

home: NEIGHBORHOOD

North Forest Beach's Wonderland of Lights...

DOVE STREET

BY TERRY BERGERON

It is considered by many in the real estate business to be one of the island's "hottest" neighborhoods, but one thing is certain: every December, North Forest Beach is undoubtedly one of the brightest. From Thanksgiving through Christmas Eve, North Forest Beach sparkles with a spectacular display of holiday lights. What began as a new dad's effort to decorate a tree in front of his home for his daughter's first Christmas has grown into a major neighborhood effort, and one of the Lowcountry's most fun – and funky – traditions.

It all began in 1990 when the Lolik family adopted a baby girl. To celebrate, father Rob lit a 40-foot magnolia tree at their 20 Dove Street home. The Beckler family joined the festivities, hanging their own lights to mark the holiday season. Over the years, more and more neighbors joined in and today the entire street – as well as some adjoining streets – participates in this magnificent display. The Becklers estimate that more than 100,000 bulbs illuminate the area. Lolik's magnolia tree – now over 55 feet high – boasts over 7,000 bulbs. It takes him over three days – and the use of a cherry picker – to decorate that one tree alone. "Sunbelt Rentals has really helped us out, letting us use their equipment for the holiday week," said Rob Lolik. "We couldn't do without it anymore." It seems appropriate that this kind of tradition was created in North Forest Beach – a neighborhood somewhat unusual by Hilton Head standards, with no gates, no golf courses, and no clubhouses. First developed as a true second home area, with cute little beach bungalows used for summer get-aways, the neighborhood evolved into a residential area for the island's middle class working families as more permanent residents moved to the island.

Today many of the 1950s bungalows have given way to large, expensive homes – and soaring real estate values. The demand for beach-oriented property has caused Dove Street's "folksy and funky" atmosphere to give way to the "fine and fancy." Many long-term residents are leaving, and more and more short-term renters are coming in. The Loliks and Becklers have both owned property in North Forest Beach for almost twenty years. And while the neighborhood around them has seen some pretty dramatic changes during that time, Dove Street has retained some of its original character. "We've lost some permanent residents on Dove Street, but there is still a sense of neighborhood," said Lolik. "And I think the lights have been a significant factor in our staying together as a community."

In the true community tradition, residents not only offer the gift of joy to hundreds of people who drive through each evening to share in the celebration, but also support Deep Well. Many visitors offered to help residents pay the electric bills. Instead, it was suggested they make donations to the local service organization. The donations became so overwhelming that nearby Coligny Plaza now helps by accepting unwrapped gifts, canned food and money. And while the residents put in a lot of time and energy into keeping the holiday spirit – and a sense of community – alive on their little piece of the island, they feel that they are the true recipients of the joy it brings. "So many wonderful things happen each year when people come to see the lights," said Kristi Beckler. "It's just a great big Christmas gift for us, too."

IF YOU GO: Dove St. is a one-way street. Take North Forest Beach Dr. and turn right on Curlew first, left on Dune Lane and over one block to Dove St. Many residents on the "land" side of Dove St. also decorate, so cross North Forest Beach Dr. and continue to Lagoon Road, where you can turn left and return to Coligny Plaza. You'll find a collection well in front of Rita's Italian Ice from December 12 -24. Donors receive an "official Dove Street Lights" postcard as a thank-you.

