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3 Lincolmites get in-sync with animated lights show

If you go

The Christmas lights display at 4905 S. 73rd St. will run from 5 to 9 p.m. every night through the first week of January.

To reach the site: ■ Take South 70th Street to Glynoaks Drive (between Pioneers Boulevard and Old Cheney Road);

■ Go east on Glynoaks to South 73rd Street;

■ Go north (left) on South 73rd Street to the display. For more information and a video of the show, visit www.liquidretro.net/lightshow

BY MICAH MERTES
Lincoln Journal Star

If you just drive past the animated Christmas lights display at 4905 S. 73rd St., just a couple of blocks north of 73rd and Glynoaks Drive, you might be a little confused.

The display appears minimalistic. Completely devoid of giant inflatable Santas. And the lights seem to be shorting out.

But if you tune your car radio to frequency 90.5 FM, it all makes sense.

Songs by the Trans-Siberian Orchestra flow from your vehicle's radio speakers, and suddenly the fluttering lights display has context, rhythm, reason. The 5,500 lights strung across the house and lawn are synced to every note of the Christmas songs.

"I'd say we probably spent," said

Ryan Carlson, a 20-year-old University of Nebraska-Lincoln sophomore, "oh, about 350 to 400 hours total working on this."

"On paper," interjected Aaron Stubbendieck, 22, "it looked like it would be easier."

Carlson, Stubbendieck and Jon Miller, 20, decided to undertake the project a year ago, when Miller's parents said they could use their house as a guinea pig. Carlson and Miller both attend UNL, and Stubbendieck graduated in May. They've all known each other since middle school.

When they weren't in class, the guys spent most of their spare time on the project, working off directions they found on the Internet.

The project involved building a makeshift control system from

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MICHAEL McNAMARA/Lincoln Journal Star

The lights on the house at 4905 S. 73rd St. are timed to music that is broadcast from the house, so people can tune their radio to the frequency and watch the lights from their car.



MICAH MERTES/Lincoln Journal Star

Jon Miller (from left), 20, Ryan Carlson, 20, and Aaron Stubbendieck, 22, are Lincoln natives who designed their own Christmas lights display to sync with holiday music.

■ Lights

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scratch, programming the lights to sync with the songs and, finally, hanging the lights.

Now, a whole lot of labor later, and the show works. But the road to triumph wasn't without its setbacks.

"The Saturday after Thanksgiving, it worked, everything worked," Carlson said, "for five minutes."

They spent the rest of the night trying to figure out what had gone wrong, to no avail.

"We had some tense moments," Miller said, "especially when it was late at night and things weren't working."

They took a break for a week and

then went back to the drawing board. And on the first of December, they achieved their moment of success.

And it's worked ever since.

"It's been a great learning experience," Miller said. "That was the purpose of doing it. We definitely did end up learning a lot."

Despite all of their newfound electrical savvy, only one of the three is an electrical engineering major: Carlson. Miller is a business major, and Stubbendieck graduated with a degree in chemical engineering.

And now that they've finished this project, they're already planning for Christmas 2008.

Carlson: "We might go bigger."

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