

Festival of Lights plugs in holiday spirit

Hermiston display continues through Jan. 2

By Tammy Malgesini
Go! Magazine

HERMISTON — Thousands of twinkling lights await visitors as the Festival of Lights returns for a second holiday season at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, 1705 E. Airport Road. It features 17 large displays, more than a dozen individual displays, 23 Christmas trees and “a bunch of small lighted items.”

“Lots, I couldn’t even begin to tell you,” General Manager Al Davis said about how many lights are featured in the displays.

Davis is especially excited about what he calls a “mega tree.” Located in front of the main building, he said it features a variety of visual manifestations — from spirals to twinkling stars.

“It runs off a software program and it’s pretty amazing,” Davis said.

When he took the job nearly four years ago, Davis said he was asked time and time again if the Festival of Lights would be revived. The popular holiday event, which had been held for many years at the old Umatilla County Fairgrounds, went dark in 2013 because of a lack of volunteers.

The drive-thru Festival of Lights runs Thursdays through Sundays from 6-10 p.m. until Jan. 2. It will be closed Dec. 24-25. Admission is by donation,



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Thousands of lights cover the grounds of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center in Hermiston during the Festival of Lights.

which goes to the Hermiston Rotary Club.

It takes many people to staff the gates, Davis said, and members of the local service club stepped up to help. He said Rotarians do a lot for the community, including during the

Umatilla County Fair.

“I knew they had the capacity to do it,” Davis said. “It seemed like it was a good fit.”

Davis recently confirmed with an elf assistant that Santa Claus will make an appearance Saturday, Dec. 18. In addition, Davis is involved in conversations about a special New Year’s Eve activity.

Bringing the event back last holiday season, Davis said, was important. With all the

pandemic-related closures and restrictions, he called last year “a punch in the gut,” which resulted in many people not looking forward to Christmas.

“It was a recipe for a miserable holiday,” he said. “We had an opportunity to try and do something.”

And a little inconvenience isn’t going to disrupt Davis’ vision — several days after the crew started setting up the

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Thursday-Sunday, 6-10 p.m.
Open through Jan. 2 (closed Dec. 24-25)
Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center
1705 E. Airport Road,
Hermiston

displays, a blustery wind tore them down. In addition, despite placing orders early, some items only recently arrived.

“We’re going to get some new displays up,” he said.

Davis views the Festival of Lights as an additional attraction to Hermiston during the holiday season.

“We’re trying to build this as a destination this time of year,” Davis said. “We’re just trying to do our part so that people come.”

For updates, check the Facebook page at www.facebook.com/eotechermistonor. For questions, call 541-289-9800.

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