

Oh, Christmas Tree

'TIS THE SEASON TO DECORATE

By Pam Cloud

TIMES RECORD • P.CLOUD@SWTIMES.COM

Thanksgiving has come and gone and Christmas is in the air.

Many area residents spent last weekend putting up Christmas lights, unfurling the yard inflatables and unpacking the ornaments and tree decorations stored away for the past year.

Some of those decorations represent years of treasured memories for many families — from heirloom ornaments passed down from earlier generations to handcrafted specialties to collectibles.

Earl Douglas' Christmas tree holds a combination of memories. For the last 50 years, he has collected a variety of special ornaments that adorn his 7½-foot Nordic Pine, which is topped with a porcelain-faced angel.

"It's an heirloom I received from an elderly lady I took care of several years ago," said Douglas, 62, of Fort Smith. "It's just beautiful with real Chantilly lace."

Douglas, a retired artist and home interior designer, has a collection of Lenox and Waterford crystal ornaments, along with miniature teddy bears and bears stuffed in Gucci shopping bags.

Then there are hand-crocheted ornaments and traditional ball ornaments

amid the pinecone-covered branches.

SEE TREE PAGE 7B

"There are all kinds of keepsakes," Douglas said, calling his tree an American and English traditional. "Mine is very eclectic because I do have meaningful things mixed with things I like."

The meaningful things for him are those handmade ornaments given to him as gifts, along with ornaments his adult sons made some 30 years ago. Gingerbread men made from cloth, and owls and bugs made from his sons' thumbprints are among his prized possessions.

"Those go on the tree before any of the expensive stuff," Douglas said, speaking of the Waterford crystal bell and Millennium piece, along with the gold angels from Nieman Marcus. "Those don't mean as much to me as the ones my little boys made."

Susan Smith's Christmas tree also holds sentimental value for her.

For years, her grandmother, Mary VanGorder, made ceramic ornaments and would give them to her grandchildren each year. Although VanGorder has been gone 17 years, her ornaments still adorn Smith's tree.

"They're in all different shapes," said Smith of Lavaca. "Gingerbread men, ceramic balls with a cut-out in front that have a church scene in them, tear-drop shapes and wreaths."

Smith's three children receive an engraved ornament

each year from their aunt with name and year, and those also are on the tree, along with special ornaments from when her late father was a child.

"It's kind of a sentimental tree, I guess you would say," said Smith.

The Crafts' Christmas tree in Alma also is filled with keepsakes of the past.

Richard Craft said his family's tree is filled with baby shoes of his two daughters, who are now 21 and 15.

"My daughter's first pair of ballet slippers is on the tree," Craft said, adding that a lot of the girls' first baby shoes hang from the tree branches.

Along with the shoes are ornaments he and his wife have collected during their 25 years of marriage.

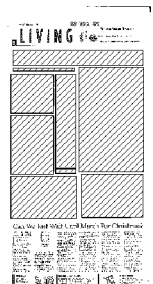
Lynn Meeks of Fort Smith prefers an old-fashioned tree, decorated in red, green and white.

"I have saved those things that three or four of (the children) have made and put them on the tree," said Meeks, adding that her youngest living child is now 33. "They're kind of like, 'oh, mom, you still put that up?'"

Meeks also embroiders as a hobby and has a collection of delicate ornaments she has crafted that also hang on her tree. She also has a few heirloom ornaments given to her by friends.

"I just prefer the old-fashioned tree," Meeks said.

For Karen McEntire of Alma, Christmas is a time to experiment with the tree decorations. She usually color coordinates the tree decor,



opting for everything in gold or another color, or by doing themes.

"My last tree was a 'snowman tree,'" said McEntire, who has seven children. "Everything I put on the tree were snowmen."

One time, her Christmas tree stayed up for four years: "I just changed the ornaments on it. I had a Fourth of July tree and a Memorial Day tree," she said.

Her daughter purchases a special ornament each year for her tree, while one of her sons just puts very few decorations on the tree until Santa Claus comes on Christmas Eve night and decorates the tree and house as he leaves the gifts.

"All the lights and decorations are all lit up on the tree," said McEntire. "And he hangs snowflakes from the ceiling."

FAST FACTS

TREE TIPS

While decorating trees for the holidays, it's a good idea to keep in mind some decorating safety tips offered by the experts at CableOrganizer.com:

- ▶ When shopping for lights, electric decorations and extension cords, purchase only the ones that are UL-listed.
- ▶ If decorating outdoors,

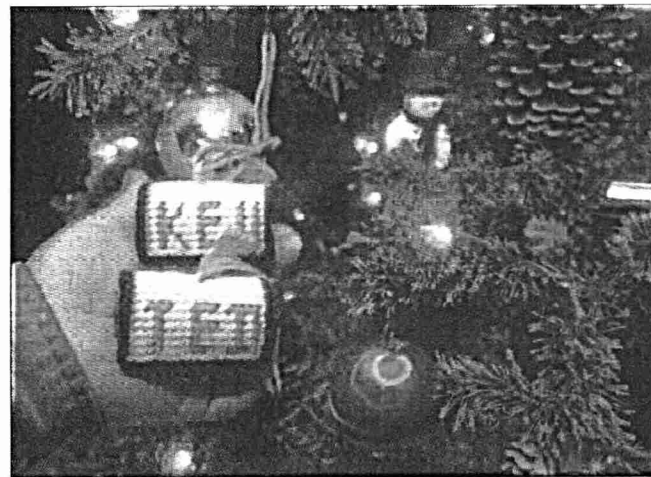
make sure to use lights and decorations that are rated for outdoor use. Putting indoor-only products outside in the weather can result in electric shock and fire hazards.

