

# Merry Christmas?

FEB 16 1987

## Belmont has its out-of-season reasons

By Carl Lakey  
Times Tribune staff

What? Christmas — in March?  
Are these people crazy?

On March 8, downtown Belmont will become the scene of Christmas decorations — some nine months before the holiday.

Yuletide decorations in March might seem a bit ridiculous, even to those commercial-minded business people who insist on putting Christmas decorations up before the last Thanksgiving turkey is eaten.

"It's very, very weird," said Belmont Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Hegarty, who has become involved in bringing an early Christmas to Belmont.

But Belmont has no intention of

keeping up the decorations until December. These decorations are merely part of a one-week test.

Between March 8 and March 13, a selection of Christmas decorations will hang from light poles on the 1000 block of Sixth Avenue. Belmont residents can look up to see bows, bells, glitter, wreaths and various other ornaments.

The early Christmas is designed to raise money for decorations for Christmas 1987. The ultimate goal is to make Belmont the "1987 Christmas city of the Peninsula."

That will be no mean feat.

For more than a quarter of a century, Belmont residents have had to put up with old stars and 1-foot red and green bells, which have faded to orange and white since they were first hung from

light poles.

"They look pathetic," said Jim McLaughlin, a former city clerk who is one of the people responsible for bringing an early Christmas to Belmont.

Yet, each year, the city dusts off the bells and hangs them from the poles.

The old decorations prompted McLaughlin, known to many as the poet laureate of the city, to compose a poem before Christmas 1986 that started with the lines:

*When Santa comes around this year, he'll say 'Oh, what a pity.'*

*The decorations are so poor to greet me in this city.*

This year, McLaughlin and



Times Tribune staff photo by Joe Meleno

Nancy Hegarty and James McLaughlin and other Belmont officials are leaving it up to city's residents to decide what to do with the old Christmas decorations.

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others would like to see holiday decorations lining Ralston Avenue, the city's main east-west thoroughfare, McLaughlin said.

Of course, that doesn't explain why Christmas must start in March — or whether the city is setting itself up for an embarrassing number of guffaws from their municipal neighbors.

"It is unique," McLaughlin responded.

"People are going to say, 'What's going on?'" said Dave Kelley, the owner of Kelley Display Co. in Sacramento, which will put up the decorations.

"I can see how people wouldn't

understand it," he said. "But they've had trouble raising money for Christmas decorations in Belmont, and I think it will help the city get some money."

McLaughlin said in coming months he and others will be looking for donations for the decorations. McLaughlin said he hopes to raise at least \$10,000.

He said several merchants have expressed interest in donating raffle prizes so money can be earned to purchase the decorations.

"It's really kind of strange, but the trouble is, if you're going to raise money, you have to start early," said Hegarty.

She said she isn't worried about shocking Belmont residents.

"In Belmont? God knows how people will react. Anything can happen here," she said.

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CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS  
REDWOOD CITY TIMES  
MARCH 1987

# Vote delays Belmont's Christmas

By Carl Lakey  
Times Tribune staff  
MAR 3 1987

Several weeks ago, former Belmont City Clerk Jim McLaughlin announced an early Christmas would come to the city the week of March 8.

Now McLaughlin and others must be wondering if the "grinch who stole Christmas" also has come early.

But it's only city politics.

For a week, beginning this Sunday, McLaughlin and others planned to hang Christmas decorations from light poles on the 1000 block of Sixth Avenue in downtown Belmont.

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But the early Christmas has been put on hold.

In order to see the decorations up by Sunday, the city would have had to approve of the idea by Feb. 24. Fearing that voters and city officials would have their attention diverted from today's election for repairs to the city's storm drains, city officials balked at the idea of approving of the decorations until after the election.

Hanging up the decorations in March was a scheme of McLaughlin and Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Hegarty, who want to raise money for new decorations. The city has had to put up with the same decorations for more than a quarter of a century.

The idea was that residents would see the decorations, fall in

love with them and be compelled to kick in a little money so that Belmont would be the "1987 Christmas city of the Peninsula."

Then city officials stepped in, and informed McLaughlin that city approval for the decorations would be required.

"None of us thought that formal council approval would be required," McLaughlin said.

When he did find out, McLaughlin wanted the approval a week before the election. But he was told he'd have to wait.

"We wanted to keep them real separate," said Belmont City Manager Ed Everett. "We didn't want anything to hurt the chances of the election. But the decorations will still be going up."

Everett said the decorations will probably be approved by the council on March 10.

McLaughlin said the decorations will go up after that.

