

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 93 Number 05

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

'Christmas in Lights' annual debut a huge success

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Thanksgiving night, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds opened its regionally renowned "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" walk-through festive lighting display, featuring local vendors, activities for the whole family, and even Santa Claus taking requests from children.

The line was backed up to the main office with people waiting to get into the beautiful Christmas show that chilly Nov. 25 evening, and though it started raining a little shortly after the event began, it could not put a damper on the overall Christmas spirit among attendees.

Many food vendors were on hand, including Hiawassee-based Clyde's Hot Boiled Peanuts, which maintained a steady line throughout the evening and

featured ribbon fries that were certainly worth writing home about.

Clyde McCoy is the owner of the business. She has been operating it for five years, and coincidentally, 2021 marked her fifth year attending the Christmas in Lights show.

"We wanted to be involved here at the Fairgrounds, and especially during the holiday season, because of the people," McCoy said. "The reason for the season is for the birth of Jesus, and we do not know a better way to show praise in Him than to be around other people, bring them together to enjoy good food and promote togetherness."

"It is always a great thing to have these events here that are family oriented, because there are not a lot of places to go, and no matter how big or small your family is, there is plenty of room here at the Fairgrounds."

Among the many activities to delve into, the most popular was Cowtown USA, a small set-up where people could play with and pet goats and cows. Sadie Sandlofer operated this booth.

Raising farm animals and championing educational animal rescue has been a part of Sandlofer's family business for over four generations.

"This is our second year here at the Fairgrounds, and we are certainly going to try to make this a yearly routine," Sandlofer said. "The Christmas in Lights is very beautiful, and it makes people happy when they come here."

"And most people love animals also, so we are happy to be able to do something in this wonderful environment to help put a smile on people's faces and warm their hearts."

Event coordinator Shannon Baldwin-Nguyen gave her

thoughts on the turnout, including commentary on the drizzly weather.

"Tonight was a huge success, and despite some of the raindrops, the turnout was still incredible," she said. "The addition of our new Santa booth this year helped a tremendous amount, as the lines stayed incredibly long as well, and kids were so excited to go talk to Santa and tell him what they wanted for Christmas."

"Even the Grinch that was walking around got a lot of love from people, so I am very pleased with it. I think this time of year, family is the most important thing, and this is a way we can give back to the community by letting families come together."

"People leave really happy, because when you walk through here, it is just like walking through a Hallmark Christmas. See Christmas in Lights, Page 6A



Just a few of the many youngsters who visited with Santa Claus on Thanksgiving night during the kickoff to the month-long "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Tree Lighting tradition to resume in Young Harris

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After being canceled last year due to concerns over COVID-19, the community-centric Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting will return in 2021 on Friday, Dec. 3, beginning at 6 p.m. inside Mayor's Park.

"It's an annual tree lighting that's been going on for close to 50 years," said Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby. "It will all be outside this year under the pavilion."

The Enotah Garden Club of Young Harris will host the event, with club volunteers handing out individual goodie baskets for the kids and serving refreshments.

"Santa Claus is coming in on a fire engine and will be sitting under a tent," Gibby said. "It's just a fun tree lighting that we do every year, and



The Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting usually features a program indoors with Santa, as pictured here in 2018, though the 2021 outing will take place entirely outdoors Dec. 3.

Photo/Towns County Herald

it's just a good time to get the community together."

Dating to the early 1970s, the first Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting occurred

across from the Post Office on College Street.

The lighting continued there for several years, though

See Tree Lighting Page 6A

TCSO Christmas Parade to return with 2021 changes

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Set to roll through town on Saturday at 5:30 p.m., the Towns County Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade will be a great time for families and children in 2021, and it holds a few surprises, too.

"Christmas kicks off for us here at the Sheriff's Office on Dec. 4, the first Saturday of December," said TCSO Administrative Supervisor Vicki Ellis. "We are going to be starting our lineup at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds around 3:30-4 p.m. The floats must be completely decorated and in

line by then so we can judge them."

