



Tour

By Rebecca Lauck Cleary
Photos by Martha Grace Gray

Christmas lights make everything beautiful.

During the holidays, even the most modest homes brighten with decorations as simple as shiny tinsel and a \$2 strand of lights. Others go all out with blinking plastic yard displays that can be seen a half-mile away.

Everyone can deck the halls, but some just do it a lot better than the rest of us. In Oxford, homes on North and South Lamar Boulevard and around the Square are well known for their tasteful, beautiful displays of Christmas spirit (see our Readers' Choice survey on Oxford's best dressed neighborhoods on page 43).

This Christmas, the Junior Auxiliary of Oxford offers a chance for everyone to go beyond the wreaths, garland and lights and into some of the town's finest historic homes dressed in their best holiday style. The tour, set for Dec. 12-13 from 1 to 4 p.m., is all for a good cause, JA member Ginger Brown said.

"The Holiday Tour of Homes is a new fundraising project for us that we hope will continue to grow and be a popular event to raise money to help children in Lafayette County," Brown said. "We hope for this to be an annual event."

Brown said Junior Auxiliary chose the tour of five historic homes, all within walking distance of the Oxford Square, as its fundraiser for this year. In past, the group has held rummage sales and bake sales to fund the Junior Auxiliary's child service projects, which include Adopt-A-Family, Art Print, Camp Bats and Balls, Camp Sunshine, School Friends, Stuff the Bus and Young Author's Fair.

In Sarah Frances Hardy's 1840s home, the mantels make a statement on their own. At Christmas, adorned with handmade stockings and gold, they are even more dramatic.

of Homes



Donna Ruth Roberts cherishes the crocheted Santa and Mrs. Claus dolls that her 98-year-old mother made for her. Roberts' mother died this fall after "a great, full, wonderful life," and Roberts said the dolls will mean even more to her this Christmas. Her Christmas tree is adorned with many ornaments that are 40 years old, collected over a lifetime of Christmases.

The service projects encompass a wide range of recreational, civic, cultural and educational opportunities. The goal of Adopt-a-Family is to temporarily assist families in the community in a time of great need, while Art Print, one of JA's oldest projects, introduces young children to famous works of art. School Friends allows a child to work with a JA member to improve reading skills, and Camp Sunshine is an overnight camp experience of fun, fellowship and personal growth for girls entering fifth grade.

JA wanted to come up with something different for the fundraiser this year, and decided on the tour of homes. But for now, they're keeping things small.



The Renfroe kids—Anna, 9, Harris, 5 and Liza Carole, 10—whip up a batch of gingerbread cookies in their family's gourmet kitchen.

"We thought we would start with five homes since this is our first year, and since we've never done this," Brown said.

The homes include John and Sarah Frances Hardy on North 14th Street and four homes on Lamar Boulevard: Walker and Whitney Byars, Donna Ruth Roberts and Christeen Shivers, all on North Lamar; and Land and Lauren Renfroe on South Lamar.

A Junior Auxiliary member will serve as hostess at each house, discussing its history and interesting facts. Rebel Ride will provide transportation to the homes for those who do not wish to walk. Holiday sweets and Junior Auxiliary cookbooks also will be available for sale.

Oxford Floral is helping with the decorations in Donna Ruth Roberts' 1850s Greek Revival-style home.

"The house was originally built for Jacob Thompson, who was a founder of the *Oxford Eagle*," Roberts said.

The house had an addition in 1991 but still has the original 12-foot ceilings and heart pine floors. Roberts moved into the home in 2002 and said she loves living there.

For the Tour of Homes, the Christmas tree ornaments she has collected for over 45 years will be on display along with her house's unique architecture and character.

"I'm excited to be part of the tour, and I think it's great. I love to show off the house. It's a perfect place for me, and I enjoy people coming through," Roberts said.

Sarah Frances Hardy said her three children, ages 5, 9 and 11, are thrilled about their house turning into a wonderland for the holidays. Hardy is planning on adding lots of greenery and lights to her usual decorations.

The original part of the house was built in the 1840s, Hardy said, and it consisted of the front two rooms. Six years ago, when the Hardys purchased the house, they gutted it but kept the main structure.

"The house had been cut up into three apartments and had been a bit neglected. We kept the floors, and we also have some wonderful, old doors," she said. "I love living in an old home because it feels like it has a soul."

During the renovations, the Hardys discovered a bit of history about the house, which was owned by Dr. John McEwen.

"A doctor lived here in the late 1800s, and when we were going through the papers we discovered he has the same birthday as my husband and daughter," Hardy said.

As part of the tour, two "sweet shops" will be set up, one at the Mid-Town Shopping Center and one at the Chancery Building. Pound cakes, cookies and other sweets will be for sale.

Tickets for the Tour of Homes are \$15. Call Brown at 662-234-6039. *JG*



Whitney Byars and her 10-year-old daughter, Ansley, started decorating early. The Byars have two large Christmas trees at their house—one real, one artificial. Because the artificial tree has no shelf life, Byars said she likes to erect it well before Thanksgiving.



Christeen Shivers is using a lot of lime green accents this year in her decorating. Her recently renovated home is grandchildren-friendly. "We have no museum pieces here," she said.