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## Guilford boy sets hearts aglow with Valentine light show

By: Elizabeth Ellis , Staff Writer

### **GUILFORD-Love is in the air - and in red lights - at Joe Petrowski's house.**

A junior at Guilford High School, he has turned his front yard into a bright light festival in honor of Valentine's Day, complete with synchronized love songs.

"I have always done decorations with lights ever since I was six," says Petrowski. "I don't know how or why I got interested, but I worked with a lot of different kinds. I did just the main holidays for awhile-Christmas, Easter, and Halloween-but last year I did a light show on the Fourth of July set to music."

In order not to annoy neighbors who may not want a constant repetition of music set to lights, Petrowski has hooked up a radio transmitter to the display so those passing through can turn to 95.3 FM and enjoy the music in the peace of their own cars.

"This is the first time I've tried doing Valentine's Day," says Petrowski. "I have five songs for this light show: I Feel Love by the Blue Man Group, Have You Ever Been in Love by Celine Dion, My Girl by The Temptations, Can You Feel the Love Tonight by Elton John, and Love Stinks by the J. Geils Band."

Petrowski uses a computer program called Light-O-Rama that controls the music and the lights with the click of a mouse button in his room. Each string of lights has channels or controllable plugs, which regulate how the lights move with the music. The Valentine display has 3,500 lights and 32 channels, but that's small potatoes compared to Petrowski's Christmas display of 22,000 lights and 48 channels this past December.

"I had 10 songs and collected money for the Guilford Animal Shelter and the American Cancer Society," says Petrowski.

"There's a donation box that people can drop whatever they feel is appropriate after the show is over. This time I'm collecting for the Guilford Food Bank."

Petrowski collected a total of \$750 over the holidays, with \$325 going to each respective charity. Having mastered the art of the light show with music after The Fourth of July, Halloween, and Christmas, he started planning for Valentine's Day in mid-January.

"I liked the idea of doing it for charity and it worked so well after Christmas," says Petrowski. "It's all pretty easy with the Light-O-Rama program."

Petrowski can see a color image of what the lights on the front yard look like on the computer screen, so he knows what strings are going on and off at any particular moment. The program also allows him to have the lights fade up, fade down, shimmer, twinkle, and strobe, all through the control of a regular cable running to his laptop.

"I can decide what I want and program whatever songs I want in there," says Petrowski. "I chose the songs I did based on their beat and without a lot of repetitive parts. Some of the songs I shortened if the verses repeat too much at various times."

Petrowski's mother, Nancy, says her son's hobby is great.

"He puts so much compassion into his lights and the shows he puts on," says Nancy. "My husband and I support him because it is a unique hobby."

Nancy remembers when her son was young and he received a lighted ceramic house for Christmas.

"He just loved it, so we started getting more for his collection," says Nancy. "I don't even have to hang an ornament at Christmas; Joe takes care of it all."

Nancy says Christmas 2005 when Petrowski put up his lights without the music the electric bill jumped from the average range of \$120 to \$140 to approximately \$250, but Nancy says this past Christmas the increase was only about \$180.

"We were pleasantly pleased," says Nancy. "But we think it is so great that he had the initiative to create something like this that can also benefit the community. I hope he pursues a career in this."

The light show takes place at 163 Valley Shores Drive in Guilford and will be running tonight and tomorrow from 6 to 9 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 6 to 10 p.m.