"This year, we're extremely excited - we had someone who was taken aback because we didn't give out cash prizes, so he donated \$1,000 specifically set aside for the first, second and third place

See Christmas Parade, Page 6A



The Towns County Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade will roll through Hiawassee Dec. 4. Pictured here: Polished Salon with a wonderfully festive float from the 2020 parade.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Shop with a Hero to treat kids to Christmas shopping

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The holidays are a time for goodwill toward all, and the Hiawassee Police Department goes the extra mile with its annual Shop with a Hero Christmas Program, which will take place this year on Friday, Dec. 17.

Shop with a Hero has been making Christmas wishes come true for many of Towns County's underprivileged children for the past 15 years, and the 2021 effort is shaping up to be bigger and brighter than ever.

Formerly "Shop with a Cop," the program expanded after the 2015 passing of former Hiawassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright to include other local first responders.

The youth program has grown in recent years, with efforts to help at-risk children

broadening last year to include the provision of a new pair of shoes and a new jacket for every participating child.

And that's on top of the chaperone-guided Christmas shopping experience at Walmart that serves as the main event.

So, on Dec. 17, which is "Early Release Day" for Christmas break, Shop with a Hero will once again offer these essential winter gifts along with providing deserving children opportunities to pick up toys and gifts for their families.

"It just lets the kids know that they're important and that the community is there for them," Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said.

The chief estimates that, with assistance from Towns County Family Connection, about 30 to 40 local schoolkids will be selected this year to go shopping in the program.



Paul Smith
Hiawassee Police Chief

For the most part, the level of annual fundraising determines how many children get to go, as each kid receives an in-store allowance to spend. It should be noted that the new clothes do not deduct from the money children are able to put toward Christmas shopping.

See Shop with a Hero, Page 6A

'Light Up Hiawassee' to be better than ever in 2021

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The "Light Up Hiawassee" Christmas season kickoff and tree lighting event will take place Saturday, Dec. 4, on the Hiawassee Town Square, with the family-friendly fun starting at 4 p.m.

There will be something a little different this year and a lot more festive, as Light Up Hiawassee is teaming up with the Towns County Sheriff's Christmas Parade.

In the past, the Sheriff's Christmas Parade was held the Saturday following Thanksgiving, which was always the weekend before the Light Up Hiawassee tree lighting.

This year, Sheriff Ken Henderson and his staff decided that the community would



The City of Hiawassee began hosting its family-friendly "Light Up Hiawassee" in 2017, pictured here.

Photo/Towns County Herald

be better served if the parade was to take place the week after Thanksgiving, so that people who were out of town for

Thanksgiving wouldn't miss the parade.

See Light Up Hiawassee, Page 5A

Buchanan Family Lights shine brightly on Scataway Road

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns county resident and winter holiday mainstay Robert Buchanan opened his regionally famous Christmas lights display Thanksgiving night at his 469 Scataway Road home in Hiawassee.

The impressive display features more than 100,000 lights that Buchanan has collected and added to over his lifetime, with the festive showing having wowed spectators for more than 25 years. And as usual, it does not disappoint in 2021.

Running every evening from 5 p.m. to around 10:30 p.m. through the New Year's holiday, the lights are free to view, though visitors are more than welcome to make monetary donations to help Buchanan defray his considerable electric expenses showing the lights.

"I have been doing this since I was a kid," Buchanan said, noting that he has always loved Christmastime and setting up the colorful decorations.

For those unfamiliar with the story of the Buchanan Family Christmas Lights, it all

See Buchanan Lights, Page 6A



The Buchanan Lights are a local favorite attraction for getting into the Christmas spirit. To see the lights, head down Scataway Road after dark - you can't miss it.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

2 Sections 12 Pages

Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,667.42
Chatuge 1,917.46
Nottely 1,760.62



Inside

Arrests 2A
Church 2B
Classifieds 5B
Opinion 4A
Legals 6B
Obits 3B
Sports 4B

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

11/30 vs. Rabun Gap 6 PM

WRESTLING

King of the Mountain 12/3-4

Holiday COVID-19 Prevention Measures

See page 2A

Young Harris College Christmas Concert

See page 6B

Quilts of Valor Recipients

See page 1B

Williams educates public on septic system do's, don'ts

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On Thursday, Nov. 18, the local University of Georgia Extension Office hosted an information session for the public at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center on the maintenance of septic systems, which are much more prevalent than sewage systems here in the mountains.

Jacob Williams, the Agriculture & Natural Resources Extension Agent for Towns and Union counties, led the educational program with an informative slideshow presentation featuring data, how septic systems work, septic tank upkeep, and various other septic subjects.

