

Opinion

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Dreary decade matched our mood

THANK HEAVEN, the lights are back — one of the best parts of the Christmas holiday. That tradition, the lights, almost died a decade ago when electricity went from being everyman's utility to a very expensive commodity.

Entire cities went dark in the '70s. What had been a festival of lights for a month turned into endless cold and dreary winter nights.

Christmas wasn't quite the same. And the darkening of that season corresponded with the national temperament for that decade — cold, dreary and hopeless.

BUT NOTICE, the lights are coming back on. Obviously it has nothing to do with the cost of electricity — which is more expensive than ever. Some things are just worth more than money — like traditions. And houses decorated with lights have been a valuable tradition since the first string of lights was invented.

Drive around and look. Sure, it isn't what it used to be, you know, when you and I were kids. But it's a start.

Last year it was just a string or two on a few houses. This year is different. More and more people are decorating the out-

side of their homes — some with rather elaborate displays.

During its heyday, we took the decorative house lighting for granted. It was so common as to be mundane.

"Nearly everybody does it, so what makes it special?" we asked ourselves.

But after a decade of dimness, the answer, like the lights, is becoming more evident.

DURING THAT DARK age in America we withdrew. Remember, we didn't stop decorating the insides of our houses, or our Christmas trees. We celebrated privately with those we could trust the most in a time of national paranoia.

But Christmas and the accompanying New Year is a time for sharing and renewal. And you just can't share and renew by yourself. And let's face it, a little of the old family goes a long way.

Now we are reaching out and once again sharing our celebration with more than close friends and family. As more and more lights go on, we're letting everyone know that at this household there exists a spirit of hope and sharing.

FOR THE FIRST time in I-don't-know-how-long — probably since being a kid — I drove around looking at the lights.

Some guy down Garden City way has really gotten into the spirit. Not only is his house lit, he has displays in two large windows, movable figures and all, of Santa and the workshop.

On top of that, he has a sleigh in front of the house in which Santa comes nightly to greet the neighborhood children.

This, of course, is more than a display. It's a gift from this man to his neighbors.

I'm sure you have your favorite example of a house decorated for the holidays. But it just doesn't have to be a memory. At least for now, we know the spirit exists allowing us to look forward to the surprises of the next holiday season and the lights it will bring into our lives.



Helping others at Christmas

IN ETHIOPIA an estimated 900,000 persons have died from a famine. In the United States, millions worry about overeating at holiday parties.

Why do people in one country count calories to look slim while in another they count the meals they've eaten in a month to survive?

It is not out of any sense of "do gooderism" that we must look around to see how we can help others. Justice requires it because "it's better to give than to receive."

YOU DON'T have to be Christian to live the spirit of this Christmas season.

Three Hindu children are leading a drive to raise money for the Ethiopians. Tripti Kataria of Canton, Shikha Katla of Canton and Shiwani Kaura of Farmington Hills collected \$75 for the Ethiopians among friends attending a Hindu religious meeting.

"The children didn't think it was right that everyone around them was enjoying the Christmas festivities while people in Ethiopia were dying," parent Brahman Kataria said. "They understand the spirit of Christmas even though they are not Christian."

Kataria is from India. "India has gone through a lot of the same things as Ethiopia," he said.

"No country in the world has helped Ethiopia as much as America," he said.



Nick Sharkey

"The generosity of Americans is unquestioned throughout the world." Those wishing to help in this drive can contribute by calling 981-2325.

YOU NEEDN'T go as far as Ethiopia to find people who need help. Look around. Perhaps there is a family on your block. Check at the local church, Family Y or the Salvation Army.

The following is a list of a few agencies still looking for assistance during this Christmas season.

• Westland needs volunteers to staff Operation Breadbasket. Last year 1,804 boxes of food were distributed to the poor. To help, call Gene Hudson, community development programs director, at 721-6000.

• Salvation Army at 9451 Main St. in Plymouth is accepting donations of turkeys, hams and canned goods. It is a clearing house for all churches and community organizations in the Plymouth and Canton areas. Call 453-5464.

• Troy People Concerned have a unique problem. This agency has an overabundance of food supplies. If you know someone in need, call 528-1515.

• Neighborhood House in Rochester is looking for donations of canned and dried goods to help needy families. Last year 228 families received holiday baskets. If you can help, call 651-5636.

• Duns Scotus Seminary in Southfield has received 1,200 letters requesting help during the holidays. The seminary seeks financial assistance and wrapped toys. Call 357-3070.

• The Old Newsboys Goodfellow Fund is about \$50,000 short of its goal. The Goodfellow Fund pays for 42,500 Christmas packages of clothes, toys and candy for needy children. Donations can be sent to: Old Newsboys Goodfellow Fund, 384 Penobscot Building, Detroit, 48226.

LAST WEEK children at Holy Family Regional School in Rochester were served rice in small cups. The children paid \$1.50 each for the rice and raised \$479 for the Ethiopians.

In a letter sent to parents before the lunch, a teacher wrote: "Our small sacrifices do make a difference for those who are suffering."

Yes, you can relieve the suffering of others. Only then can you experience the meaning of this holiday season.

Lucas loses a vote but gets his way

A **COUNTY** executive in Wayne County has a good thing going, and Bill Lucas knows it.

The executive appoints members to the board of the Economic Development Corp. with the approval of the County Commission — just like a president appointing an ambassador.

