

A wreath to remind: local fire department gives daily reminder of safety for the holidays

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ROSEWOOD HEIGHTS - "Keep the wreath burning red," is the mantra of **Rosewood Heights Fire Chief Tim Bunt** during the holiday season.

A large wreath strung with crimson Christmas lights is situated outside the department, reminding all who drive by it to be mindful of holiday hazards. For every fire caused by a Christmas decoration, candle or space heater, a red bulb on the wreath will be replaced with a white one. Bunt said his mission to keep the wreath red has been successful during his time as chief - he has not replaced a single bulb since he started at the department in 2006.

"If we respond to a fire involving Christmas decorations, we replace a red bulb with a white one," Bunt said. "I haven't replaced any yet, and I've been doing it since 2006. I haven't replaced a bulb yet, and I hope I never do."

The wreath is part of an initiative from the **Illinois Fire Chiefs' Association** to bring attention to the safety of Christmas decorations. Bunt said one of the main issues of holiday safety involves strings of Christmas lights being plugged into each other. Bunt said the maximum amount of light strings attached to a single power source is five. He said some homeowners string together as many as 10. Candles are another concern of Bunt's.

"Candles are a big item I'm concerned about," he said. "We tell people to make sure their candles are not around anything flammable and are in good safe containers."

Despite not qualifying as holiday decorations, space heaters are another common winter fire hazard. Bunt advised people to be very cognizant of the positioning of their space heaters and ensure they are constantly monitored and not placed around anything flammable.

So far, the lack of conflagrations caused by Christmas decorations has Bunt questioning whether the wreath is working or if he and the community are lucky. Based on the community response to the wreath, however, Bunt leans toward the former.

"I don't know if it's pure luck, or if the wreath reminds people," he said. "We have people asking us when we're going to put it up. I usually put it up around Nov. 15. People ask me when it's going up before it goes up every year, and people driving by ask a lot of questions about it. The wreath really does bring attention to fire safety."