Ag agent here since June 2018, Williams said that many people have been moving to the mountains lately, “which also entails more phone calls regarding questions on the septic tank system, as they were all previously used to city municipal sewage systems.”

“There are many things unbeknownst to people about septic system care and maintenance,” Williams said. “Some indicators of a septic system failing are sinks and toilets that drain slowly, backed-up plumbing, gurgling sounds coming from the plumbing, sewage odors in the house or yard, wet or mushy soil in the yard, standing water greyish in color, grass growing faster and greener in one particular area, and bacteria in well water.

“Bacteria and other microbes are responsible for partial decomposition of the sludge going through the system, and a new supply of these is added to



Jacob Williams
Extension Agent

the septic tank with each flush, which is why no additives are needed.

“However, the microbes cannot break down all the material in the sludge, so that is why the general consensus is to have your tank pumped every 10-30 years depending on your house/family size, the tank size, and number of tanks that you have.”

Williams also said that the No. 1 rule of thumb is to never flush anything down the toilet that is not biodegradable.

“Cleaning agents are fine from time to time, but make sure it is not anti-bacterial, as that would actually decrease the breakdown process that the bacteria need,” he said. “And the biggest misnomer is about flushable wipes.

“They do not actually dissolve, and research has shown that, if used continuously, they just group up and stick together and eventually create a mass that clogs the entire system

from flowing.”

Williams concluded the session with tips on maintaining septic systems, as “poor maintenance is the most common cause of septic system failure.”

“Fortunately,” he said, “it is relatively easy to maintain your septic system to avoid expensive repairs.”

The ag agent listed suggestions for septic tank health, including having the tank inspected and pumped periodically as per the general guidelines “if you do not know the last time it was pumped.”

“Do not drive or park over the tank or drain field, if possible, as it could compact the soil and diminish efficiency,” Williams said. “Do not use sinks or toilets as trashcans. If you have a garbage disposal, keep in mind they increase the need for routine pumping.

“Consider the septic system in the landscape design, as tree and shrub roots can grow into the drains and even the tank. Use water wisely and pay attention to running water that you may be wasting.

“Lastly, do not use additives, as chemical solvents break down solids into smaller particles that do not settle to the bottom of the tank. These small particles remain suspended in the water and move into the drain field, potentially clogging the lines, and acids can corrode concrete tanks and distribution boxes.”

For more information on septic tank care and many other issues, from agriculture to pest control, contact Williams at 706-439-6030 or Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

SHOP WITH A CRUISER Saturday, December 4th and winner of the 2021 raffle car announced

Saturday, December 4th is the day that The Blairsville Cruisers will host the needy kids of Union County for the Annual SHOP WITH A CRUISER event at WalMart in Blairsville. We will host 65 needy children this year thanks to our supporters, sponsors and our raffle car sales.

If you like kids and would like to assist the Car Club by escorting and assisting a kid or two as they experience a fun time shopping for Christmas for their family and themselves then please show up at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, December 4th and see any of the Cruisers to volunteer. This is always a rewarding experience for our volunteers as they help make a joyous Christmas season experience for these youngsters. Wayne Tanner, CEO and founder of the Cruisers will be there to head up the program along with most of the board and some of the members who volunteer.

In addition, the Blairsville Cruisers will be assisting with the SHOP WITH A COP on December 11th at WalMart. If you would like to help out be there at 8:30 and be prepared to put a smile on some kids faces.

Let's make the experience a happy one for these kids. Please volunteer a couple of hours to help make that happen on both December 4th and again on December 11th.

The Blairsville Cruisers is a 501(c)3 non profit so your contribution is tax deductible.

With Higher Heating Bills on the Way, Homeowners Can Take Steps to Winterize Your Home Now

Local homeowners can expect to pay a lot more on their heating bills this winter as prices surge worldwide for heating oil, natural gas and other fuels. The U.S. government recently announced it expects households to see their heating bills jump by as much as 54 percent compared to last winter.

The biggest reason for this winter's higher heating bills is the recent increase in prices for energy commodities after they dropped to multi-year lows in 2020. U.S. natural gas has climbed to its highest price since 2014 and is up roughly 90 percent over the last year. The wholesale price of heating oil has more than doubled in the last 12 months.

