

# Grandpa Gang Opens Christmas Wonderland with New Displays and More Lights Than Ever Before

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
November 27 2023 3:39 PM



ALTON - The annual Christmas Wonderland display at Rock Spring Park is open once again for Riverbend residents to enjoy the holiday lights and support local nonprofits.

The display opened on Nov. 25 and will run through Dec. 27, 2023, at Rock Spring Park, located at 2100 College Avenue in Alton. You can drive through the park to see

the lights and decorations from 6–9 p.m. Monday through Friday or 5–9 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. The Grandpa Gang, a local organization that decorates the park, suggests a donation of \$10 per car or \$1 per person in cars of ten people or more. All proceeds go to organizations throughout the Riverbend region.

“It’s really, really gratifying,” said Dick Alford, the “Head Grandpa” of the gang. “And the best part of that is knowing that all these people who come through are helping to help the community, because last year alone, we gave back almost \$50,000 to certain organizations in the community. The more we take in, the more we’re able to pass back to the community.”

Alford said they average a “staggering number” of visitors every year. He estimated that they will see approximately 30,000 people through the month. The gang hopes to hit the \$50,000 mark this year.

Many organizations decorate a Christmas tree, and people can vote for their favorite tree at the end of the Christmas Wonderland path. The Grandpa Gang donates to the organizations that participate in the tree decorating contest. They also spread the money between several nonprofits, including local Boys and Girls Clubs, the Optimist Club, Oasis Women’s Center, the Salvation Army and more.

“Those people that depend on donations, we try to help out,” Alford explained. “It’s gratifying, and I think all the grandpas and everybody involved in it feel the same way. They’re just happy to be able to help out.”

While the Christmas Wonderland is a longtime Alton tradition, there are a few new elements to the display this year. Alford said they updated several decorations and added more lights than ever before, including twinkle lights spread throughout the park.

The grandpas start decorating in September and drive through the park several times before they open it to the public. They make sure there are plenty of lights and fun displays, including a few returning favorites like Robert Wadlow and the Piasa Bird. Visitors can also stop by the Santa House to chat with St. Nick and grab a picture free of charge.

“We’re getting a lot of compliments,” Alford said. “We got a good group of grandpas again. We’ve done a lot and put up some more lights and just some more decorations here and there, just to add to it a little bit. So far, so good.”

Alford noted that the Grandpa Gang will need volunteers to “run the show” every night at Rock Spring Park. Volunteers will collect donations, keep track of visitors and more. Alford said people usually volunteer in big groups and “just have a great time doing it.”

“It’s a great way to earn a little money and help out the community,” he said. He added that he loves to see so many people enjoying the display, including his own grandchildren. “That kind of makes it all worthwhile.”

For more information about the Christmas Wonderland display and the Grandpa Gang, including how to volunteer, call 1-800-258-6645 or contact the [Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau](#) at 618-465-6676.