarmid, who operates the KOA with her husband Barry, “but it still seems to sneak up on us. There’s never enough time to get done all that we hope.”

Barry has taken advantage of the mild weather to build, place and light the various scenes that make up the Shining Light.

Regardless of temperature, though, he’s out there plugging in cords and hammering away. The work will continue, Barry said, right up until the gate is opened for the first visitors on Dec. 15.

“There’s always something to do,” he said carrying an armload of cords. “Even when I get it all put together, I will still be fixing and moving and improving.”

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The Shining Light Celebration began at the KOA in December 2001 and has grown and evolved through the years with numerous volunteers.

Interstate 80 travelers who can see the glow of light from the highway stop off to drive through the display, built largely around Barry's creative ideas with the help of many cast-off decorations donated to the cause.

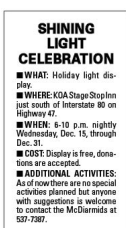
While many of the lights and decorations have been used year after year, the McDiarmids always add a few new things and rearrange the old.

"It's never the same experience two years in a row," Gwen said.

The free-will donation collected by the McDiarmid family and other volunteers goes to a host of worthy charities.

Gwen said she's partial to sending money to the American Cancer Society and the Alzheimer's Association.

Her adoptive mother had alzheimer's when she died and her birth mother died of cancer.



Barry's top charity choice is Lions Club International. He said the Lions do good things all over the world.

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Those are only three of a long list of charities that benefit from the generosity of Shining Light visitors.

“We certainly will take suggestions of charities,” Gwen said.

Donating the proceeds and watching people’s eyes light up when they drive into the campground is what makes all the work that goes into Shining Light worthwhile for the McDiarmids.

“This place is totally transformed. It’s like driving into a magic land where nothing else matters,” Gwen said. “The fact that it brings joy to others makes it all worth it.”