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GREAT Theatre presents 'Miracle' for the holidays
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Section B

Lighting up the season

Royalton family goes all out with 70,000-light Christmas display

By ZACH HACKER
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The Christmas season is merry, and definitely bright, for one rural Royalton family.

Andy and Kayla Dancer, along with their three children: Landon, 6, Adeline, 4 and Lillian, 18 months, have created a winter wonderland at 15786 Friends Court — about three and a half miles northwest of Royalton.

Christmas lights are nothing new to the Dancers. But this year, they're kicking it up a notch. During the past few years, Andy said they have had around 40,000 lights. They're hitting a new family record this year with more than 70,000.

Andy said 2020 seemed like the perfect year to step up his game.

"With everything going on this year, as crazy as it is, it just made it a little easier to make that push to try to get a little bit bigger, to get everybody outside," he said. "It's been a messed up year for everybody."

They have been putting up what Andy considers to be "big" displays for about four years, but they have decorated each of the 11 years Andy and Kayla have been together. Before that, Andy helped his parents, grandparents and even the middle school in Royalton with their displays.

The joy of seeing how much their own children and those of others enjoy the lights — along with a friendly rivalry with Andy's brother's family in Gilman — has helped the display continue to grow.

The Dancers' home is hard to miss. Large candy canes, a "Happy Holidays" sign, a nativity scene and much more greet visitors before they even turn up the driveway. Santa Claus and eight not-so-tiny reindeer — 8 1/2 feet tall, to be exact — sit atop the roof of the family's home. A lit-up Snoopy rests on top of the doghouse, and trees festooned in the colors of the Minnesota Vikings, Minnesota Twins, Minnesota Wild and Minnesota Timberwolves are just a few of the wonders in the front of the house.

"I've always liked — for whatever reason — Christmas lights," Andy said.

Putting such a display together is no small task. Andy said preparations begin before Halloween, with the entire month of November spent putting up the lights. They are lit for the first time the day after Thanksgiving.



(12-13-20 Dancer lights 1)

Staff photo by Zach Hacker

Kayla and Andy Dancer have created a winter wonderland at their home northwest of Royalton. The 70,000-light display features Santa and his reindeer on the roof of their home a Christmas greeting and much more.

This year, Kayla said she was able to provide a little more manpower to the operation. She spent a good deal of time fixing lights, getting everything ready and keeping the children entertained, so Andy could spend more time outdoors putting up the display.

This year, she has also put her own twist on what the couple hopes will be a fun night out for the entire family. Each Friday and Saturday, the Dancers leave a bowl of candy canes for anyone who wants to get out and take a stroll through the lights. Kayla has added a scavenger hunt to add to the fun.

The idea came to her while preparing for a visit from relatives.

"I was just trying to think of something to get our kids out to do something fun as a family," she said. "I thought, 'What could we do?' I thought, 'Why don't we go to the Dollar Store and we'll pick up some cool Christmas items and we'll hide them throughout the lights?' Everybody had a really good time with it. And then some family friends were driving by and they stopped and we had extra sheets, so we just started passing them out and everybody was like, 'This is so cool.' We thought, 'Maybe we should just continue it along.'"

The lights are a hit with all who come to check them out, whether they're just driving by or they get out to take a closer look. Andy and Kayla both said they always receive positive feedback from families who enjoy seeing their Christmas lights every year.

With all the joy they are bringing others and hitting a new personal record — not to mention the amount

of work it all takes — one might think the Dancers are going to hold steady with the current display. Not so much.

Andy said he hopes to get to 100,000 lights before he takes a break from adding to the display.

"We're hoping next year to get a little bit bigger and finish up our trail that we have," he said. "It's about 5 1/2 acres. Right now, we probably put lights up on about two or two and a half, so it would be nice to go around the property."

"By the time we get our trail done, once we get around that 100,000, I think we're going to be good for a while; at least until the kids get a lot older and they start chipping in more," he said. "It's a lot of work."

