

From Guilford to DISNEY WORLD



By Pam Johnson
Special to Living

Joe Petrowski has always had a fascination with lighting up the world. After many years of putting on a blazing holiday display at his family's Valley Shore Drive home in Guilford, during which time he collected more than \$50,000 for charities from appreciative visitors, Petrowski wants to thank everyone for their support and let them know that, sadly, there will be no display this year.

Of course, Petrowski has a great reason for his decision, one which many will be pleased to hear: the recent college grad and light-show aficionado has been hired to continue working in his chosen profession at Disney World, Florida.

A past Person of the Week, Petrowski headed off to work at Disney in August. He contacted the Guilford Courier from Florida to help spread the word about the Petrowski home going "dark" this year.

"Every year, hundreds of visitors of all ages would stop by to see the lights, [but] for this upcoming season, I will be a cast member for the most magical company in the world, Walt Disney World, where I can bring magic and joy to thousands of people from all around the world," explains Petrowski.

Were it not for the support of area residents, Petrowski says he knows he could not be where he is today.

"To put it simply, I could not have asked to be surrounded by [a more] awesome community that is always there to support my holiday displays through various efforts—whether it be through spreading the word, visiting a display multiple times, or with monetary donations," he says.

Petrowski also says he's grateful for having neighbors who "didn't seem to mind the extra traffic in the neighborhood, even if that meant a little delay coming or leaving their homes."

He also thanks Kendra Luden, 13, and Devyn Luden, 12, for recording reminder announcements played throughout the displays. Petrowski set his lights in motion to music using a computer program and then piped holiday music to cars with a sign asking them to tune in to an FM frequency broadcast from his home to the outside area.

In addition to his annual holiday display to benefit a variety of charities, Petrowski has completed light displays pro bono, including for past Cystic Fibrosis "65 Roses" Summer Soirées. Some of the organizations benefiting from his holiday light shows have included American Cancer Society, Make-A-Wish Foundation, The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Guilford Animal Shelter, Guilford Food Bank, the Epilepsy Foundation, and St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

A few years back, Petrowski was shocked to find a \$10,000 check to St. Jude's left in his holiday display contribution box outside

his parent's home. The money was contributed by a Guilford resident through her parents' memorial foundation. Petrowski was recognized recently by St. Jude's for his outstanding contributions and efforts.

Petrowski's parents, Joe and Nancy Petrowski, have been proud to offer their home's front yard (and the exterior of their home) as their son's creative palate through the years.

Now, "it's ironic," says Joe Petrowski, Sr. "I'm running into people all over the community that I've known for years and they introduce me as the man whose son does the lights. They say their kids enjoy it and can't wait 'til it happens this year—and this year, it's not going to happen. My wife and I are very, very grateful to many, many people that have supported [Joe] over the years, and especially the neighbors who put up with the traffic. The support he received fueled the fire of his spirit. Now, we just don't want them to show up and be disappointed. Who knows? Maybe we'll have Christmas in July."

His son adds that he will miss putting together a new display at his home, which is usually up and running around Thanksgiving time and lights up the street through New Year's Day.

"This upcoming holiday season is going to be hard for me as this will be the first time that there will not be a display," says Petrowski.

"I know I'm going to miss designing,



Photos courtesy of Joe Petrowski

maintaining it, and seeing cars pass by my house every night to see the show. I also appreciate the endless support from my parents, who were always open to everything I wanted to do for every display, and for always being willing to have the extra bump in the electric bill year after year. As they joked, it was their contribution to the community for the holiday seasons."

