

Christmas Spirit Glows in Hermann Rectory

Written by Tom Uhlenbrock

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Hermann, Mo. — If there was an award for Christmas decorations inside a home, Father Bill's residence would win hands-down.

The Rev. William Debo lives in the rectory adjoining Hermann's [St. George Catholic Church](#), whose bell tower stands high above this quaint river town in the hills of the Missouri River Valley. Every Christmas, the 21 rooms inside the three-story red brick building are decorated, top to bottom, in a prodigious labor of love by a group of dedicated town residents.

"Everybody says, when they come here, that it's the best they've ever seen," Father Bill said.

There are no prancing reindeer, no animated Santas, no overbearing music. Each decoration is carefully planned, and artfully executed. The visitors who go through on tours are overwhelmed by twinkling lights, pine boughs and trees, and vintage ornaments, carolers and manger scenes. There are 31 trees, 7-foot or taller, this year.

"We started decorating in mid-October with a core group of about 20 volunteers," Father Bill said. "Numerous people pop in and out, people in the community who know we need help. We opened Saturday, Dec. 1. Since then, there have been bus tours kind of non-stop."

The tours are free, but donations are welcomed. The event raised some \$10,000 last year; money was distributed to the needy by Hermann-area churches. Tours are by appointment; call [573-486-2723](tel:573-486-2723).

The Franciscan Friars served St. George Parish until 2002, when Father Bill was appointed the first diocesan priest for the parish. He brought with him his art degree and Christmas spirit. This is his 10th year decorating the rectory.

"A representative of the [Chamber of Commerce](#) wanted us to be on the house tour, but I was afraid they weren't going to get enough bang for the buck," Father Bill said. "She stood in the foyer here and said, 'I assure you, there's more in this room than we'll see in all the other houses combined.'"

Carrying J.P., his white Maltese, Father Bill began a tour of the home in the parlor.

"This is the Victorian tree that started all the madness," he said. "These are hand-dried flowers out of my garden, vintage ornaments, hand-strung beads. I hand-dipped the lights to get that shade of pink."

Several of the decorated rooms have themes. The dining room is all white and silver, with poinsettias, a tiered cake and seven donated dresses on forms, representing a vintage wedding. There is a Mardi Gras room with masks, beads and clowns; a Wizard of Oz room with Father Bill's collection of memorabilia; and a military room decorated with uniforms, helmets, medals and photos of soldiers, young and old.

"Every year we get more photos and uniforms," Father Bill said. "People want to memorialize their friends and family."

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The attic is Santa's workshop, with a seated Mr. and Mrs. Claus taking a well-deserved rest. The basement wine cellar is decorated for the first time; tiny white lights and pine boughs hang from the pipes and rafters. Hermann is in Missouri's wine country, and the wine racks are full of local vintages received as gifts.

"We'll leave it all up until mid-January," Father Bill said. "We take our time taking it down."

Tom Uhlenbrock is a staff writer for the Missouri Division of Tourism.

About the Missouri Division of Tourism

The Missouri Division of Tourism (MDT) is the official tourism office for the state of Missouri dedicated to marketing Missouri as a premier travel destination. Established in 1967, the Missouri Division of Tourism has worked hard to develop the tourism industry in Missouri to what it is today, an \$11.2 billion industry supporting more than 279,000 jobs and generating \$627 million in state taxes in Fiscal Year 2011. For every dollar spent on marketing Missouri as a travel destination in FY11, \$57.76 was returned in visitor expenditures. For more information on Missouri tourism, go to www.VisitMO.com.

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