But there is a quirk in the EDC law, as pointed out by George Cross, the commission's research chief and a former corporation counsel.

"A board member holds over under the law until a successor is named," Cross told the commission recently. "Lucas hasn't named anyone."

THE ODD situation involves Dr. Samuel Ajiri. He has served a term on the board, and Lucas attempted to appoint him to a new term.

The County Commission objected, and here we run into another odd quirk. The commission's 15 members meet as a "committee of the whole" to go over everything. A week later, they finalize their actions by meeting in a commission session.

Well, the committee of the whole voted overwhelmingly to reject Ajiri. As Commissioner Kay Beard, D-Inkster, tells it, Lucas withdrew the Ajiri nomination before the commission could act officially to reject Ajiri a second and final time.

So now Lucas is keeping Ajiri on the EDC board by the simple process of not naming anyone to replace him. Clever, eh?

AJIRI HAS been Lucas' point man in efforts to get rid of EDC director Robert FitzPatrick, who ran for county executive in 1982.

In that campaign, Lucas failed to show up for most of their debates. The one time I saw them on the stump together, FitzPatrick made Lucas look — well, pitifully unprepared.

So when FitzPatrick lost the election, he found himself on Lucas' hit list. Well,



Tim Richard

that's politics. So what?

Commissioners didn't like Ajiri's tactic of leveling flimsy charges against FitzPatrick, who enjoys widespread respect.

It also left a bad taste in their mouths that Ajiri is second in line to take over the former Wayne County General Hospital if Southwest Detroit Hospital can't make a go of it. Rightly or wrongly, they see Ajiri as trying to curry favor with Lucas by working to dump FitzPatrick.

I don't know, of my own knowledge, whether the commissioners are right or wrong about Ajiri. But if it's any clue, they are virtually unanimous.

Ajiri's goodness or badness isn't the point, however.

THE POINT is that Lucas is able to keep Ajiri on the EDC board by the simple tactic of declining to appoint a successor. For that part, the commissioners seem to have made two serious errors:

1) Holding committee of the whole sessions. These lead only to delays and gamesmanship. Items of business should go directly from standing committees to the full board without a redundant halt in a committee of the whole.

2) Approving the appointment of John E. Johnson Jr. to the EDC board as a replacement for Maurice Vermeulen, who resigned. Tactically, the board should have held up the Johnson appointment, leaving the Vermeulen seat vacant, until Lucas names a successor to Ajiri. By confirming Johnson, the commission threw away its trump card.

For a candidate who did so badly in debates, Lucas certainly has shown a mastery of legal loopholes. He gets his way.

Gift ideas for local celebrities

PEOPLE WHO aren't sending each other Christmas cards this year include Oakland County Circuit Judge James Thorburn and retired editor of the Detroit News Martin Hayden.

Hayden, who served six years on the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, wrote a long opinion piece which appeared in last Sunday's Detroit Free Press (interesting) singling out Thorburn as the chief impediment to the commission's conduct of business.

The tenure commission was created by a 1968 voter-approved amendment to the state constitution to handle complaints against lawyers and judges. Members are elected or appointed. Thorburn was elected by all the circuit judges in the state.

A former member of the tenure commission said there is merit to Hayden's charge. "Thorburn would like to scuttle the tenure commission" he said. "He would be happy if the commission went out of business entirely."

ANYONE DOING last-minute Christmas shopping for favorite celebrities and public figures may be interested in these suggestions:

• For Wayne County Executive William Hamm — a ouija board to determine if a black Democrat from Wayne County can draw Republican votes in the suburbs and outstate Michigan. The suspicion is



Bob Wisler

that he is testing the winds before running for governor. The ouija board would help the ex-sheriff decide whether he is going to continue out-state speaking engagements before public groups — thereby further alienating Democratic bigwigs — or whether he is going to stay in the Democratic trenches and continue to slug it out with his in-name-only Democratic allies.

• For Gov. James Blanchard, whose reputation is on the upswing after a miserable first year in office — a desk plaque engraved with a quote from philosopher George Santayana. "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it."

• For Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, who rose to prominence on the anti-bussing fever in Oakland County in the '70s and who has attempted to capitalize on such public issues as capital punishment and Proposal C — a five-year membership in the Detroit Press Club.

• For Livonia Mayor Edward H. McNamara — a 15-year pin signifying

the 15 years he will have served as Livonia mayor in April.

• For WJBK-TV station manager Bill Flynn — a group photo of the Channel 2 news team so that in a few weeks Flynn can remember who used to work for him. For the newsroom, a revolving door.

• For Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca — the book "How to Write a Screenplay," so that he can turn his book into a movie and conquer another field. Iacocca for president? Why not Iacocca to replace Coppola? At least the movies would make money.

• For Howard Simon, director of the state American Civil Liberties Union, who stirred up a few wasps' nests by getting court orders prohibiting the cities of Birmingham and Dearborn from having municipally-paid-for Nativity displays — an introduction to a job-placement service.

• To Detroit Lion coach Monte Clark and ex-Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen — the tapes of their most memorable press conferences so that they can have at least the pleasure of burning them.

• For Henry Ford II — an autographed copy of Lee Iacocca's book.

• For the rest of the metropolitan area — a promise from Sparky that the Tigers will win the pennant again.