

## Glitter, twinkle, wink



Photos courtesy of JE Hedges Photography

The Ludy Christmas Spectacular starts Thanksgiving night and goes through New Year's Eve, dusk to 10 p.m. or later during peak times. Lights are turned off during inclement weather.

## Local family puts on free light, sound show

THE BAYONET  
Cheryl Rodewig



The annual light and sound show has been a Ludy tradition for three generations. Jerry Ludy's 4-year-old grandson should be holding the lights soon, he said.

Where can you see an Airborne reindeer, a snowball fight between seven-foot snowmen and a dancing Christmas tree? Where else, but the Ludy's Christmas Light Spectacular.

This one-story Columbus home takes on a whole new look for the holiday season. Decked out in candy canes, wreaths and marked with a sign reading "North Pole," it has been twinkling and glowing from Thanksgiving through New Year's Eve for six years now. If you go for the opening Thursday, don't expect a neighborhood house trimmed with a few icicle lights and an inflatable Santa in the yard. For the Ludy's, this is the event of the year.

"I've been doing this since I was 13," said Jerry Ludy, the creator of the light show. "My mother let me decorate the outside of the house, and it just escalated from there."

Since then, it has "escalated" to more than 130 amps of power, 70,000 lights, two of his neighbors' houses and a radio station, 90.1FM, which plays Christmas music

specially coordinated with the glittering lights.

"Everybody has hobbies," said Ludy, a self-avowed Santa who plays holiday music in July. "I work on Christmas 365 days a year: drawing up plans, building different displays, doing new songs. I really get excited bringing joy to kids. It's a lot of work; it's a lot of expense, but it brings a lot of joy."

That's how retired CSM Cleo Childress got involved. A longtime neighbor, he used to stand out on the sidewalk, watching the expression on children's faces as they looked up in awe at the Ludy light extravaganza. He decided he wanted to be a part of it.

"It brings out the kid in me," Childress said. "It's just fascinating ... all the decorations, the excitement of the lights. I reckon if you could see it, you could understand where I'm coming from. If you see how Jerry has it set up with the music and the lights flashing, synchronized and dancing together, you'll believe."

Parents brought by a lighted Santa land on a trampoline and bounce into Childress' chimney. A snowman in his yard throws sparkling snowballs at neighboring snowmen. But Childress has something a little extra special for Fort Benning visitors. He paid tribute to his eight years as an Airborne instructor by placing a paratrooper reindeer over his house. He might do something to honor the Rangers next year, said the former Ranger instructor.

For Ludy, making each year better than the last is a personal goal. A few years back, Santa Claus — Ludy in full Christmas regalia — started visiting on the weekends with hot chocolate and cookies for all the good boys and girls, moms and dads, too. Children can sit on his lap, get a candy cane and pose for a photo as they read off their wish list. For kids who can't make it, those with a life threatening illness, the Ludy's have added something else to their show: the Make-a-Wish Foundation.

People volunteered donations for so many years, Ludy said, that he finally decided to let them contribute, not to his power bill, but to something more important. The family raised \$1,800 last year and are going for \$4,000 this year.

Giving isn't required at all, however, Ludy said. The shimmering display, with a Nativity scene at the center, is there for people to enjoy as a reminder of what Christmas is all about, and after a few minutes with the lights and music, Ludy guarantees you will leave with a brighter outlook.

The house is located at 5784 Ironstone Drive, just a few minutes from Fort Benning. The lights are on from dusk to about 10 p.m. For more information and a schedule of Santa's appearances, visit [www.ludychristmas.com](http://www.ludychristmas.com).



The Ludy's Nativity scene, at the center of the display, "is what everything is wrapped around," said Jerry Ludy, who added the scene four years ago. "Jesus is the reason for the season. We get so wrapped up in the world, we forget what life is all about. After 10 minutes at my display, you forget about the things of the world and focus on Christmas. You leave with a whole different outlook."