(OVER)

## Beginning to look a lot like. . .

**C**HRISTMAS DECORATIONS going up on St. Patrick's Day? Why not? Keep in mind, it happened in Belmont, the town that painted funny little faces on its fire hydrants for America's Bicentennial.

Actually, hanging the bells and wreaths from Ralston Avenue light poles is no different from reserving a spot in December for a summer vacation. Belmont's Chamber of Commerce and homeowners associations just want the townfolk to shop early — very early — for Christmas.

The idea is to show residents and merchants some spiffy, state-of-the-art decorations, which these leaders hope will soon replace the funky but faded ornaments the city has used for the past 25

years. A Sacramento-based purveyor of Christmas street ornaments is only too happy to oblige with a demonstration, begun Tuesday, on Ralston. Once the decorations have attracted some attention a raffle and other fund-raisers will be held to pay for whatever decor the campaigners can agree on — in time for this year's Christmas (read "shopping") season.

It all sounds perfectly logical. We have one suggestion, however: Why not really get into the holiday spirit and hang a block's worth of the *current* decorations adjacent to the demonstrator models? Their appearance by comparison would boost raffle-ticket sales — unless (egad!) the old ones are then thought to be not all that bad?

# Belmont has early Christmas

By Carl Lakey  
Times Tribune staff

A customer approached Linda Young Tuesday to tell her that there were strange people in front of her Belmont tanning salon. The people were hanging Christmas decorations from light poles.

Young thought the customer had spent the day imbibing St. Patrick's Day spirits.

"It must be a joke," she said before she was informed that there really were Christmas decorations in front of the store she manages, Holiday Sun Tanning Center on Ralston Avenue.

Tans in winter she could understand. But Christmas decorations on St. Patrick's Day?

"I thought the customer had too much green beer," she said.

But it was no joke. Those were bonafide Christmas decorations in the middle of March — even if the Santa who hung them up came from Sacramento.

Kelley Display Co. of Sacramento spent an hour hanging bows, bells, glitter, wreaths and other ornaments from light poles on Ralston Avenue, from Sixth Avenue to South Road.

The goal is to help the city earn money for better decorations for Christmas this year.

The decorations, which will be up for two weeks, created an odd sight for people working or driving on Ralston Avenue.

"It was weird. I didn't know what was going on. I thought it was Easter," said Ned Batshon, the assistant manager of the Mobil service station on Ralston Avenue.

Though people had trouble believing their eyes, the strategy of hanging the new decorations proved effective. It helped point out that the 25-year-old decorations Belmont usually hangs up pale in comparison to those now hanging up.

"Of course the city needs new ones," Batshon said. "They're old, they've been there for years."

Now residents who want better decorations have to translate that type of sentiment into dollars.

Former City Clerk Jim McLaughlin and Chamber of Commerce Director Nancy Hegarty, along with homeowner associations, have been the driving forces behind the early Christmas.

They hope that residents will pay for the types of decorations that were hung up Tuesday.

Their next step will be to place coupons in the city's recreation bulletin. The coupons will be for a raffle.

Some merchants already have donated prizes for the raffle.

"We hope more will donate prizes," Hegarty said.

She admitted that Christmas decorations in March were a bit odd.

"But we had people passing by Tuesday, honking their horns and giving the thumbs up," she said. "That made us feel pretty good."

(OVER)

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Times Tribune staff photo by Joe Melena

Ron Kelley (above) only seems to be a little bit ahead of time Tuesday on the streets of Belmont. The city paid Ron and his brother, Dave, to put up Christmas decorations on St. Patrick's Day so residents can decide if they want to keep the adornments.

BELMONT CHRISTMAS DECORATION  
COURIER-BULLETIN  
OCT. 1987

### **Belmont seeks holiday donations**

The Christmas spirit will be evident in Belmont this season, when at least 48 holiday wreaths decorate Ralston Avenue lanterns.

Although still short \$2,536 of a \$10,000 goal, the Belmont Christmas Decoration Committee has already placed the main order for the wreaths, said Jim McLaughlin, coordinator for the committee.

With \$7,464 already raised, McLaughlin said the committee remains hopeful it will make its goal and will be able to purchase more wreaths to decorate about 80 lanterns in total.

Donations are still being accepted, and a last ditch effort to raise more money will be made in November.

The first order of wreaths should be delivered by the end of this month.

If the committee is successful in reaching their goal, the wreaths will extend from Hiller Street to Alameda de las Pulgas.

Donations may be sent to the Belmont Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 645, 94002.

\*\*\*OCT 2 1987\*\*\*