Holiday decorations in region light up the season

HERALD STAFF REPORT

One of the favorite Christmas holiday pastimes is viewing outdoor light displays.

Again this year, many area residents have decorated their homes, and readers have already submitted photos from several holiday displays.

If you have any we should add to the list, let us know by emailing the address and a contact phone number to news@kdhnews.com and putting HOLIDAY LIGHTS in the subject field of the email. We'll run this list through New Year's Day.

To share your photos on our Instagram account, tag us @kdhnews and use hashtag #kdhholidaylights.

Readers have submitted photos from holiday displays from homes and businesses in the area.

KILLEEN

- 2900 block of Bastion Loop
- 4400 block of Lake Road
- 4700 block of Moose Ridge
- 4800 block of Cinnamon Stone Drive
- 5200 block of Siltstone Loop
- 5300 block of Siltstone Loop
- 5400 block of Siltstone Loop
- 6100 block of SPC Laramore Drive
- 6500 block of Deorsam Loop
- 2200 block of Moonstone Drive
- 1800 block of Ledgestone Drive
- 1800 block of Hooten Street

HARKER HEIGHTS

- 6200 block of Flagstone Drive
- 400 block of Winter Sun Drive
- 400 block of Ponderosa Drive
- 400 block of Winter Sun Drive
- 700 block of Tundra Drive

COPPERAS COVE

- 2300 block of Veterans Avenue
- 4800 block of County Road 146
- 100 through 3000 blocks of Business U.S. Highway 190
- 1100 through 1400 blocks of South Farm-to-Market 116
- 800 block of South Main Street
- 100 through 300 blocks of the Cove Terrace Shopping Center
- 100 block of East Avenue D
- 400 block of East Avenue D
- 1300 block of East Avenue D
- 100 block of East Avenue E
- 100 block of South First Street
- 600 block of South First Street
- 400 and 500 blocks of Robertstown Road

LAMPASAS

- 100 block of County Road 4314

GABE WOLF | HERALD

Christmas lights in the 700 block of Tundra Drive in Harker Heights.

NATURE IN LIGHTS

The Belton Lake Outdoor Recreation Area annual Nature in Lights is open from 5:30 to 11 p.m. daily until Jan. 6.

The trail, which is at North Nolan Road and Cottage Road in Belton, features miles of outdoor light displays and an opportunity to visit Santa's Village for shopping and pictures with Santa. Cars, minivans, and pickups are $15 per carload.

Area lights brighten HOLIDAY

PHOTOS BY GABE WOLF | HERALD

TOP RIGHT: Christmas lights in the 2300 block of Veterans Avenue in Copperas Cove. ABOVE: Christmas lights in the 5400 block of Siltstone Drive in Killeen.

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A child calling Santa reached NORAD instead

Christmas Eve was never the same

BY STEVE HENDRIX
THE WASHINGTON POST

Col. Harry Shoup was a real by-the-book guy.

At home, his two daughters were limited to phone calls of no more than three minutes (monitored by an egg timer) and were automatically grounded if they missed curfew by even a minute.

At work, during his 28-year Air Force career, the decorated fighter pilot was known as a no-nonsense commander and a stickler for rules.

Which makes what happened that day in 1955 even more of a Christmas miracle.

It was a December day in Colorado Springs when the phone rang on Shoup's desk. Not the black phone, the red phone.

"When that phone rang, it was a big deal," said Shoup's daughter Terri Van Keuren, 69, a retiree in Castle Rock, Colorado. "It was the middle of the Cold War and that phone meant bad news."

Shoup was a commander of the Continental Air Defense Command, the early iteration of the North American Aerospace Defense Command. Then, as now, the joint U.S.-Canadian operation was the tense nerve center of America's defensive shield against a sneak air attack. In 1955, the command center was filled with a massive map of North America on plexiglass, behind which backward-writing technicians on scaffolds marked every suspect radar blip in grease pencil.

