

BRIGHT LIGHTS, SMALL CITIES

By **GRETCHEN AMMERMAN**
For the *TODAY*

The first time I drove through Lincoln City, it was late at night and I was tired from a long drive. As I traveled from the north end of town toward my destination in Newport, I struggled to find ways to stay alert. Then I passed Christmas Cottage, all lit up with holiday lights even though it wasn't even winter yet, and the sight immediately brightened my spirits and perked me up. Something about the red and green points of light lining the roof made me smile even though it was out of season — it was just what I needed to finish the drive.

Now actually 'tis the season, and there are lights everywhere, and not just on houses and trees; follow Santa around the county and you'll find some other fun ways to see lights, like at the Olalla Valley Golf Club in Toledo, where all the golf carts will be festooned with holiday lights until after the holidays. Many of the trees around the clubhouse are also beautifully lit and the clubhouse holds a great big decorated tree, in front of which you can get a free Santa photo that is kid friendly.

"We saw how timid kids can be around Santa," said club owner Eric Anderson. "But one year we went to the Polar Express with our daughter, who was quite shy at the time, where they did it differently and now we have a picture we treasure."

The difference was in the approach; instead of parents putting kids on Santa's lap then standing back hoping for the best, this Santa will join the family and let the child get comfortable before pictures get taken.

Though Saint Nick will be at the clubhouse every night during the winter school break, there are a few upcoming events that offer a little extra.

On Thursday, Dec. 19, kids with sensory sensitivities will find an environment tailored to their needs.

"This year we're teaming with Oregon Family Support Network to provide a unique Santa experience," Anderson said.



The Andersons pose at Olalla Valley Golf Club

GRETCHEN AMMERMAN



One of Olalla Valley Golf Club's festooned carts

"It's for kids who might be overwhelmed by the usual noise and crowds that can sometimes be found."

Advance notice is required but accommodations will include a private visit as well as unique light and sound settings.

On Sunday, Dec. 22, hearing-impaired kids can come sign with a special Santa; wishes can be given and holiday greeting received in American Sign Language.

Anderson and family, as new owners, are actively trying to make the clubhouse and golf course a family-friendly place as well as a community resource.

"We've been adding lots of kids activities

and we are also dog friendly," he said. "We welcome people to come walk their dogs out here as long as they stay aware."

And speaking of dogs, if the thought of holiday lights wiggling and waddling across the Waldport Bridge on decorated dogs makes you smile, head to Christmas in Waldport on Saturday, Dec. 14.

The Lighted Dog Parade is the highlight of an afternoon of holiday cheer starting at the Waldport Visitors Center at 3 pm with visits with Santa, including free photos and fun, holiday-themed face painting. Barbecued hot dogs cookies, hot chocolate and apple cider will be served.

holidays



Ready for Waldport's Lighted Dog Parade

At 4:30 pm, the event goes to the dogs. "We start with a dog-show style walk where everyone goes in a circle and shows off their dogs and their costumes," said organizer and emcee Janet Sutherland. "Everyone laughs and claps as the dogs go around, then I judge the participants in categories that change every year depending on who shows up, but everyone gets a prize and a bag of treats."

Once all the contestants have been suitably awarded, the assembly heads across the Waldport Bridge and back, a distance of about one and a half miles, using flashlights and glow sticks to help light the path not already illuminated by the dogs.

"It looks so pretty watching all the lights on our beautiful bridge," Sutherland said. "It's really a very fun event."

This free event was inspired, Sutherland said, by two local ladies who celebrated the season with a spirited bridge crossing every year.

"They would dress their dogs up and walk them across the bridge singing and waving to passers-by," she said. "I thought, why not turn that into a real event."

Fifteen years later, the tails are still wagging.

The Olalla Valley Golf Club is located at 1022 Olalla Road. For more information about these and other upcoming events, find them on Facebook or call 541-336-2121.

The Waldport Visitors Center is located at the south-west end of the historic Alsea Bay Bridge. For more information, go to www.waldport-chamber.com or call 541-563-2133.