

Sharing the sights and sounds of the season

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Provided by: CCAL

Article Contributed on: 12/22/2009 11:34:49 AM



Barbara Dice, executive director of Castle Country Assisted Living, welcomed more than 60 residents and family members to her home for a Christmas party.

Driving around the neighborhood to see the holiday decorations isn't just for kids. A group of seniors from Castle Country Assisted Living (CCAL) and their families took the holiday light tour recently, and voiced as much delight as any kid.

More than 60 seniors and family members from the three assisted living communities in Douglas County boarded a charter bus to tour the lights of the county. Singing Christmas carols and sharing stories, the bus wound through The Meadows neighborhood.

"Although it seemed like there were a few less lights up than last year, the residents got a kick out of it," said Stacy Robak, marketing director at CCAL.

After the tour, the group visited the elaborately decorated home of Castle Country Assisted Living Executive Director Barbara Dice, for a holiday party.

The Dice family has decorated a Christmas tree in every room of their home for more than 10 years. Sharing the decorations with CCAL residents is a cherished event for her family, says executive director Barbara Dice.

For many residents, it is the only time they attend a gathering outside of their assisted living community, and for the residents without family nearby, it is chance to share in a family's holiday traditions.

Dice initiated the tours for CCAL residents four years ago. Castle Country charters a bus to take all the residents and interested family members on a holiday lights tour around Castle Rock, finishing at Dice's elaborately decorated home.

"For me and my family, it's a very special Christmas tradition," Dice said of hosting the event.

With the help of her husband Allen and son Tyler, 9, Dice starts decorating the day after Thanksgiving and takes about 120 hours of hard decorating to adorn the 19 Christmas trees in their home. Each tree has a unique theme, from teddy bears and handmade ornaments to one tree embellished with Dice's great-grandmother's costume jewelry.

At the Dice's home visitors enjoyed hot cocoa, cider and holiday treats. This year the party included live entertainment from pianist John Gorklo and a visit from the big man himself, Santa.

Residents mingled while listening to Gorklo, a regular performer at the assisted living communities, and singing along.

"A lot of the residents even got on Santa's lap; they loved it," said Robak.

For Dice, the chance to open up her home to residents has become a treasured family tradition.

"For the residents to come into our home, I think for us to be able to share that with them, it's a

really special evening," Dice said. "For so many of them it means more than we know."

Castle Country Assisted Living, Inc. is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, serving seniors in Douglas County since 1989. Castle Country Assisted Living operates three assisted living communities, Cantril House at 221 Cantril St. in Castle Rock, Valley House at 255 S. Valley Drive in Castle Rock, and Victorian House at 19600 Victorian Drive in Parker. The first organization of its kind in Douglas County, Castle Country Assisted Living is committed to providing compassionate care and supportive assisted living communities for seniors, including those with limited incomes.

For more information, go to www.castlecountryassistedliving.org.