

Happy Holidays

Lafayette Home a Christmas Extravaganza

By Cathy Tyson



Lu Huish surrounded by some of her treasures



Photos Andy Scheck



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When 94-year-old Lucienne "Lu" Huish came to California as a young woman, she fell in love with the state, got married, raised her children here and never left. Besides the vibrant economy and sunshine – the golden state offered a real contrast to her childhood in Des Moines, Iowa. Coming from a family with seven children, Christmas was a very modest affair; their home was fairly spartan.

The yellow house on a corner in the Hamlin Road neighborhood, her home since 1972, could not be more different. Every room and every surface is decorated in an amazing array of holiday decorations, collected over a lifetime. "I do this all on my own," she admits, but adds that occasionally neighbors will help out. They call her the "Christmas Lady."

Living room, dining room, bed-

rooms and bathrooms are covered in neat groupings of Santas, sleighs, reindeer, nutcrackers, multiple table top trees, with tiny lights and sparkling ornaments. Although she calls it all "a bunch of junk" collected from dime stores and her one-time antique business – it's clearly a labor of love. She jokes about her favorite feather Christmas trees saying, "I'm taking them with me to the grave." The seven foot tall giant Santa near the front door is bequeathed to the Shriner's Burn Center. She's already given away quite a few items to her kids, neighbors and just had a garage sale last month, but by all appearances there's no shortage in the house.

Huish proudly points out the village that came as a kit that her husband put together, purchased when Disneyland first opened in 1955. The lit buildings and town square are poised on

plywood above a bathtub. She frets that whole thing might collapse if it's moved.

She and a lady friend had an antique business many years ago. At that time they came across feather trees from Germany – the original artificial tree. "You don't see them anymore – they get old like we do," she said, referring to a white tree that has faded to beige over the years. "I'm partial to the white ones." Every room is filled with six or seven feather and man-made trees along with an explosion of holiday decor.

Even a dollhouse that was a gift to her daughter on her first birthday is fully loaded with miniature furniture and holiday themed accoutrements. "I remember it cost \$17. Back then that was a lot of money."

She's quite independent and busy these days – going to ballroom dancing in Pleasant Hill and helping out a

disabled family member who needs help running errands, also working at a food bank in Oakland.

Her father came to this country from Switzerland, and received his citizenship in 1923 – he was sponsored by a jeweler in Iowa, so that's where the young family settled. After high

school, Huish worked in an ordnance plant in Des Moines. One of her older sisters had come out to California and persuaded her to come west with stories of good looking soldiers and sailors. As the second youngest sibling, Lu reflects, "They are all gone now, I'm the last one left."

Sneetches Spotted in Orinda

By Lou Fancher



Photo Ohlen Alexander

Liz Piatt's Orinda home is being overrun by Dr. Seuss characters and she isn't going to take it anymore.

Instead, she's sending The Cat in the Hat, a pair of Six-foot Sneetches, Horton the Elephant, Thing One and Thing Two, and more than 50 other soft, hand-sewn sculptures she created to Orinda Books.

The December exhibit, reflecting children's universal love for Ted Geisel's books and the store's mural, painted by Gerry Wallace years ago, will be installed for the entire month of December.

Piatt, better-known for her fabulous quilts—one of which hangs in the new Walnut Creek Library—took up the Seuss project at the request of her second son, Brad.

"One of my grandsons graduated from Campolindo in June 2009," she said. "The high school parents go all out to decorate the gymnasium, the

auditorium and the outside area between the two. My son and his wife Trish asked me to help with the decorations."

The theme was Seuss and Piatt described the project: "They did a water scene with actual water, so I made a whole bunch of fish. Then there was a corner with Sneetches. I made two Sneetches that were taller than I am. I think they were about six feet tall," she paused, took a deep breath, and continued, "I did *There's a Wocket in My Pocket*—I made all the characters from that book. I think it's 23 characters. Oh, and there was a fourth corner where I made the two beetles."

After the graduation ceremony, a few sculptures were given to students, but most of them traveled back to Orinda.

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