- ▶ Inspect all lights, electric decorations and extension cords for signs of damage to wire insulation, plugs and bulbs, whether new or old.
- ▶ Always unplug lights before changing bulbs, replacing fuses or making any repairs.
- ▶ If replacing a bulb in a string of Christmas lights, make sure that the wattage rating of the replacement bulb matches that of the

light strand.

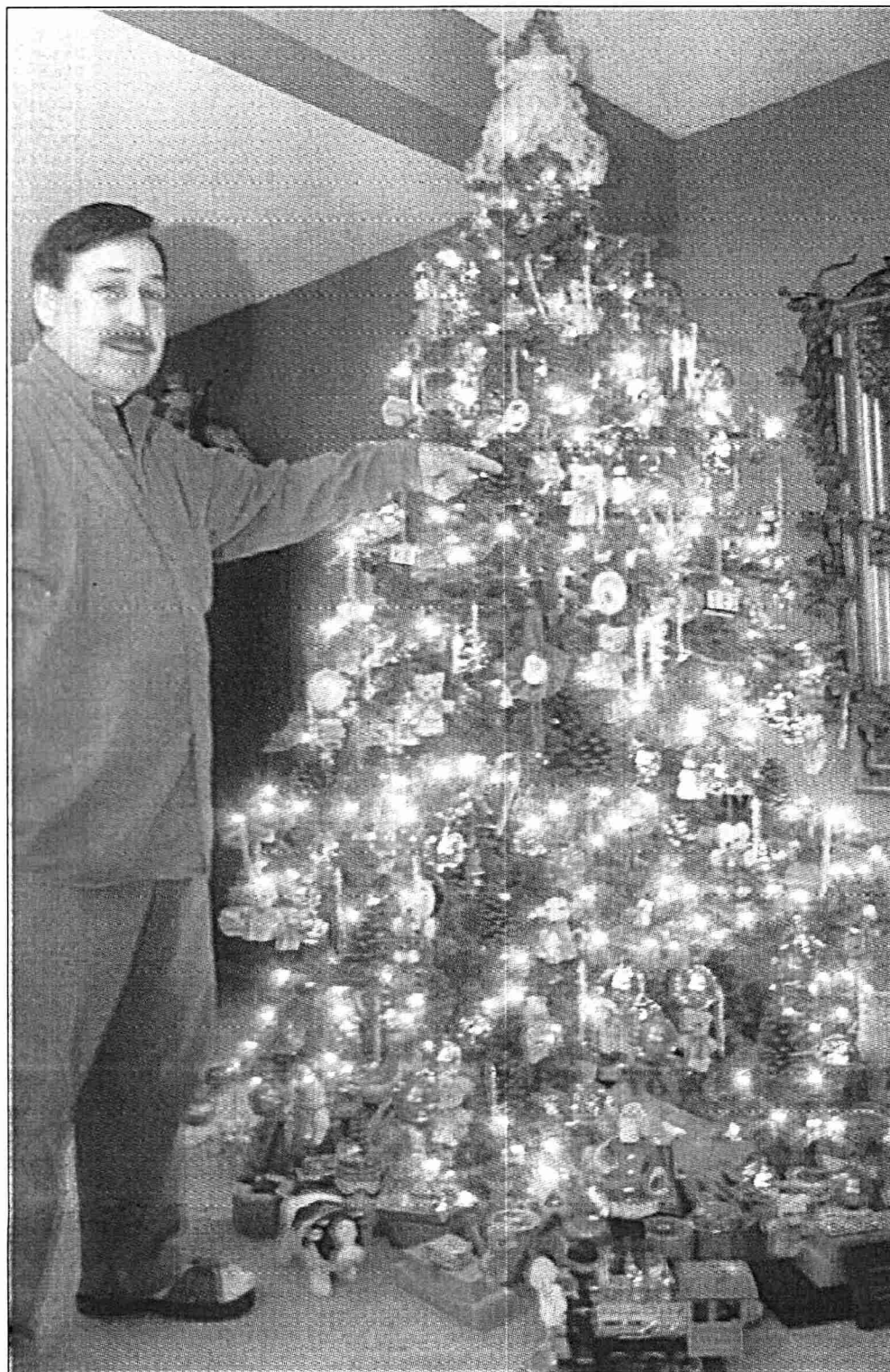
- ▶ Before decorating, verify how many strands of lights it is safe to connect end-to-end. (As a general rule, it's three).
- ▶ Be careful not to overload extension cords.
- ▶ Every so often, check Christmas light wires to make sure they're not warm to the touch.
- ▶ Always turn off all Christmas lights and decorations before going to bed or leaving the house.

SOURCE: CABLEORGANIZER.COM



PHOTOS BY KAIA LARSEN • TIMES RECORD

Two mailboxes with the names of Earl Douglas' sons were made in 1982 by their aunt, Shirley Douglas. They are among his most prized ornaments.



Earl Douglas decorates his Christmas tree at his home in Fort Smith. The porcelain angel atop the tree is 100 years old.



Waterford crystal wise men adorn Douglas' tree.



Douglas shows two ornaments that were made by his two sons when they were young.



One of Earl Douglas' favorite ornaments hanging on his tree was handmade by his sons.

Printing imperfections present during scanning