It was not a place of fun and games. And when that red phone rang — it was wired directly to a four-star general at the Pentagon — things got real. All eyes would have been on Shoup when he answered.

"Col. Shoup," he barked. But there was silence.

Until, finally, a small voice said, "Is this Santa Claus?"

Shoup, by all accounts, was briefly confused and then fully annoyed. "Is this a joke?" Glaring at the wide-eyed staff for any sign of a smile, he let the caller have it with all the indignity of a bird-colonel who brooked no nonsense on this most vital of all phone lines.

"Just what do you think you're doing," he began.

But then the techno-military might of the United States was brought up short by the sound of sniffles. Whoever was on the phone was crying, and Shoup suddenly realized it really was a child who was trying to reach Santa Claus.

The colonel paused, considered and then responded:

"Ho, ho, ho!" he said as his crew looked on astonished. "Of course this is Santa Claus. Have you been a good boy?"

He talked to the local youngster for several minutes, hearing his wishes for toys and treats and assuring him he would be there on Christmas Eve. Then the boy asked Santa to bring something nice for his mommy.

"I will, I will," Santa-Shoup said. "In fact, could I speak to your mommy now?"

The boy put his mother on the phone, and Shoup went back to business, crisply explaining to the woman just what facility their call had reached.

"He said later he thought she must have been a military wife," said Van Keuren. "She was properly cowed."

But she also had an explanation. The woman asked Shoup to look at that day's local newspaper. Specifically, at a Sears ad emblazoned with a big picture of Santa that invited kids to "Call me on my private phone, and I will talk to you personally any time day or night."

The number provided, ME 2-6681, went right to one of the most secure phones in the country. "They were off by one digit," Van Keuren said. "It was a typo."

When Shoup hung up, the phone rang again. He ordered his staff to answer each Santa call while he got on the (black) phone with AT&T to set up a new link to Washington. Let Sears have the old number, he told them.

That might have been the end of it. But a few nights later, Shoup, as was his tradition, took his family to have Christmas Eve dinner with his on-duty troops. When they walked into the control center, he spotted a little image of a sleigh pulled by eight unregistered reindeer, coming over the top of the world.

Van Keuren was only 6 at the time, but the exchange that followed became stuff of both family and Air Force legend.

"What's that?" the commanding officer asked.

"Just having a little fun, Colonel," they answered, waiting for the blowup.

Shoup pondered the offense as the team waited. Then he ordered someone to get the community relations officer. And soon Shoup was on the phone to a local radio station: CONAD had picked up unidentified incoming, possible North Pole origin, distinctly sleigh-shaped.

The radio station ate it up, the networks got involved and an enduring tradition was born. This Christmas Eve marked the 63rd straight year that NORAD will publicly track Santa's sleigh on its global rounds.

"This is our most feel-good mission," said Maj. Andrew Hennessy, a Canadian Army officer posted at NORAD headquarters in Colorado. "We know Santa brings lasting joy to kids around the world and we're glad to have that as our fourth mission one day out of the year."

(On the other 364 days, NORAD's three-pronged mandate is to oversee air threats, general aerospace control and, in recent years, maritime warnings for potential threats from sea.)

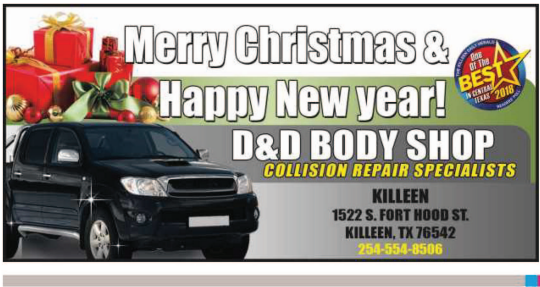
In good military fashion, the Santa tracking command has grown terrifically complex. NORAD deploys satellites, radar, jet fighters and Santa cams to feed its website, apps and social media accounts used by more than 2 million followers. Naughty and nice alike can follow Santa's movement on 3D maps in eight languages. Last year, when Alexa was asked "Where's Santa?" more than 1.5 million times, it was NORAD that fed her the answer.

