

Grandpa Gang Welcomes Christmas Spirit, Decorates Rock Springs Park

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - It's been a warm autumn so far, but that won't stop the Grandpa Gang — they've been decorating for Christmas since September.

The Grandpa Gang is a group of retired Alton residents who organize the Christmas Wonderland lights and display at Rock Springs Park in Alton every winter. Board

President Dick Alford said the gang started decorating in the first week of September and will continue to work four hours a day, five days a week until Thanksgiving. They're looking forward to putting on a great display and benefiting local organizations.

"Pretty much everybody there is a grandpa in some way," Alford said. "It kind of brings that holiness to it, to know that your grandpas are out there putting this up for your grandkids and your children."

Despite the name, he emphasized that you don't actually have to be a grandfather to join them. The group is made up of 25 men who have some extra time and want to decorate "for the public's enjoyment." Alford joined them eight years ago and has enjoyed watching the display grow and sharing it with his grandkids every year.

Even if you've never driven through the Christmas Wonderland display, you've likely caught a glimpse of the thousands of lights glowing in Rock Springs Park all December. For \$7 per car, you can drive through the park, listen to Christmas music and stop to visit with Santa. You can also pause at the Enchanted Forest and vote for your favorite Christmas tree, another favorite tradition that invites local organizations to compete against each other for the best-dressed Christmas tree.

It's a fun way for organizations to get their names out there and compete for a cash prize, and it also guides the Grandpa Gang as they make their own donations. The \$7 admission fee goes directly to the community, with the grandpas choosing local nonprofits, church groups and school clubs to receive the proceeds from Christmas Wonderland. Alford said they make a special point to give to nonprofits like [Oasis Women's Center](#) and the [Boys and Girls Club of Alton](#).

Last year, the Grandpa Gang donated more than \$48,000 back to the community.

"We share what we get with those in need," Alford said. "It's gratifying to help some of these organizations. Things really haven't improved a great deal since COVID, and a lot of these organizations suffered during that period. So it just allows us to do a little more."

This holiday spirit is the life force of the Grandpa Gang, most of whom also look forward to sharing the Christmas Wonderland with their grandchildren as soon as they're done decorating. Alford said his grandkids, ages 10 and 14, still "get a kick" out of helping him turn on the lights every year.

The giving spirit and kids' excitement is what fuels the grandpas from September through the end of the year. Alford recalled a day recently when a truck drove past the gang as they worked at the park. Two young boys leaned out the window and called out

to the gang, thanking them for their work. One of them shouted, “We love you, Grandpa!” Alford laughed at the memory.

“Kind of makes it all worthwhile just to hear something like that,” he said.

More details about Christmas Wonderland will be available closer to its opening date in late November. Alford encourages everyone to stop by this year and enjoy the new LED lights and displays, adding that they've made a lot of changes this year.

For more information about Christmas Wonderland or how to get involved in the Grandpa Gang, contact the [Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau at RiversAndRoutes.com](http://GreatRiversandRoutesTourismBureau.com).