However, that might not be all that long. Andy said his son, Landon, has already helped where he can and has taken an interest in the display.

It isn't only their own display that catches the eyes of the Dancer family, either. They drive around and check out the Christmas light tours in towns such as Little Falls and Sartell.

The trips are all about family fun, but both Andy and Kayla admitted they also are able to get some ideas from what they see.

"People do a great job out there," Andy said. "We picked up on a few ideas last weekend."

"It's fun to see what other people come up with, or what other people make themselves," Kayla added. "That's one of our favorite things, to see what other people make or think of."

This year, the Dancers are also using the lights as a way to give back to the community. In previous years, Kayla said people have left donations in their mailbox. There is a free-will box out this year, which the family will use to "adopt" families in need from the Angel Tree at Walmart in Little Falls.

"It's just something that we're showing our kids — that it's nice to give back to other people, too," she said.

At the end of the day, the display is all about bringing the magic of Christmas to life for their family and whoever else wants to come share in their enjoyment.

Andy said it means "ev-

Little Falls woman bakes to bless others

By SHEILA BERGREN
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Ever since Jeanne Davis of Little Falls was a child, baking a variety of cookies for Christmas was a given. At first, the baking was done by her mom, Mary, but as Davis reached her early teens, her mom was adamant about her daughter learning how to bake.

"Mom wanted to make sure I knew how to cook and bake. Her thing to say was, 'Mamas don't live forever so you have to learn,'" Davis said.

"When mom and I were baking or making supper, we'd listen to different music and dance in the kitchen."

— Jeanne Davis

Since Mary worked the 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. shift, it also became Davis' responsibility early on to make sure the rest of the family was fed after she returned home from school. Her mom had often prepared a dish that Jeanne baked in the oven for the required time and then served to her dad, Bob, and her big brother, Steve.

David said at first she bucked her mom's efforts to teach her how to cook, bake

and can, especially can pickled beets, which she didn't like one bit. Typical for teenagers, she had rather spent the time with her friends. However, looking back at all she learned throughout the years, she is grateful for the time her mom dedicated to teaching her. As she grew older, her mom also became her best friend, Davis said.

Mom and daughter baking Christmas cookies every year became a tradition. It is a tradition Davis has continued on after her mom died from Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 2009.

Mom and I always made 10 different kinds of cookies and everyone who knew her remembers her three-tier cookie display," she said.

Since then, Davis has baked thousands of cookies each year that she either donates or sells to individuals. When she learned her cousin Rachel Wallace's nephews have cystic fibrosis, she started donating the proceeds she made from selling

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(121320-JeanneDavis)

Staff photo by Sheila Bergren

Finding baking therapeutic, Jeanne Davis uses her skills to sell cookies and donates the proceeds to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.



(12-13-20 Dancer lights 3)

Staff photo by Zach Hacker

Santa Claus and his eight, 8 1/2-foot-tall reindeer sit atop the roof of the Dancers' home northwest of Royalton.

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Heartland Symphony Orchestra presents 'Holidays Around the (Virtual) World' Concert in Little Falls

By SHEILA BERGREN
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The year 2020 has been like no other year for many people, including the members of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra in Little Falls.

"When COVID-19 shut all of our organizations down this past March, we started brainstorming ways to continue to bring music to our community," said Ryan Webber, music director of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra.

Webber said one way was to hold virtual concerts. Over the summer months, he and others met for several planning sessions as well as with art consultants to make the idea to make a digital program come to life somehow.

The Heartland Symphony held a virtual concert in October, which was very well received by the community, Webber said. With a love for playing music and a passion to bless others with music, the Heartland Symphony Orchestra is getting ready to present its "Holidays Around the (Virtual) World," Saturday, Dec. 19, at 2 p.m. at www.HeartlandSymphony.com. The performance will later be posted on the orchestra's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

The concert includes a variety of clips of 50-60 different musicians performing new musical pieces that musicians have recorded from home and pieces that were recored at different concerts that were held in previous years. There will also be a

special appearance and music from Alexander Corbett, who served as the music director for the Heartland Symphony Orchestra from 2016 to 2019.