But the real emotional outlay comes in the Colorado Springs live call center, staffed for 20 hours Dec. 24 by more than 1,500 volunteers (many of them local service members and their families). With a nine-page Santa Tracker manual in hand, they fielded more than 126,000 calls in 2017.

"As soon as you put the phone down, it rings again," said Hennessy, who has done duty in the call center.

Shoup went on to ever-higher ranks in the Air Force, retiring as a wing commander. When his kids were old enough, he told them why so many of his colleagues called him the "Santa colonel," but it was a quiet kind of legacy until the 25th anniversary of Santa tracking and TV news crews sought him out.

After that, he looked forward to getting the media calls each December, even carrying special business cards with the story typed on the back. In 2009, Shoup was buried, at 91, with a flyover of F-16 fighters, under a gravestone that notes his service in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. The last line reads: "Santa Colonel."



Christmas trees and their decorations have evolved

BY LEE REICH
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In the story of St. Boniface, a thunder oak decorated with lit candles and gilded apples was glowing in the dark forest one Christmas day in 8th century Germany. The pagan god Thor was to be appeased with a human sacrifice. But Wynfred, an English Christian missionary later to be known as St. Boniface, split the giant oak into four parts with one stroke of an ax, revealing a small fir tree nearby — the first Christmas tree, perhaps.

SOME ARBOREAL HISTORY

The exact origin of the Christmas tree isn't known, but for centuries, people have had the urge to decorate trees at this time of year.

In ancient Rome, decorated trees were part of the festival of Saturn, celebrated beginning Dec. 17. The Paradise Tree of the Middle Ages was a fir tree hung with red apples, a prop used in the Biblical play telling the story of Adam and Eve. That tradition was moved into homes after the "miracle plays" were banned in the 15th century.

In Germany, a written record from 1604 describes trees decorated with paper roses, apples, and figures of Adam and Eve and a serpent.

The custom of decorating trees at Christmas gained popularity in the British Empire in 1841 when Queen Victoria and Prince Albert celebrated the birth of their first son with a decorated tree at Windsor Castle.

AND NOW FOR SOME LIGHTS

In the late 19th century, gas jets and then electric lights were tried as replacements for candles.

According to the National Electrical Contractors Association, the first electric Christmas lights were lit in 1882, three years after the incandescent bulb was invented. Edward Johnson, a friend and partner of Thomas Edison, hand-wired 80 "patriotic" red, white and blue bulbs and wound them around a rotating evergreen tree in his home.

In subsequent years, publicity (such as Grover Cleveland lighting the White House tree with electric lights) and electrification in rural areas made electric Christmas tree lights more popular.

THE TREE

The "technology" of the tree itself has also advanced over the years, mostly to adapt to warmer and drier homes. Firs, spruces and some pines were found to be the best evergreens at holding onto their leaves under these conditions, both for looks and to reduce the fire hazard from dry leaves indoors.

Another way to offset the effects of today's drier homes is to put the tree in the coolest spot, or at least not right where an air duct spills hot air out into the room. Spraying the tree with an anti-transpirant such as Wilt-Pruf also helps. Keeping the base of the tree in water — after making a clean cut — allows water to enter the base to replace moisture lost through the needles. A couple of tablespoons of bleach in the water inhibits bacterial growth which clogs the stems.

Still, Christmas trees — and Christmas — don't last forever. You may be heartened to know that the residents of Christmas, Florida, live up to their name by maintaining a year-round Christmas tree.

LEE REICH VIA AP

A Christmas tree in New Paltz, New York, includes lights, cookies, strings of popcorn and other colorful decorations to brighten up the holiday season.