As we approach the Thanksgiving weekend with temperatures dropping, this is the time that residents need to start preparing their homes for winter. A local indoor air quality expert with AdvantaClean in can provide tips to keep their homes properly insulated and lower their heating bills this winter.

We can set up an interview for you with an air quality expert via Zoom or at a local home, where they can show your reporter areas of the home to inspect prior to winter.

Top 5 Tips to Cut Costs and Winterize Your Home



2009 Mustang convertible raffle car won by Sandy Hathaway

BLAIRSVILLE CRUISERS, P.O. Box 2502, Blairsville, GA 30514. The cruisers contribute to local law enforcement programs for needy children in addition to our SHOP WITH A CRUISER program.

We have a winner of the 2009 Mustang convertible raffle car. The lucky ticket was purchased at the Butternut Creek Festival at Meek's Park by Sandy Hathaway of Utah. Here is a list of the past winners of our raffle cars for those who have asked who won. As you can see we have winners from all over who visit our mountains and help support our local needs.

Blairsville Cruisers past winners of car raffles:

2012: 1993 Mustang GT Convertible on October 20, 2012 - R. D. Kelly of Corinth, MS

2013: Camaro Convertible on October 9, 2013 - Melanie Rich of Blairsville, GA

2014: 2004 Mustang

(red) 40th Anniversary Edition on October 4, 2014 - Helen Winter of Orlando, FL

2015: 2004 Mustang (silver) 40th Anniversary Edition on October 17, 2015 - Martha Carter of Atlanta, GA

2016: 2002 Mustang GT Convertible on October 15, 2016 - Cindy Royals of Young Harris, GA

2017: 2001 Mustang Convertible on October 21, 2017 - Carole Murphy of Snellville, GA

2018: 2002 Pontiac Fire Bird Convertible on October 20, 2018 - Louis Beavers of Baton Rouge, LA

2019: 2008 Mustang Convertible on November 2, 2019 - David Jarrard of Cleveland, GA

2020: No raffle due to COVID 19

2021: Sandy Hathaway of Utah - 2009 Mustang Convertible 45th Anniversary Edition.

N(Dec1,28)gg

Light Up Hiawassee...from Page 1A

So, the change was made, with an added benefit to the date change being that it now coincides with Light Up Hiawassee.

“We are joining with the Sheriff's Office this year,” Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales said. “They will start the parade at 5:30 p.m. from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and work their way here to the square.

“Santa will, of course, be riding at the back of the parade with the Fire Department – we're going to have Santa in a fire truck. And as soon as the parade finishes and Santa shows up, we'll light up the square.”

The Jolly Old Elf will then move over to the Old Rock Jail, which will be decorated and lighted, for pictures with Santa.

“Festivities on the square will start at around 4 p.m.,” Ordiales said. “Ingles has donated cookies for cookie decorating. We'll have ornament making, which was donated by SERVE-PRO. Hiawassee Hardware is going to be doing s'mores.

“We'll have a little table where kids can write a letter to Santa; we have a mailbox already on the square. And Art-Works will be doing some rock painting.

“The event should last anywhere from 4 p.m. until we run out of kids for Santa to talk to – I'm thinking from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. should take care of the whole thing.”

Ordiales said 2021 will mark the fourth year the city has held “Light Up Hiawassee,” adding that a smaller version of the event was done before she took office.

“Now, it's been expanded a little bit,” she said. “We've got community (volunteers) that came out last Saturday, and we put up all the decorations on the square (Nov. 20). So, there are a few things we still need to finish off, but, for the most

part, everything is pretty much in place.

“I think this is just a great opportunity for us to gather the community together and have a good time with your kids and your family. We head it up as the city, but this is certainly a group effort.

“We couldn't do it without all the help that we get from our community businesses, charitable organizations, and residents all working together to make this a great event for kids and families. We look forward to this event every year.”

Christmas in Lights...from Page 1A



Thousands of guests from all over the region visit the "Mountain Country Christmas" walk-through lights display for the holiday season. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

mas movie."

The Mountain Country Christmas continues every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 6-9 p.m. between now and Dec. 18, and then every night from Dec. 19 to Dec. 23 inside the Georgia Mountain Fair-

grounds.

