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# Above and Beyond: Habitat for Humanity volunteer spreads spirit of Christmas

## BY LIZ FABIAN

At this time of year, visions of sparkling lights fill Chuck Hammock's head.

The choreographed show he designed for his home several years had begun to draw buses to his north Macon neighborhood, so he went looking for bigger venues.

When Chuck's son C.J. was in the choir at Martha Bowman Memorial United Methodist Church, he offered to coordinate lighting for the Christmas program under the direction of Holli Clark, whose husband, David, owns the Chick-fil-A restaurant on Tom Hill Sr. Boulevard.

Hammock spent hours and hours at his computer designing the display for a concert that was over in less than an hour.

Hammock had a bright idea and repeatedly suggested setting up the lights at the restaurant.

"I would just laugh and move on," David Clark said.

Then nearly four years ago, Hammock walked out of the nearby Kmart with bags of Christmas decorations.

"He said, 'We really need to do something,'" Clark said. "I went back to my business of making chicken and forgot about it until he walked up in the summer."

Clark embraced the idea, but only if the light display had a greater purpose.

As a longtime volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, Hammock decided to use the production to lure contributions for his favorite charity.

Now he sits in front of a spreadsheet of 200,000 cells that direct the lights at Chick-fil-A to twinkle and flash according to the music.

"It takes dozens of hours to do just a couple of songs," said Hammock, who is quick to point out he works with a team of folks who volunteer their time and energy during one of the busiest seasons of the year.

Harold Tessendorf, Macon area Habitat for Humanity executive director, refers to Hammock as his "chief elf" who has volunteered for the organization for more than 15 years and served on the board for about a decade.

"Chuck is a man driven by deep faith and he uses his talents to really further God's work," Tessendorf said. "To think that he has chosen to do that for Habitat, with a long family history, is very inspiring."

The 51-year-old Hammock inherited his giving spirit.

"It's my father's fault," Hammock said jokingly. "My dad is a saint. He lives in Griffin and is on the Habitat board there and is active with the soup kitchen and everything else out there."

Hammock is an engineer who specializes in commercial designs.

He rolled up his sleeves and started helping on Habitat electrical crews.

When he learned the local chapter was having to pay to install heating and air conditioning systems, he volunteered to take over that project.

"When he gets behind something, he'll wear you out," Clark said.

Whether it's helping a homeless father find a job and shelter for his family, taking foreign mission trips or stuffing food into school backpacks of students who might not eat over the weekend, Hammock continually finds ways to help others.

"He's a great guy, and he's got a big heart and he'll really give of himself," Clark said. "He's a servant-type guy."

As a self-confessed geek, Hammock visualizes in his mind how the 45,000 lights should move to the melody and then makes it happen on his computer.

Each year, he enhances the presentation.

In this year's fourth annual Light More Homes Celebration, cascading icicle lights stream down in succession as cars move through the 33 lighted arches in the restaurant's drive-through.

Last year they added the "Light the Night" 5K run/walk that coincides with the flipping of the switch for the first time on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. The event raised \$22,000 with corporate donations.

Hammock's goal is to raise enough money to fully fund construction of a new house.

"Habitat to me is one of the most effective charity organizations there is," Hammock said. "It appeals to me because people are putting in sweat equity. It's a hand up, not a handout."

Tens of thousands of people will experience the joy of Christmas as they tune their radios to 89.5 FM and hear carols and seasonal stories.

The celebration begins at 8 p.m. Saturday as runners set out from the restaurant as the music blares and circle the block twice. The lights will shine from 6 p.m. until midnight until Jan. 1.

"Some people never darken a church door, but they'll go to Chick-fil-A for a sandwich, so maybe they'll hear the story of the birth of Christ," Hammock said. "It's an opportunity for me to share my faith and see the kids smile."

If you know of a person going above and beyond to help the community, someone whose work might otherwise go unrecognized, please let us know. Send an e-mail to [lfabian@macon.com](mailto:lfabian@macon.com). To contact writer Liz Fabian, call 774-4303.