Some of the music pieces the Heartland Symphony Orchestra will perform include "A Christmas Festival" by Leroy Anderson (a medley of Christmas carols), "Sonata No. 4 in E Minor" by Georg Philipp Telemann and performed by Heartland Symphony Orchestra Concertmaster Leslie Zander and Principal 2nd Violin Claire Rud, the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah" and "Christmas Sing-A-Long," which is a tradition for the Heartland Symphony Orchestra to end every December concert

"That's one of the joys of community orchestras. You might miss a note here and there, but the passion is there. They are there for the love of music."
— Ryan Webber

with, Webber said. While editing the different clips for the virtual concert has been challenging from time to time, Webber said it has also been a fun journey as it has given them to look to the past as well as to the present.

"It's been fun to go back into the archives and listen to past performances. After the fall program, I heard back from some musicians and former directors that it brought back some good memories for them and hopefully it will for the audience too," he said.

For the different musicians, recording from home has been a new learning experience and fun challenge. However, while they all have crossed a few bumps in the road, Webber said that even learning and preparing for a live concert isn't without a

few challenges.

"No project goes smoothly. Every project, whether live music or recorded concerts, everything has its bumps, but we figure out a solution, work through it and keep going ahead and do the best we can. That's really all we can do," he said.

Webber said because the Heartland Symphony orchestra has members from a wide range of musical levels and backgrounds, from professional musicians to those who are just getting back into playing, he treats every concert and rehearsal as a unique experience and a learning opportunity.

"That's one of the joys with community orchestras. You might miss a note here and there, but the passion is there. They are there for the love of music," he said.

Webber said by watching and listening to old clips, he has also been able to identify some areas where there is room for improvement. It excites him as it helps him plan the orchestra's future once they can gather in person again and live performances can be held safely.

"It's also encouraging to see how some sections have grown and gotten better over the years and it also makes me think about how I can help to make it even better," he said.

While the Heartland Symphony Orchestra does not have a specific month as to when they may gather or hold live concerts, Webber said he hopes for the orchestra to at least have one live concert in 2021. As the orchestra members miss the live audience, they are looking forward to get on the stage once it's appropriate and hopes to see many community members gather as well to show their support.

A small portion of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra's budget comes from ticket sales with the rest coming from grants and donations. All donations are used to help fund their concert season as well as to help pay for music, rehearsal space rental, performance venues, promotional materials and staff salaries.

To donate to the Heartland Symphony Orchestra through Paypal, visit www.heartlandsymphony.com or mail a check made out to the Heartland Symphony, PO Box 241, Little Falls, MN 56345.

heartlandsymphony.com or mailed to Heartland Symphony, PO Box 241, Little Falls, MN 56345.



Submitted photo

The members of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra are looking forward to bringing music to the community through their "Holidays Around the (Virtual) World," Saturday, Dec. 19. Pictured is Chris Fogderud, assistant conductor and principal trumpet of the Heartland Symphony Orchestra.

Lighting up the season

(Continued from Page 1B)
everything" to see the smiles on children's faces as they

take in the lights. He said this year is extra special knowing it's an excuse for families to get out and have fun when not much else is happening because of CO-

VID-19.

"Christmas lights in general make people happy," Kayla said. "Just to bring smiles to kids' faces, I think that's one of our favorite

things, hearing what the little kids say. It's just that time of year when you want everybody to be happy."



(12-13-20 Dancer lights 2)

Staff photo by Zach Hacker

A "Happy Holidays" sign, Santa Claus and a life-sized nativity scene (not pictured) are just a few of the elements visitors to the Dancers' home will be greeted by before even entering the driveway.

LF woman bakes to bless

(Continued from Page 1B)
the cookies to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

"She bakes very unique cookies and creates beautiful platters," Wallace said.

Some of the cookies Davis bakes include sugar cookies, cutout cookies, peanut butter blossoms, spritz, cherry winks, candy cane cookies, almond cookies, peanut butter reindeer cookies, chocolate mint cookies and more.