A full slate of vendor booths for the Outdoor Craft Market is available throughout the month of lights, providing plentiful Christmas shopping opportunities, including extended Saturday hours from 4-9

p.m.

Parking is free, and tickets are \$6 per person, with children under 12 getting in free. No pets allowed. For more information, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/christmas>.

Tree Lighting...from Page 1A

it eventually moved from its point of origin to various trees along Main Street.

Finally, in the late 1980s, the lighting found its permanent home in Young Harris Mayor's Park after the construction of City Hall on land left to the city by former Mayor Irene Berry.

Four years ago, the big tree that served in the lighting for more than two decades died and had to be cut down, so they began using a different tree in Mayor's Park.

This year will feature a very special return after 2020's cancellation, as the city plans to use the Mayor Dan Nichols Memorial Tree for the first time.

Nichols' memorial tree was planted several years ago

and needed time to grow into a big enough tree for the lighting, and Mayor Gibby is looking forward to its debut as the new Young Harris Christmas Tree.

In the runup to the family-friendly festive affair, the Garden Club has kept busy decorating and getting everything ready for Dec. 3.

"They put this together,"

Gibby said of the club. "They find Santa Claus – somehow – at the North Pole. They also put together the food and the agenda for the evening."

"There will be children from the Elementary School singing and, generally, the (High School) band plays, but that has not been confirmed yet."

In a typical year, the

event opens in the park with the traditional Christmas music performances as children await the arrival of Santa, at which point everyone moves into the Community Room at City Hall for cookies and visits with Old Saint Nick.

For health reasons, the Community Room was deemed too small for this kind of event in 2021, so everything will be taking place outside under the new pavilion, which was built just last year.

"We're doing our part to stay healthy one more year," Gibby said. "It's a fun time for the community, and since we didn't get to have it last year, we're all eager to get back together. It's always cold the first weekend in December, so wear your coats or bring a blanket."

Christmas Parade...from Page 1A

floats.

"Normally, we have a prize, but it's not a cash prize. (Cash prizes) seem to get people to come out and get those floats decorated for the parade, especially for churches, youth groups – people who are trying to raise money for their organizations."

"First place is \$500, second place is \$300 and third place is \$200," said Ellis, adding that there have never been cash prizes for the best floats in the 17 years she has been with the Sheriff's Office, making it a nice surprise that will likely draw people out.

"And then, this year we've coordinated with (Hiawassee) Mayor Liz Ordiales, and we're doing the parade the same day as they are flipping the switch to light up the Christmas tree on the square."

"So, Santa Claus – he's going to be in the parade – he'll get off the fire truck (when they get to the square) and go over and flip that switch, and they'll

get (the Christmas season) all kicked off on the square as well."

Over the many years she's been involved with the Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade, Ellis said it was always traditionally held on Thanksgiving weekend.

"But we made an executive decision when Sheriff Henderson came in that we would (have the parade) the first weekend in December," Ellis said. "A lot of people are out of town during Thanksgiving."

"A lot of people would complain over the years, 'Hey, we missed the parade. We don't ever get to see the parade because we're out of town.' So, Sheriff Henderson decided to change it this year, and it's really going to work out great."

"I'd like to reiterate that (Sheriff Henderson) is very honored to be the chairperson for the parade, the Grand Marshal, and doing it for the first time – he is just 'over the moon' excited."

Ellis said the Sheriff's Office has accepted toy donations in the past but is only accepting cash donations this year because deputies will be taking 60 kids on a special Shop with the Sheriff for Christmas trip to the Blairsville Walmart on the afternoon of Monday, Dec. 13.

"There are so many organizations that do something similar, and they all do it on a Friday or a Saturday, so we thought Monday might be a little bit better," Ellis said. "We've got a lot going on, a lot of new things this year with the parade, changing the date and switching from the Empty Stocking to Shop with the Sheriff."

In conclusion, Ellis said the recent changes probably should have taken place years ago but were never implemented because, well, that was just always the way things were done. But Christmas 2021 will be different in Towns County, and the Sheriff's Office can't wait to make it happen.

Shop with a Hero...from Page 1A

Fundraising is not hard, Smith said, noting that, as a small community, people maintain closer connections than in larger municipal areas, which works to the advantage of the Shop with a Hero program.

