About half the population of Fluvanna County lives behind the gates of Monticello. If you aren't one of them, now is the time to phone a friend to let you in.
Inside those gates at 4 Lewis Court you'll find perhaps the best Christmas light show in the whole county.

Jeff Spinello and his wife Leslie Spinello have been decorating their house for both Halloween and Christmas for years.

And all that time Jeff Spinello (let's face it, this is his baby) wanted to do a light show set to music. It took a health scare in August to make him realize life is too short. Get what you want when you want it.

"I always wanted a system like this but I never pried open the wallet before," Spinello said. "Now that I've bought it, I have absolutely no regrets."

This system is from a business in Ohio called Animated Lighting. The some 60,000 lights arranged around Spinello's two-story home and wooded property go off and on, change color and different displays light up to the music of 10 different Christmas favorites like Little Drummer Boy, Carole of the Bells and the theme to A Charlie Brown Christmas.

Spinello even went the extra mile and had the company program the system rather than doing it himself.
"It can take up to 20 hours to program one song," he said.

This is the same company that puts on the Christmas light and music show at Rockefeller Center, Spinello said.

He has small sound system playing the music – not too loud, just loud enough for people in front of his house to hear it.

But if the weather outside is frightful, you can stay in your car, turn your FM radio to 88.1 and enjoy the songs snuggling with your honey.
That's what Rob and Heather Maloney did Saturday night. Rob Maloney said he and his family had come to see Spinello's light show each night for the past eight nights.

"We drive around the Lake to see the lights but there's nothing like this," said Rob Maloney as his four kids, ages 1 to 6 oohed and ahhed from the back seat.

Spinello said it took him 15 hours just to draw up the layout. He said his lawn looks like a bowl of spaghetti with 2800 feet of extension cords snaking through the grass.

Each extension cord is labeled at each end so he can find a problem easily.

Every year after Christmas, Spinello sends out his network of friends and family throughout the United States to buy discounted extension cords.

"We wait until they're 75 percent off," he said. "Last year my dad out in California picked up 7,000 feet for me."

All the lights are LED so Spinello's electric bill isn't as high as you might think.

"Before I got the LED lights our bill would be a couple hundred dollars more, but now it's only about $100 more," he said. "The lights aren't all on at the same time; they're constantly flashing. Plus LED lights only use a fraction of the power as regular bulbs."

Lewis Court is a short street that ends in a cul-de-sac. Spinello said his neighbors are all pretty good about his hobby.

“The lights don’t bother them, just the traffic some time,” he said.

said next year he’d like to partner with a local charity so people who want to show their appreciation can donate at his light show. As it is, Spinello said it’s not unusual to come out on his porch and find a plate of cookies or a note of thanks.

“We don’t have children,” he said. “It’s just something we love to do.”

The lights are on from 5 – 9:45 p.m. every night from now until the first of the year.

~Photo By O.T. Holen