



One of the scenes from Overly's Country Christmas is the western town. Lights define a row of store fronts and country scenes from whip-cracking wagon drivers to cows, chickens, and animated horses. The lights will be on every night from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. through Jan. 14.

Lights By The Thousands Brighten Fairgrounds

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ARMBRUST (Westmoreland Co.) — Imagine this:

The biggest Christmas light display you've ever seen: 750,000 lights, drawing enough power to fully supply about 57 homes.

Sound like too much to believe? Well, the bright and popular tradition of animated lights and holiday scenes, originally on Harry Overly's farm near Armbrust, has been hosted by the Westmoreland County Fairgrounds since 1993. The growing exhibit benefits area children's organizations.

In this holiday season, many families adorn their homes and farms with lights and special decorations. One tradition that has outgrown its original location is Overly's Country Christmas, a tradition in its 39th season.

New this year are additional light displays and an emphasis on smaller light exhibits which people can observe as they walk through the exhibition, according to Jane Sibenaller, who works with the exhibit.

Volunteers are crucial to the success of this program. They began working several weeks before the display opened.

Local volunteers do minor construction, set up animated displays, paint, and test lights. Last year, "Santa's elves" tested and plugged in more than 17,000 strands of lights. Though electrical or wood working skills are helpful, almost anyone can help get things put together.

After the setup is complete, 45-50 volunteers help each night, playing Santa, Mrs. Claus, or an elf. They work in the gift shop, admissions booth, take Santa pictures, or help visitors in other ways. Many of the adult volunteers are people who as children were delighted by the display at Overly's home.

In the past, local organizations, clubs, and school groups have worked on the light display together.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact Linda Brady at Overly's Country Christmas, (412) 423-1400.

With the donated labor, funds raised for children's charities keep growing each year. In 1994 about \$47,000 was donated to area organizations whose work benefits

children. This year about \$57,000 went to 10 organizations. All donated funds are channeled through the Overly Charitable Foundation, which evaluates requests from organizations whose work benefits sick or abused children.

During the day, the numerous cords and wires turn the fairgrounds into a spaghetti bowl of plastic coated copper, but at night the lights appear magical and new delights are seen at every turn. Visitors may drive through the fairgrounds to see the many scenes and animated sets, such as the

playground with slides, swings, and teetertotters. With many other public exhibits emphasizing a drive-by view, Overly's includes small elements that can help visitors remember the days when we lived on a more humble scale.

After a drive through view of the lights, visitors might visit the life-sized nativity scene with living animals, drink hot chocolate around the outdoor family bonfire, or shop in the Country Christmas Gift Shop. The country kitchen features car-grilled hot-dogs and hamburgers, hot and cold beverages.

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Harry Overly, founder of the Overly Charitable Foundation, started putting up lights to delight his four children in the 1950s. Today his light display, Overly's Country Christmas, is hosted by the Westmoreland County Fairgrounds and has gained national recognition. Harry poses appropriately with his grandchildren.

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