

Display rivals Broadway show

By James Retarides
Staff writer

If you happen to wander past 163 Valley Shores Dr. in Guilford one December evening and find the street as bright as early afternoon, don't put on your sunglasses.

It is likely just the Christmas decorations by Joe Petrowski Jr., the imaginative 11-year-old who, from a tender age, has been stopping traffic on his street with

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Decorate...

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his solo act of holiday styling.

"He started decorating the house, on his own, at five -years-old," said Nancy Petrowski, Joe's mother. "That includes all of the holidays, not just Christmas. He has just been fascinated with lights since he was an infant," she added.

According to his parents, Petrowski spends all of his free hours after doing his homework on his decorations and would rather get new miniatures to add to his fantasy village in the family room than toys for Christmas.

"He goes outside almost every morning to rearrange his decorations," Nancy said. "I had a few pieces to the village before, but Joe just sort of took over."

So when does Petrowski start decorating for Christmas? On November 1.

"He starts decorating for Christmas the day he takes down his Halloween decorations," joked Nancy.

Lucky for Petrowski, his younger brother Nick, 8, is not into decorating the family's Christmas tree, because Petrowski does that all on his own too. Nick says he does not mind that his brother gets free and total reign over holiday decorations because his interests lie in more athletic endeavors.

Perhaps the person with the best vantagepoint of Petrowski Jr.'s work is his neighbor, Judith Perry, who lives directly across the street from the Petrowski's.

"Jojo is very artistic," said Perry, who lets him use extension chords for his more than 40 strings of lights. "He just loves decorating, and this year is

absolutely spectacular. People are stopping just to look at it."

Perry is moving to Branford this month but says she will return each holiday to see Petrowski's decorations.

"I am going to miss seeing it (the decorations) from my window," Perry said. "I really think he has found his calling. He just has the most artistic imagination. One day I hope to see him decorating Tiffany's or Bloomingdale's."

Petrowski's fascination with lights and decorations may have been inherited from his father, Joe Petrowski Sr., who enjoyed the same hobby as a kid.

"My parents thought something was wrong with me when I did it," said Joe Sr., a wholesale florist, who has three green houses packed with poinsettias on his property that borders Capella's pond. "I try to encourage him in every way that I can. Whatever he ends up doing I just want him to enjoy it and be happy."

In spring and summer when there are no holidays, Petrowski has a small pond that he accessorizes behind the house. Petrowski says that he wants to be an actor, and according to his mother, he is well on his way.

"We took him to see 'CATS' at the Oakdale," she said. "And he knew the whole script by heart."

But the decorator in Petrowski could not be suppressed, she said. Like at home, Petrowski spent much of the show critiquing the set design and contemplating modifications that he, with a roll of duct tape, some lights and a big imagination, could undoubtedly create.

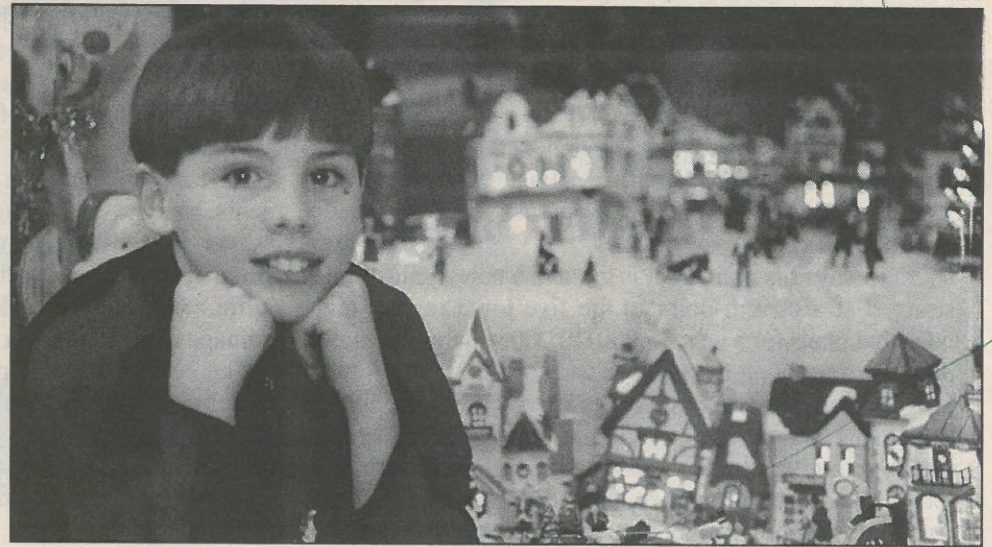


Photo by Kelly Quinlan

It only seems like midday when one passes the Petrowski house around Christmastime.

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