

VILLAGE OF HICKSVILLE

111 South Main Street
Hicksville, Ohio 43526-1398
www.villageofhicksville.com

March 23, 2017

To The Defiance Area Foundation,

Thank you so much for all you do.

I am really excited to hear The Christmas Cruise Thru is applying for a grant to help them purchase an apparatus to work safely in high spaces. The people involved with this non-profit organization have donated thousands of hours of their time to provide a way, to not only celebrate the Christmas season, but provide beautiful, inexpensive, entertainment for all that come from the surrounding areas, including Indiana residents.

If you have gone on a leisurely drive through the fairgrounds during The Christmas Cruise Thru, you may recall the extreme heights on some of the displays. I live in Hicksville, and have the opportunity to see the guys on high ladders hanging displays each year. It would do my heart good to see it done in a safer manner.

I am always looking for events that will stimulate our local vitality and economy. The Christmas Cruise Thru taps into local talent that adds to the enthusiasm of the event.

I hope you will seriously consider The Christmas Cruise Thru's request for a grant.

Have a blessed life.



Mayor Diane Collins

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March 3, 2017

**Defiance Area Foundation
515 Fifth Street
Defiance, OH 43512
ATTN: Grant Committee**

RE: CHRISTMAS CRUISE THRU APPLICATION

As a tween in 1969 I became the regular and frequent babysitter for Dottie and DeVonn Werder's two children. I spent many happy hours in the house with the kids and almost as many happy hours watching Dottie decorate for any holiday. 949 East High Street was the place to be during every holiday because of Dottie's amazing talent for decorating. Willy Wonka was a wonder; Dottie Werder was the master.

The Werder's had a pine tree in their front yard along East High Street that received the royal decorating treatment during 1969. As the Werder kids and I grew up, so did the huge pine tree along one of the main streets of Hicksville. Lights on the tree just weren't enough for Dottie; each year she added wooden cut out, painted and lighted displays that her husband made. The tree reached a point that it took DeVonn, several family members and friends and two cherry pickers to put the lights up that the tree demanded not to mention the house. Needless to say, the Werder house was a massive display of Christmas lights, love and joy for everyone who drove by to see and enjoy. No one in town came close to spreading the cheer by using lights the way Dottie and DeVonn did.

I graduated high school in 1974 but still kept in contact with my "second family". Every Christmas season I would cruise down High Street and make sure to check out the annual Christmas display to see what Dottie had added – and to see how much more manpower DeVonn had to enlist! Each year brought more and more lights, beauty and – not surprisingly – traffic! Folks from all over the area drove to Hicksville to see the Christmas Wonderland on the east side of Hicksville.

Dottie's health began to decline and in 1993 she and her husband sold the East High Street house and moved out to the west side of town. I'll never forget Christmas 1993. For the first time since 1969 there wasn't a single light at that spot on the east edge of town; the Werder's weren't there anymore and that side of town was missing its former splendor and glory of lights and love. The community missed the labor of love done by Dottie and DeVonn for several years after that.

When Dottie died in 2008 I thought that the lights were gone forever. Little did I know that daughter Denise Sutter would step up with her husband and her dad to bring a vision that would make her mother proud.

Christmas Cruise Thru became Denise's reality and a tribute to her mother in 2013. Denise, husband Vince, daughter Lindsey, her dad and a host of friends and volunteers began to decorate the Defiance County Fairgrounds in Hicksville for the holiday season. Dottie's love of lights and the joy they brought came back to life! Word spread of the project, donations of money and lights came in and the project took on a life of its own. The 2013 Cruise Thru saw 3,677 cars come through the fairgrounds carrying an estimated 11,000 people. A free will offering was taken at the gate and patrons were generous with

donations. Word spread of the fantastic light display in Hicksville bringing more volunteers and contributions to make it better. Private financial donations increased and Social Media began to spread the word of the Christmas Cruise Thru. Donations and volunteer manpower continued to grow – and so did the crowds. People have come to Hicksville and Defiance County from Fort Wayne, South Bend, Angola and Muncie, Indiana; Michigan license plates appeared at the fairgrounds; Toledo, Findlay, Columbus, Archbold, Wauseon and even as far away as Sandusky, OH made the trip to see the holiday love and pride. In spite of a heavy snowstorm the parking lot was filled for the fireworks display which was a new feature for 2016. Almost 14,000 people came through the gates to look at the lights, take a sleigh ride, wander through the crafts and holiday sections, check out a few reindeer and live in the Christmas spirit.

Denise Sutter and her dedicated volunteers have not only carried on her mother's love and joy of sharing the Christmas spirit but have also put Hicksville and Defiance County on the map for the unique celebration. Visitors not only bring money for donation but also share those dollars in restaurants, hotels and shops throughout the entire county. The Christmas Cruise Thru is, in my opinion, deserving of receiving grant money to help expand this unique and rapidly growing jewel of Hicksville and Defiance County. As a private and corporate sponsor rest assured your consideration of the Christmas Cruise Thru as a recipient is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,



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