Although Davis enjoys baking to bless others and to see them enjoy a good treat, baking means so much more to her. To her, baking is a way to release stress, frustrations and other things that may come her way.

"Baking has been a great stress releaser for me. I learned to channel it through that, make the best of things and baking is what makes me feel good," she said.

Baking was also a way to head down a different path in life. In her teens and early 20s, she partied wildly with her friends, drank heavily and smoked during the weekends. What drew her to even start was the social aspect of it all. It was also the thrill of sneaking out of the house without her parents knowing, she said. Now, she has been sober and smoke free for more than 30 years.

"I used to like to drink and smoke, but by baking, it took my mind off of it. I wasn't drunk all the time, but I just felt horrible when I did, waking up with a headache the next day," she said.

Although Davis has remained sober for more than 30 years, the temptation to drink and to smoke still come from time to time. However, knowing that just having one beer or drink or just smoking one cigarette can derail her entire progress and lead her to pick up the habits again, she does whatever she can to distract herself. It usually leads her

to baking a batch of cookies, she said.

Baking and doing other projects, such as diamond art, listening to music, playing with her four cats and more, also helps her to face the loss of people she loves. Besides losing her mom in 2009, her dad died in 2012 from necrotizing fasciitis, a flesh eating disease. Despite that she had worked as a licenced practical nurse for many years, nothing could have prepared her for that sight and horror her dad went through the last days he was alive, she said.

As Davis still grieves the loss of her parents from time to time, baking as well as listening to music have become outlets to navigate through the sorrow. Something as simple as a certain tune playing on the radio, or hearing a familiar phrase

one of them would say, can trigger the memories, Davis said.

"When mom and I were baking or making supper, we'd listen to different music and dance in the kitchen. She was also a better singer than I was, so she'd be singing along and harmonizing with the people," she said.

While music may bring her back in time for a moment, Davis said it's like she can almost hear what her mom would have said.

"Mom would have said, 'Oh, for heaven's sake, get over it,'" Davis said.

Despite that Davis bakes a lot, she rarely eats any of her cookies unless it's a new recipe. If someone compliments her for one of the cookies, she may also try it once more just to remember what it tastes like.

"I don't really know why

I rarely eat my baking. I think it's because when you bake all day you smell them for so many hours and then I just don't feel like eating them," she said.

Besides baking to donate, Davis is also active in the annual Cystic Fibrosis Walk usually held in May.

Those who are interested in purchasing a tray of cookies for \$15 with the proceeds being donated to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, can email jeannedvs@aol.com.



(121320-JeanneDavisCookies)

Staff photo by Sheila Bergren

Learning how to bake from her mom, Jeanne Davis bakes to bless others.

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HOLIDAY DEADLINES

Because of of the Christmas Holiday, the deadlines for the December 27, 2020 issue are as follows:

| | |
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| Inserts | Noon, Friday, Dec. 18 |
| News Submissions | 5pm, Tuesday, Dec. 22 |
| Legals..... | 11am, Wednesday, Dec. 23 |
| Display Ads..... | 2pm, Wednesday, Dec. 23 |
| Classified Ads including Too Late to Classify..... | 4pm, Wednesday, Dec. 23 |

The Record office will Close at Noon Thursday, Dec. 24 and will be Closed Friday, Dec. 25

Because of of the New Year's Holiday, the deadlines for the January 3, 2021 issue are as follows:

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Inserts | Noon, Wednesday, Dec. 24 |
| News Submissions | 5pm, Tuesday, Dec. 29 |
| Legals..... | 11am, Wednesday, Dec. 30 |
| Display Ads..... | 2pm, Wednesday, Dec. 30 |
| Classified Ads including Too Late to Classify..... | 4pm, Wednesday, Dec. 30 |

The Record office will Close at Noon Thursday, Dec. 31 and will be Closed Friday, Jan. 1, 2021

Happy Holidays!

MORRISON COUNTY Record

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