

Display:

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Avenue in Hermiston is one of the biggest.

The home has featured a musical light display for three years now, but this year is bigger and more elaborate. Dircksen said he has been working on it since January, spending hours creating custom metal props and programming the songs.

"I like being different, and this is something you can't just go downtown and buy," he said.

The computer programming is the hardest part, he said, and songs take as much as 12 hours to program.

This year he has been using a free online platform called xLights. Dircksen said the xLights online community has been of great help, as users all over the world chat with each other — troubleshooting, critiquing and sharing ideas. Since Dircksen works the night shift and sleeps during the day, he often talks to people from Australia, where he has been surprised to discover elaborate Christmas light shows are a popular hobby.

One Australian rigged up flamethrowers to shoot pillars of flames above his roof, but accidentally caught his roof on fire at one point. Dircksen said the flames looked cool but he didn't think his home-



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A variety of Christmas lights adorn the home of Craig Dircksen and Lori Smith on West Johns Avenue in Hermiston on Thursday, Dec. 10, 2020.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A sign in the yard of Craig Dircksen and Lori Smith's Hermiston home advises drivers to tune to 88.1 FM for music to accompany their Christmas light display

owner's insurance would go for that.

While some musical light displays merely cause entire strands of light to blink on and off, every light on the Johns Avenue display can work individually, forming pictures and designs.

To do that, Dircksen and family members who helped out had to install every bulb in its place by hand, including the hundreds that work together to create a sort of movie screen on the garage door.

They then select songs, purchase the rights to use them, choreograph the show for that song and go

through a detailed computer programming process that includes inputting the exact number of bulbs on each strand after Dircksen counts them. The program needs to know there are 150 lights per strand on the giant metal Christmas tree, for example, to know that if the directions say to light up the top half blue, it knows to light 75 bulbs.

Smith, Dircksen's girlfriend, said even though it's a lot of work, the payoff is the happiness it brings to people who come by and watch the show.

In past years they just let it spread by word of mouth, but this year they created a "Miracle on Johns Avenue" Facebook page, where they promote not only the light show but also encourage people to pick up some movie theater popcorn or takeout from a local restaurant to eat in the car while watching.

"It does require a lot of work, but it's definitely something people need this year, and so we wanted to do a little extra to get the word out," Smith said.

She said her parents used to set up a Christmas light display in Stanfield that required an electrician to install an extra electrical box and ran up the electricity bill significantly. The new LED pixels that Smith and Dircksen are using are far more energy efficient, however, and Smith said people are always surprised to hear that their electricity bill only went up by "maybe \$30" last December.

Dircksen said he appreciated how patient the neighbors have been with the extra traffic each night, and he is encouraging everyone to be as considerate as possible, including turning off their headlights and not parking in front of driveways.

He has programmed a version of the show with non-Christmas songs he plans to run around New Year's.

Vaccine:

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Oregon is still a distant goal. "The vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel, but we will be in this tunnel for several months," said Oregon Health Authority Director Pat Allen.

Allen urged Oregonians to wear masks, physically distance, avoid gatherings, and staying home if sick in the meantime.

The initial doses will go to what health officials

around the country have said are the most important initial targets.

"Starting with the front-line health care workers who have been our first line of defense against COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, and the long-term care facility residents who are among the most vulnerable, each day," Brown said.

For the facility residents and staff, the pharmacy companies CVS, Walgreens and Consonus Healthcare will offer on-site, no-cost COVID-19 vaccines to more

than 680 long-term care facilities in Oregon.

The next group to receive vaccines will be "essential workers," followed by people with underlying health conditions, and those older than 65 are next in line as they are identified by OHA's Vaccine Advisory Committee.

Receiving the initial doses on Dec. 14 were Legacy Health Holladay Park, Portland and Legacy Health Meridian Park in Tualatin, just south of Portland. On Dec. 15, doses were

scheduled to go to Oregon Health & Science University and Kaiser Permanente Airport Way Center, both in Portland.

St. Alphonsus Medical Center, in Ontario, will receive the first doses outside the Portland Metro area.

Most medical facilities that registered to be vaccine provider sites are slated to receive the Pfizer vaccine within two weeks. Oregon is

scheduled to receive additional doses on Dec. 22 and Dec. 29.

Because the vaccine requires two shots given about 19 days apart, the initial doses will all be used as the first shot, with the follow-up doses later in the month being used primarily for second shots.



A similar vaccine made by Moderna could arrive beginning Dec. 22. The

FDA released data on the vaccine on Dec. 14 as part of its review process. The *New York Times* reported the FDA intends to make a decision on emergency authorization of the Moderna vaccine by Friday, Dec. 18, and if approved the vaccine would be shipped out immediately.

Hermiston Herald News Editor Jade McDowell contributed to this report.

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PETS OF THE WEEK MEET BABY & LILY



Baby & Lily are sisters who tend to squabble even though they do care for each other. Baby is a marshmallow girl who is brave, curious, and loves to go for walks. Lily, however, is timid at first and loves to be the star of the show. She can tend to be quite possessive of her things and has become interested in her foster family's rabbit. The both love belly rubs.

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