

Check out these Lake Lanier Christmas lights by land or water



Stewart Loggins, pictured Thursday, Dec. 12, said he's always been a fan of Christmas and especially setting up Christmas lights. - photo by Nick Bowman



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The Times

Updated: Dec. 12, 2019, 8:07 p.m.



It's not often that a houseboat is decorated for Christmas, but Stewart Loggins just couldn't help himself. He's living with his friend, Tom Stepnowski, and when Stepnowski was out of town, Loggins got to work.

“I was talking about how there's a boat parade and I was thinking about slapping a couple lights on it,” Stepnowski said. “When I came back, I could see this thing glowing down at the dock.”



Stewart Loggins set up a large display of Christmas lights on Thunder Trail in Forsyth County near Boling Bridge. Even though the house is a ways from Dawsonville Highway, the lights have drawn passersby since they were put up. - photo by Nick Bowman

Loggins has been working on the display at 6795 Thunder Trail in North Forsyth County since the beginning of November and hasn't taken a break since.

“It's just something I've always been into,” Loggins said, sitting inside the lake home with a slowly revolving Christmas tree just behind him. “I like creating things.”

He's been going all out for Christmas since he was young and it's carried into adulthood. His collection is quite large by now — altogether there are more 40,000 lights across the property — and it's still growing. Loggins is always thinking about Christmas and what new decorations would fit best in his displays.

“I really can't put my finger on it exactly,” Loggins said. “But I love doing it and I do it every year. This year a little more than others, though.”

Cresting the last of a few hills on the drive to the house, the lights and Christmas decor glitter and gleam along Thunder Trail below.

As soon as you pull up to the house in the cul-de-sac, you're greeted by a pair of inflatable snowmen. Loggins is new to the inflatable game, but the Santa Claus in a sleigh pulled by reindeer that's suspended in the air over the yard is one of his favorite decorations. There's more inflatable reindeer, even some dogs and unicorns, a horse-drawn carriage and more snowmen. An inflatable workshop for Santa sits near the front and above it hangs a flying helicopter with Santa as its pilot, of course. Oh, and don't forget the snowman floating in a hot air balloon above the driveway.

All of those would be enough decorations — a spectacle to see for sure — but Loggins has wrapped almost every inch of the chain link fence in lights and every tree and bush with even more.

He said he doesn't do it all for the recognition, but just for the Christmas cheer it brings.

"I'm proud of anything I do to a degree, but at the same time, it's going to happen either way," Loggins said, laughing. "I'd do it in my sleep, and probably have and didn't know it."

Through just word of mouth with neighbors telling friends, Stepnowski is surprised with how many people have enjoyed the display.

"We're in a remote location and I have never seen so many cars come down to this cul-de-sac," he said. People have been driving up, parking and getting out to take pictures in front of the yard.



Bands of lights lead to a Christmas light-bedecked house boat at Tom Stepnowski's home on Thunder Trail. - photo by Nick Bowman

But if you want to see the houseboat, you'll have to come by water. It's usually parked at Aqualand Marina, where Stepnowski runs his Lanier Boat Charter business. If you book a charter this winter, you'll have the chance to ride the Christmas-themed boat.

As soon as Stepnowski flips on the generator on the boat, the magic begins. There are 13 Christmas trees decked out with lights and ornaments with Santa and a nutcracker standing on guard nearby. All of the railings on the boat are wrapped with tinsel and candy cane decorations are attached to the sides.

He has areas set up with fire places for people to gather and stay warm. The top and front of the boat both have enclosed areas to keep the wind away while touring Lake Lanier.

It might even snow while you're out on the water — thanks to a little help from a machine he'll have attached to the front.

When it all comes together, Stepnowski said it's a sight to see. "Probably not from outer space, but right

before you get to outer space, you'll be able to see this boat," he said as he climbed down the ladder from the upper deck of the boat.

It's impressive to Stepnowski, everything Loggins has done with the decorations and lights he's collected over the years and had in storage. But for Loggins, it's just another year, another Christmas.

"It's not a big deal," Loggins said. "If you see a big pile of lights sitting on the floor, most people run from it. I just look at it and go, 'Oh, I can fix that in a second.'"

Still, when Stepnowski looks at his front yard, especially at the decorations floating in the air above the trees, he's impressed. His home, let alone his houseboat, has never been decorated like it is this year.

"It's like your own mini Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade," he said.

Even with a few blown fuses, money spent on bigger amps and a pricier power bill, it's worth it for both Stepnowski and Loggins. They get to enjoy the Christmas season while bringing a little extra cheer to anyone who needs it.

"If it just makes somebody feel good, that's what it's about," Loggins said. "Watching people's face light up over something that I've done is intoxicating."



Stewart Loggins stands in a huge display of Christmas lights on Thursday, Dec. 12, on Thunder Trail off of Dawsonville Highway on Lake Lanier. Loggins has set up lights for as long as he can remember, and this year he decked out a friend's home while he was out of town. - photo by Nick Bowman