



PORT STANLEY CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

I've always enjoyed decorating for the holidays but it's Dennis' love of lights that really got this started. I'm more of the creative director. Dennis started to set in as we (he) realized that we were maxing out our hydro! If he wanted to increase the number of lights every year then he needed to look at other options. LED lights used less hydro and the colours were more vibrant. Up went more displays! Then along came synchronized lights with music. This started to draw people to our home. Then Dennis decided to put up a few lights in the backyard for our own enjoyment.

This got people's attention and they started to sneak into our yard to take pictures. Others would ring the doorbell and ask if they could go in the yard and take a few family photos. The next thing we knew, people were offering us money. We knew then that we needed to find a charity. One night, a husband brought his very sick wife to see the lights. She thanked us for giving her a few moments joy...where she was pain free.

That's when we knew which charity to approach. I called Make A Wish and told them who we were and would they be interested in partnering with us. Yes, we donate to this worthy cause but we have received so much more in return. It has been a great partnership. They have provided us with volunteers to help Dennis in November to put up lights displays. This is not an easy job as he is very particular! Then we had volunteers stand outside each night we were open to the public.

We are proud to have raised \$105,716.00 for Make-A-Wish since 2010. For us, the rewards are too numerous to mention. We've met some amazing people through Make-A-Wish. The staff have been wonderful and very supportive, we've had the opportunity to meet some of the recipients and their families, we've made some new friends through the volunteers, we've gotten to know our neighbors much better and we've rekindled old friendships. For this we are grateful.

My best advice for anyone wanting to run an event is stay organized. For us Dennis was the creative display person but I was the list maker and contact person. Together we set parameters, determined the needs to achieve those goals, who can help and how to use social media. Don't be afraid to ask family, friends, co-workers and neighbors to give a hand. There might be students needing volunteer hours. Use social media to put the word out that you need volunteers and post pictures to draw people to your event. Call the radio, newspapers and local news stations to promote your event. Some of our biggest supporters were the London and St Thomas Camera Clubs along with local camera buffs taking fabulous photos and posting them. We drew large crowds when the Ukas of Hazzard came to sing Christmas Carols. So, keep an open mind. You never know what opportunities there will be to make your event a success.

So did we meet our goals? Yes! We owe a great big Thank You to all the wonderful people that come year after year with donations in hand. Together we have accomplished a great thing....for families with sick children, we made life a little brighter!

Thank you Dennis and Raymie for supporting Make-A-Wish and helping us continue to grant wishes to children with critical illness.