



# Volunteers keep Sugar Grove Christmas tree lit another year

By CHRIS WALKER

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Al Markus hangs Christmas lights on the big tree on the corner of Cross Street and Route 47 in Sugar Grove on Nov. 20. (Julie Walker)

SUGAR GROVE – When Karen McCannon wants something done, she gets it done.

There was no way she was going to spend the holiday season without the massive evergreen tree at Route 47 and Cross Street illuminated. When McCannon found out that Sugar Grove Village President Sean Michels deemed that it wouldn't be appropriate to spend taxpayer money on tree lighting last year, she rallied some volunteers together and raised funds so that she could do it on her own.

Now, with the lights already purchased, it was a far easier task of getting them out of storage and installing them in the tree this year.



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was crazy," McCannon said. "Now every night I can look outside my front door and see that beautiful tree. Other towns like St. Charles might be much bigger and do more things, but we've shown we can do something pretty big, too."

Jim Wilhelm (2009) and Pat Graceffa (2006) are two of the volunteers who were instrumental in assisting in this project the past two years, along with McCannon (2008), who were all named Sugar Grove Citizens of the Year.



"People may think when someone wins Citizen of the Year that they're done doing things," McCannon said. "It doesn't end when you get those accolades. You're still out there doing things for the community."

McCannon, who is also known by her clown character, JoJo, did face painting and other entertaining things during the annual Corn Boil. She received a check from the Corn Boil committee for her efforts, which she donated directly to the holiday lighting project this year.

That allowed them to extend their decorations. In addition to the tree, they put lights around the nearby signage this year.

"Jim Wilhelm is the one with the boom – [the truck] – which we really needed," McCannon said. "And he used his equipment from his company to help us install the lights."

The group made sure they purchased lights that would last. They didn't want to get stuck in a tough situation where they pulled the lights out of storage this year and found out many no longer worked, resulting in replacement purchases.

"Lee Drendel, [Sugar Grove Township trustee], really made sure we got a good deal on lights that were heavy-duty and could handle being out in the weather for more than just one Christmas," McCannon said. "A lot of people were generous and that helped us get high-quality lights that we think should last a long time."

The lights came from Texas, and a long evening of putting the lights together last year in Al Markus' garage in Sugar Grove provided wonderful fellowship for all the volunteers. Even the Sugar Grove Fire Department assisted in the effort that night. All that work made it easier for this year's installation to be done pretty much seamlessly.

"There was a lot of work because it was our first time doing it last year," McCannon said. "But we also made sure that once we took everything down and stored it, that we would be in good shape for this year."

Now that she can glance out of her front door every night and see the tree lit up in all its glory, McCannon can rest easy and go to bed with a smile on her face.

"We couldn't have done it without all the volunteers," she said. "Pat and Dan Graceffa, Jim Wilhelm, Lee Drendel, Al Markus, Lisa and Bill Born, Bruce Wick, Don Foupl, Marc Ebert, John and Shirley Guddendorf and any others who I may have missed. They helped get this tree lit again."

Now all of Sugar Grove's residents, as well as the thousands who drive by on Rt. 47, can enjoy it once again.

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