

McGREGOR'S CHRISTMAS LIGHT DISPLAY IN ATHENS

By Sally Smid

When Laura McGregor came into the world as a premature baby, she was in a very fragile condition in Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa for some time. Her parents told her about the excellent care she received to save her life. Five years ago, her family decided to honour CHEO by creating an amazing Christmas light display at their home at 579 County Park Road, Athens, On near Charleston. It has now become an annual event with proceeds going to CHEO to help other families with young ones in need. Last year their Christmas display donations totalled \$6295.

The couple covers the cost of materials and hydro as part of their contribution. They do welcome the donation of decorations and power cords. Last year McGregor's' Christmas Light Show was even covered on CTV News. Could it just be that the popular display has spin-offs for businesses in Athens, as travellers may also stop in at local eateries and shops?

The display opened this year on Nov. 19th which closely corresponds with their daughter Reba's birthday. This year motorists can follow new signage placed on major routes which will direct them to the Christmas spectacle. Of course, there is a certain amount of noise and traffic in the area, which is especially challenging in such a rural setting, but measures are being taken to improve the situation this year. There will also be some parking made available for those who choose to explore the display. Those unable to walk onto the property can enjoy the lights by driving along the road. There are also walking



paths to get a closer look at the Light Show, which includes lighted inflatables, sculptures, Christmas music and more. Youngsters are always thrilled to find many of their favourite characters in the display. Mr. and Mrs. Claus will also make an appearance again this year and there is the possibility of hot chocolate being provided for visitors.

Laura and her husband Bill, plan and prepare all year long and many hours of work goes into construction, wiring, and arranging. This year the expansive lighted miniature village in the garage has been moved downstairs. Visitors are always amazed by the detail involved in the array of miniature buildings, vehicles, people and much more. With the addition of a ramp, everything will now be wheelchair and stroller accessible. It is a great way to spend some family time together in the holiday season.

There is no admission fee, but donations to CHEO are appreciated. It will be lit nightly throughout the Christmas season, until

the end of December from 5-9 pm, when weather permits. "We are not lighting up when the weather is such that it might be dangerous for motorists," explained Laura. While snow does add to the festive Christmas atmosphere, when it does snow a lot, it means that the walks and exhibits need to be cleaned off, which creates more work for the McGregors'. More information is available on their Facebook page, www.facebook.com/mcgregorschristmasdisplay.

Laura is also willing to help with directions or more info by texting her cell at 16132230041

Many visitors now attend from miles away as the display has become more well-known. "It is wonderful to hear the many stories of families who have been helped by CHEO," commented Laura McGregor. It must also be rewarding for the family to hear the cries of excitement and realize the enjoyment that so many visitors receive in experiencing their Christmas Light Show each year. **LH**

