

Local teen lights up our lives with 12,000 Christmas lights
by Lee De Bevoise

Remember when you were in 10th grade? What or who was your passion? For Friend High School's Charles Beckler it's computers, and solving problems.

According to his mother, Tressa, "He has always been fascinated by mechanical things and lights. So, this light show is right up his alley."

Light show, indeed! What Charles has done is to choreograph 12,000 lights to move to music. Sounds simple? Think again. Just programming the sequences took him 80 hours.

You see, the time of the sequences are as short as 0.05 seconds for each of the 48 channels. Think of your favorite Christmas carol and imagine what it would take to program lights to blink in time with it!

Charles' quest started with a television commercial featuring a light and music show. The seed of creativity took hold as he set out to solve the first challenge of his quest - to convince his parents.

As Charles explains, "I researched the amount that could be saved using LEDs (Light Emitting Diodes). They use 80-90 percent less energy than a mini-lightbulb."

That being accomplished, he moved on to the next phase - finding and ordering the LEDs. There was a snag when the company Charles ordered his LED sets from could not ship them.

"Bill [his dad] and Charles went to Lincoln one night after school," explained Tressa. "They spent most of the night looking for the best price."

They returned home with a variety of LEDs and tested them. Charles then made his choice. Yet another problem resolved.

Creating this year's show actually started in September with a commercially available computer software program that included pre-programmed shows. "I only liked the way that one of the songs and lights worked," he explained. "I picked out my own songs and programmed all of the sequences."

"We've encouraged him a lot. We support our other children in sports and other activities. It's his gift [the light show]," said Tressa, his mother.

Charles and his dad, Bill, put up all of the lights in November. The show made its debut December 1st. There are lights in the yard, on the roof, and on top of the antenna tower of the Beckler homestead, which is located two miles East of Green Top Cafe and five miles North. To experience this Christmas light and sound show, tune your radio to 94.5 FM when you get within sight of the display at the Becklers. The shows start a 5:30 p.m. and end at 12 midnight every day through January 1st.

"It was fun," he said. "My dream is for next year's show to be a lot bigger, with a lot more lights. New sequences for sure, and a 'mega-tree.'" This dream 'mega-tree' would be a 20-foot tall tree of lights. "I have a lot smaller one in this show," Charles explained. "I've already figured out how to do it, but I have to convince my dad." The challenge of another problem - just what Charles thrives upon.