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# Lighting designer spent 300 manhours to make restaurant glow



**STEPHEN PINGRY / TULSA WORLD**

Benjamin Allen of Lawn America stands with the dancing lights of the 71st Street and Garnett Road Chick-Fil-A flickering in the background.

Instead of using ordinary Christmas lights, which mindlessly blink on and off, Allen opted for synchronized ballerinas of red, green and clear light.

All those flickering bulbs pirouette in Allen's masterpiece to a host of tunes ranging from Trans-Siberian's wintry metal tunes to Josh Groban's gorgeous version of "O Holy Night."

To get an idea of what the fast-food joint looks like in all its vibrant splendor, recall the Miller Lite commercial featuring a home clad in thousands of Christmas lights that flickered to Trans-Siberian's thunderous "Wizards in Winter."

By **MATT GLEASON** World Scene Writer  
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Inside Benjamin Allen's Lawn America cubicle, the company's 30-year-old operations manager pulled a forest green notebook from his bag and plopped it on his desk.

Then, as he flipped through its many lined pages, Allen revealed handwritten notes that turned his 300-400 hours of work into a choreographed ballet of light and music.

The setting for Allen's opus of Christmas lights -- a Chick-Fil-A restaurant at 71st Street and Garnett Road -- is cast in 16,000-18,000 lights that adorn everything from the Christmas tree that crowns the spectacle, right down to its drive-through/tunnel of lights.

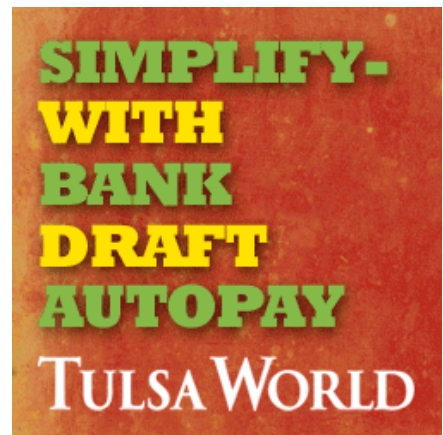
Now, whereas a large residential Christmas light display in south Tulsa might cost more than \$3,000 and take about 24 man-hours to complete, the Chick-Fil-A undertaking doubled the price and called for 100 man- hours.

Although \$6,500 could buy more than 2,000 Chick-fil-A Deluxe Sandwiches, Allen figured Lawn America probably didn't even make a profit on the job.

But, really, making money wasn't the prime objective for a company that handles everything from small \$500 Christmas lighting jobs to jobs in excess of \$10,000.

See, the Chick-Fil-A job was more of an experiment that defied anything Allen had ever done.

It was the first time Lawn America used



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LED lights, which use 85 percent less electricity than ordinary incandescent bulbs. And it's the first job the company used a "monster brain" to conduct the kinetic light show and to beam the various tunes to four parking lot speakers.

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The music also can be heard in nearby cars via 88.5 FM on your radio dial.

Allen not only handled the minutiae of planning the Chick-Fil-A job, he actually spent two or three days plugging the lights into a mile of extension cord -- most jobs only call for 100 feet -- all by his lonesome to ensure his ballet happened just as he envisioned.

Throughout the job, Allen's wife recalled how the Chick-Fil-A job sometimes followed her husband home at night.

The glazed look in his eye gave him away every time, she said.

sh5 Show time

About two weeks ago, the sun set on the Chick-Fil-A and found Arthur Greeno, the restaurant's owner and operator, standing with about 150-200 people gathered to see Allen's work in all its glory.

In dramatic fashion, Greeno stood at a mock dynamite plunger wrapped like a Christmas present, which was designed to cue the start of the light show.

Allen's wife, Glory, and their two children, 1-year-old Lauren and 7-year-old Bradley, waited with the large crowd while Allen stood off by himself, close to the road, fretting that only darkness would greet the crowd when Greeno pushed the handle down.

But the lights flickered to life and began their first dance to Trans-Siberian's stirring "Christmas Eve/Sarajevo 12/24."

Allen's son declared, "Dude, this is awesome!"

Nowadays, Allen can't drive home on U.S. 169 without peering out his window to make sure his ballerinas are still in motion.

The funny thing is that once Allen arrives at home after a long day of making lights flicker across town, he doesn't pull up to a house draped in holiday lights.

No, just like last year, nary a bulb could be seen twinkling at the Allen residence this week.

"You know, I tell myself there will be (lights) but I've been telling myself since September that I'm going to jump out and put lights on the house," he said. "At a certain point, you go, 'Well, it's not worth it anymore because I'm going to have to pull them down in less than a month.'"

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