

Burbank, Glendale residents brighten their homes with 'unique' festive displays



Dick and Pam Norton's "Winter Wonderland" in their front yard at 513 N. Florence St. in Burbank, which they've decorated each year since 1977. (Courtesy of Dick Norton) (Courtesy of Dick Norton)

By **Chad Garland**

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For some area residents, holiday decorating has become something like an institution, stretching back decades. For some neighborhoods, the spectacles build bonds and, for others, it attracts droves of revelers.

Dick and Pam Norton have “kept up the tradition for 45 years,” Dick Norton said last week. Their home in the 500 block of North Florence Street in Burbank becomes a “Winter Wonderland” theme-park display each year featuring a train with moving wheels and arms, real smoke, train sounds, a merry-go-round, double-hammer ride and Santa’s train station.

The holiday animatronic carnival operates for three hours each night — 6 to 9 p.m. through Dec. 27, as long as rain is not falling or expected — and draws about 90 amps of power, Dick Norton said.

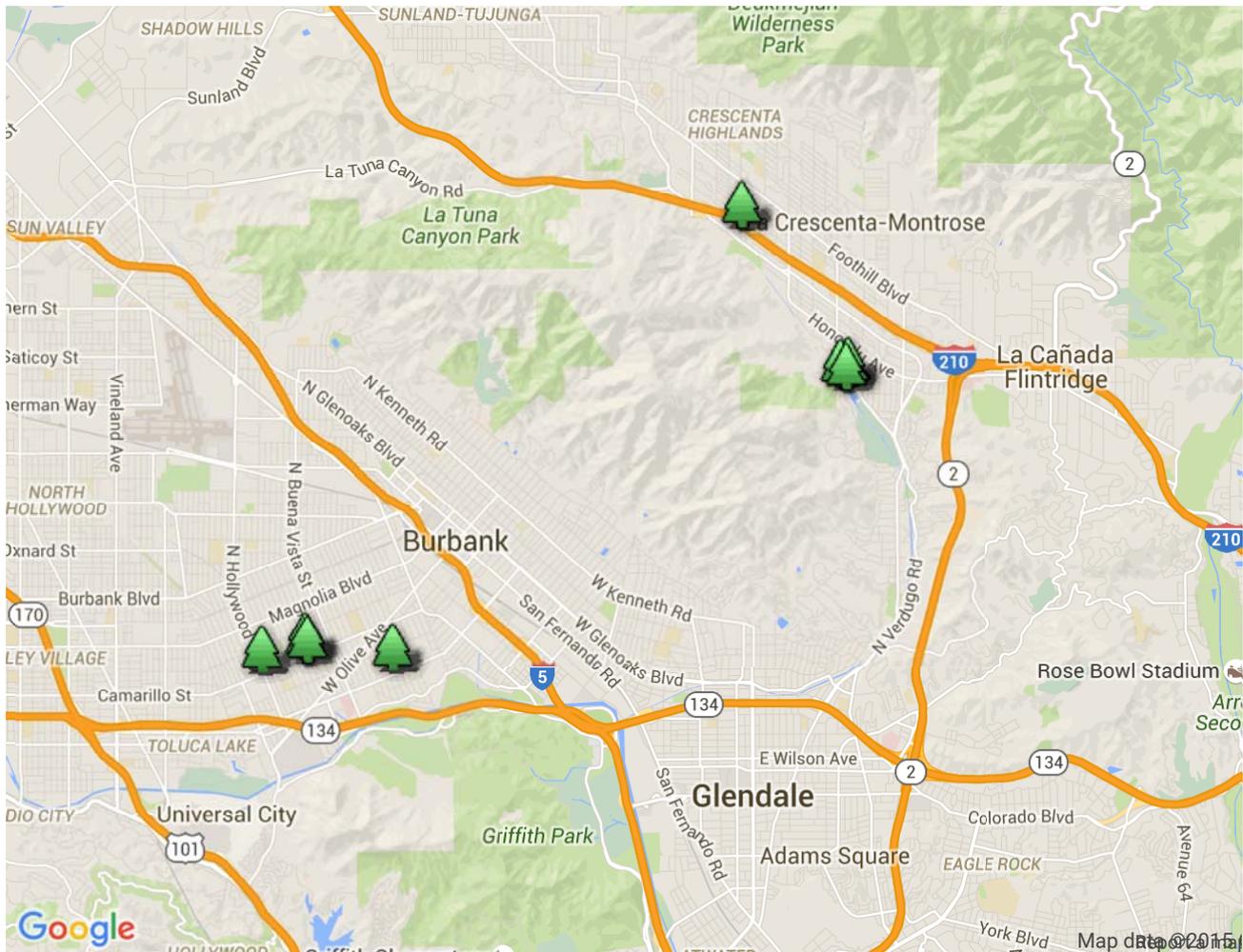
“It is all home-made which makes it unique,” Norton said. “There is nothing like it anywhere.”

