

Not all the lights in Balboa are on the boats

Check out the Zimmerman house on Sapphire Avenue.

Barbara's Bits; Zimmermans are Crazy for Christmas



The Zimmerman house, all lit up
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZIMMERMAN FAMILY



Greg and Loretta Zimmerman
PHOTO BY BARBARA VENEZIA



One of the awards the Zimmermans have received for their holiday decorations.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZIMMERMANS

By **BARBARA VENEZIA** - FOOD FOR THOUGHT
REGISTER COLUMNIST

It's boat parade week in Newport, and it's not just boats in the harbor all decked out in lights and fun. Homes along the bay also get into the holiday spirit in a big way.

Greg and Loretta Zimmerman's home at 327 Sapphire Ave. on Balboa Island is one of them. The Zimmermans are crazy for Christmas.

For the past 11 years, the home they share with their five children has won numerous awards for the over-the-top Christmas decorations – snow and all.

Greg Zimmerman's been a multi-year award winner of the Newport Beach Boat Parade's Ring of Lights in the categories of best animation and photographer's choice.

But to say he's crazy for Christmas is an understatement.

Loretta Zimmerman says her husband takes his holiday decorating very seriously.

"During the summer Greg goes to a Christmas light enthusiasts' convention in Tennessee," she shared.

With a little help from his grown kids, Zimmerman prepares for months designing, building and buying items for his displays.

"I start the day after Halloween," he says. "It takes two solid weeks just to get this place wired."

I visited the house before he premiered it on Thanksgiving night. It was amazing. Be sure to check out this week's Barbara's Bits video column to see the magic for yourself!

This year's display, "Walking in a Wired Wonderland," consists of 25,793 light bulbs, 15,161 watts of power, 126 amps, and 96 computer switches.

I asked Zimmerman if his lights had ever blown a fuse.

"Five years ago I had an electrician re-do the circuit breakers in the house and put in a dedicated panel just for the lights," he said.



The Zimmerman family
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ZIMMERMAN FAMILY

His entire display is tied into his computer and the lights dance to holiday music every seven minutes. It took him five hours to program every minute of music. Talk about a labor of love!

Zimmerman made many of the decorations himself, including a two-story-high Christmas tree of lights, a shooting stars display on the roof, and a Merry Christmas sign he jokes rivals anything on the Las Vegas strip.

He cranks up the lights on Thanksgiving night and continues each evening through Christmas. The display fires up weeknights from 5 to 9 p.m. and till 10 p.m. on the weekends.

“During boat parade I keep them on a bit longer,” he tells me.

But the decorations don’t stop at the exterior. Visitors are welcome to visit the interior decorations as well.

Inside on a display table, Loretta Zimmerman showed me her miniature snow-covered Victorian Village complete with music, lights and even tiny ice skaters!

Each night during the holiday, the couple is outside greeting visitors. I asked Zimmerman if any of his neighbors found all the lights, sounds and traffic bothersome.

“Not at all, in fact they plan their parties around the lights,” he said.

Every year he ups the ante with something new, and this year he doesn’t disappoint. His newest addition – a laser light show displayed on the house and sidewalk.

In talking with the Zimmermans, I sensed the real jazz they get from all their hard work is the opportunity to meet new and interesting people. Last year alone they spoke with people from 22 different countries.

And if all this talk about Christmas lights inspires you to upgrade your holiday bling, here’s a tip.

Crown-Ace Hardware has launched a program in conjunction with 1-800-GOT-SCRAP where you can swap out your old lights for a \$5 gift certificate redeemable for purchases over \$20.

Mark Schulein, owner of 17 Crown-Ace stores in Orange, Riverside and San Diego counties, says newer lights are more energy efficient and safer than older products.

“Each year homeowners lose their homes due to fires caused by faulty holiday lights,” said Schulein. Christmas certainly brings out the kid in all of us, so check trees and lights and remember – safety first as you decorate this year.

For more information on the Zimmerman’s display, visit their site www.zimchristmas.com, or stop by and see the snow fall from his rooftop on Balboa!

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