In addition to funds, the effort requires the help of many volunteers, which come by way of the Coast Guard Auxiliary, Hiawassee Police, Towns County Fire Department, county EMS workers, and others, such that the little shoppers have a veritable township at their backs.

In terms of donors and volunteers, many wish to remain anonymous, but Chief Smith nonetheless thanks them for "coming through year after year to ensure a brighter Christ-

mas for local children."

"On a good year, we have at least one (volunteer) per child; sometimes we have to double up with the kids when we have 15 or 20 volunteers," Smith said.

In addition to making children feel important and loved, Smith said there was another benefit to the building of trust that occurs between the youngest members of the community and first responders during Shop with a Hero.

"This program allows for kids who may not otherwise have an experience with a police officer or public safety personnel to have a positive contact where they can get to know an officer and experience something awesome," Smith

said.

As for the future, there's been talk of hosting a similar shopping event at the end of each summer featuring a back-to-school theme. Like Shop with a Hero for Christmas, the back-to-school program would rely on donations, in this case school supplies as well as monetary support.

Unfortunately, this proposal has been put on hold indefinitely. Smith explained that, while they received plentiful donations before the onset of COVID-19, organizers haven't received the financial support needed to really get things going in the post-pandemic world.

That being said, the chief is not giving up hope.

"If we can get the donations really working forward, then we would like to do back-to-school shopping," he said. "We could let (the kids) go get new outfits for school so they're not wearing the same stuff they wore last year or hand-me-downs."

Although such an endeavor hinges on financial support improving in the years ahead, Smith said things are looking bright, because the motivation for this community to look after its own children is strong.

After all, over the past 15 years of an ongoing Christmas program, donors and volunteers have counted among their only rewards the smiling faces of children and the knowledge of warm clothing on their backs, and the same might be anticipated for future community-supported events.

Buchanan Lights...from Page 1A

began when 4-year-old Robert received a single strand of lights from a family friend in the 1960s, which he has in his possession to this day.

It was a modest Christmas that first year of decorating, but the spark of fascination had been lit, and over time, the Buchanans began adding to their display – a tradition that Robert now carries on primarily by himself after his father's passing in 2015 and his mother's recent health issues.

In the early 1990s, the Buchanans started noticing that people would drive by and stop to look at the display. Each year as they added more to it, more people would come to see the display, and it has become a family tradition for others, too, in the mountains.

The Buchanan tradition is still going strong today, as Robert has included several new additions in 2021, including a Santa's workshop building, plus several thousand more lights all around.

One of his trees has 30,000 lights wrapped around it, which equates to a little over 300 boxes of lights on that single tree.

On top of the many displays – from Snoopy to reindeer and Nativities – he has about 50 artificial trees, many of them donated over the years for the display, and only one real tree, the big one with the thousands of lights, with everything carefully organized as to where it goes in the yard.

The massive decorating process starts at around the first of September getting the lights up in time for Thanksgiving night, and he goes until about the first of March taking everything down.

It is a lengthy ordeal, because most of the time Buchanan is doing it by himself, and he has a highly organized system in the way things get packed up and labeled based on what goes where, he said.

Regarding Santa coming this year, Buchanan said that, unfortunately, he's unsure for the moment if St. Nick will be able to visit because of COVID, though Santa is definitely making appearances elsewhere this Christmas season.

And even though Santa may decide to practice social distancing for the 2021 Buchanan Lights, kids will still be able to reach him with a special letter box located at the display,



An area family visiting the Buchanan Christmas Lights on a chilly evening Saturday, Nov. 27. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

so if he can't be there in person, at least kids can write him letters and put them in the box for Santa to read.

Ultimately, Buchanan said that the lights are for everyone to enjoy, and he wants people to feel welcome to drive by and even stop to get out of their cars, take pictures and talk.

There's a chance that

Buchanan may even have some hot chocolate brewing, "so come on out and say hello," he said.

After all, the holidays are meant to be a happy and joyous time for everyone to sort of kick back and relax, said Buchanan, who knows as well as any elf that Christmas lights can evoke many feel-good emotions and contentment.



Towns County School Resource Officer Donnie Jarrard doing some chaperoning during the 2017 Shop with a Hero Christmas shopping event for kids. Photo by Shawn Jarrard