

"There Goes Clark Griswold": Brighton Mayor Explains Family's Famous Light Display

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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BRIGHTON - For those who live in Brighton's Suntara Estates Subdivision — also known as Christmas Village — the holidays are merry and bright, literally.

Mayor Matt Kasten and his family go all-out for Christmas, with synchronized lights, music and an annual food drive to help local food pantries. Seventeen years after they started the tradition, most of the neighborhood has joined in with displays of their own, spreading holiday cheer to community members from across the Riverbend.

“It keeps us going,” Kasten said. “These days, I really want to say my body is getting too old to do this. But then I think of all the kids and their smiling faces and I decide I get the energy to do it again.”

Kasten has “always been a gadgety type of person” and loves decorating for Christmas and finding new ways to incorporate technology into his display. Over the years, his family tradition grew into thousands of lights spread across the yard and a radio station that cars can tune into to enjoy dancing lights and holiday music.

At first, the family was nervous that their neighbors would be inconvenienced by all the people who came to see the lights. They asked visitors to be respectful and not block driveways, and Kasten made a point to check in with his neighbors and ask them to let him know if it was too much. He was surprised to find that his neighbors weren’t upset at all; instead, they were eager to join in.

“I don’t want to be that neighbor that they’re like, ‘Oh, there goes Clark Griswold again with his light display,’” Kasten joked. “But now what’s so exciting is...there’s a lot of people that have now jumped in, and they’ve decorated beautifully their homes, and it’s just fun. We love it. The neighborhood’s going to look gorgeous.”

The houses light up the night and are visible from Highway 111 as cars drive into town. Kasten said a lot of people turn around just to see what’s going on, and he regularly chats with the parked cars outside his house. Hundreds of people stop by the subdivision to park their cars and enjoy the show.

While the decorations require some time and money, Kasten said it’s “a labor of love” that “pays off” when he sees how excited the visitors are. He also enjoys spending time with his children and wife as they brainstorm new ideas for the display and spend two weeks decorating. They have been delighted to learn that for many families, it has become a tradition to visit the neighborhood during the holiday season.

With a growing number of visitors every year, the Kasten family decided they could use their light show to help others. They started hosting a food drive on the Saturday before Christmas.

This year, the food drive will run from 6–9 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 16, 2023, at Kasten’s house at 118 Dylan Court in Brighton. Santa Claus will be giving out candy canes and

“a special gift” to kids while supplies last. The family is asking for nonperishable food items that will go to Brighton’s food pantry, the Jersey Community Food Pantry and the Pack-a-Sack program at St. John’s Church in Brighton, which benefits students in Southwestern Community Unit School District #9.

To Kasten, the food drive and the light show just further demonstrate what he already loves about his community.

“ are gracious enough to donate. We appreciate it and it goes to a great cause, helps our community,” Kasten said. “Brighton has always been a giving community. That’s why I love being mayor here. The people are awesome. Anytime we have a need, we have people come forward and help out. It just makes me feel great to be a part of that.”