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LTD's Joy Ride provides a unique view of the lights on the most beautifully decorated houses in Eugene.

## LTD's Joy Ride a well-lit show

Admit it, the commercialization of Christmas is not all bad.

Roast chestnuts over an open fire, let Jack Frost nip at your nose. But, to really get into the spirit, there is something about the modern conventions, like blinking lights and tinsel, that excites people about the holiday season.

Lane County Transit knows this. For the last five years, LTD has sponsored a seasonal tour of neighborhood houses decorated with outdoor Christmas decorations. From Dec. 19-21, LTD's Joy Ride tours Eugene houses, mostly in the South Hills, where the nights glow like a Christmas aurora borealis.

"Our Joy Ride tour is a huge hit. Last year, we sold out in two hours," said Michael Schumacher, a LTD representative. Since most of the outrageous Christmas light shows are found in houses far removed from the regular bus routes, the Joy Ride provides an opportunity for people to view houses they may not ordinarily see while driving through town.

For one hour and 15 minutes, the bus riders tour Eugene gazing at houses with front-yard Santas and spectacular light displays. As part of the festivities, two South Eugene High School students act as hosts on the tour. The hosts lead the mobile troupe in Christmas Carols throughout the ride. And in case you forgot the words to "Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer" in the past 11 months, LTD arms all the passengers with a goody bag filled with candy-canes, a holiday songbook, a coloring book and even a towel to wipe the foggy bus windows on the tour.

The towel is necessary because passengers don't want to miss the



show. While the bus inches past the houses, some displays are so complex that the bus may not be moving slow enough.

John Dahl, a Joy Ride bus-driver, makes sure he passes by two houses each year. One house, which sits on top of a hill, is swaddled in blinking white and colored lights.

"The owner covers the stairs, the yard, everything, and it makes the house look like it is moving," Dahl said.

The other home, near Amazon, is lit on a computer-generated cycle.

"The lights on the house blink on and off to form the image of a train or Santa Claus," Dahl said. And with the critical expertise that only a veteran bus-driver of the Joy Ride could have Dahl said, "these houses put on fantastic presentations."

Of course, not all the houses on

the tour are as intricately decorated.

"Some homes look gorgeous dressed like gingerbread houses," said Judy Cerkoney, marketing director of Valley River Center, who along with Oregon Eye Associates, is co-sponsoring "Joy Ride." Nevertheless, merely wrapping a house in blinking colored lights will not promise a visit by the LTD bus either. After all, there is a fine line between a Las Vegas show case and a celebratory light show.

So, for most residents whose houses are exhibited on the tour, it can be serious business. One South Hills resident, Stan Schumacher, who is orchestrating a nativity scene for this year's display, said that he decorates his house for his two sons. When the whole neighborhood begins lighting their houses after Thanksgiving, the planning can turn into a game of good-natured rivalry.

"There is some unspoken competition between houses. When the whole neighborhood decorates their houses, you can feel the pressure," Schumacher laughingly revealed.

LTD will be selling Joy Ride tickets beginning Dec. 6 at LTD customer service, Valley River Center and Oregon Eye Associates. The tickets are \$2 per person and even with 3,000 tickets available, not everyone will get a seat unless you plan on buying a ticket early. Two buses depart Valley River Center at 6 and 7 p.m.

Why deck only the halls with boughs of holly this season? Consider decorating the outside of your house as well, and maybe the "Joy Ride" tour will pass by your home. But remember, the competition is pretty fierce.

—Erinn Bucklan

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