The Nortons’ display may be one-of-a-kind, but they’re far from the only ones in Burbank or Glendale who take holiday decorations to serious extremes. They’re not even alone on their block.

Just down the street, Keith LaPrath said his family has been decorating annually since 1988 with home-made items he made and his mother and grandmother painted, including a train with smoke, Santa’s sleigh with reindeer and elves, as well as “singing” carolers.

“From the roof all the way down to the street is decorated,” LaPrath said. It’s open from 6 to 9 p.m. through Dec. 25 and used to triple his electric bill in past years. However, thanks to LED lights, “now it’s barely doubling the bill.”

LaPrath said he and Norton are “the dueling displays of Burbank,” but it’s a friendly competition that started because he admired Norton’s displays. He said double-decker buses from Hollywood have been known to swing by to show off the street to tourists.



In Glendale, residents in the 1200 to 1400 blocks of Oak Circle Drive have been decorating for decades, Lynda Hessick said this week.

For nearly 30 years, the neighbors have had a “progressive gathering” where they visit several homes on the block the Monday before Christmas, and for 20 years they’ve helped respond to “letters to Santa” submitted in a special mailbox in front of the Wassell home in the 1300 block of the street. This year, they received 82 letters, she said.

Aida Mousessian, who lives in the 1200 block and decorated with a gingerbread theme this year, said that in addition to the “good food and good company” of the progressive gathering, there’s a friendly competition for the best decorations on the circle. She said the neighbors have a close bond.

Nearby, Lori Flagg said she started decorating with these hand-made cutouts several years ago when a co-worker told her she loved penguins and bears and suggested Flagg decorate her yard for Christmas.

“I decided to make a penguin choir with a polar bear looking on, just for her,” Flagg said. “She became ill and died on Christmas Eve before seeing my display. The penguin choir has been retired, but every year I add some new piece in her honor.”

This year, Flagg added a snow grandma and baby penguin to celebrate the birth of her first granddaughter.

“It means so much to me to add light and laughter to the Christmas season,” Flagg said. “I hope my house brings a smile to a face or two.”

In La Crescenta, in the 3500 block of Prospect Avenue, Brandy Yi said her holiday display has more than 20 inflatable decorations and Christmas trees that light up in sync with music.

“Our yard is always a hit at Christmas time,” Yi said. “We enjoy doing it just to see the smiles on the kids’ faces who come by to enjoy it.”

Back in Burbank, Carrie Stewart in the 200 block of South Sparks Street also has a carnival theme for her yard, including inflatable decorations she called the “Macy’s Day Parade rejects.” She said she does it for the joy it brings others, and “because all the kids love it so much.”

LaPrath said decorating has brought his family closer, but it’s also a way to spread cheer and show thanks for their blessings.

“It’s something we can share with the community and bring everyone closer together,” he said.

Readers can check out a map and photos of some of the local holiday decorated homes submitted by Burbank and Glendale residents, and share photos of their favorites on Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag #818lights.

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