



**Eat, drink
and be merry**
(but don't overdo it)

CHICAGO Parent

Real.
Happy.
Families.

Decorating to the extreme Teen lighting the holidays in West Chicago

When Zach Gebis was 16, he saw a synchronized light show online and asked his parents if he could try something similar. Little did his parents know their son's talent would soon be viewed by thousands of visitors who heard about his holiday light displays.

"When I showed them the videos, they were like, 'OK, if you can do that, go ahead,'" says Gebis, now 19 and a freshman in college. "They weren't quite expecting me to get such an amazing show as I got."

Gebis uses tens of thousands of LED lights, synchronized to a computer program that turns them off and on in time to music for a show that's not only stunning, but also a lot of fun.

The light show covers his entire home and lawn in West Chicago. He estimates one minute of music programming takes him about eight hours of set-up, and each year he has new ideas to make the light show bigger and better.

Surprisingly, his neighbors haven't complained about the lights, music and the thousands of visitors who make their way past his house each Halloween, Christmas and Fourth of July.

And as far as any possible calls to police to complain?

Nothing to worry about. "The sheriff's office actually came by one time to watch it because another officer saw the display and they were outside watching the show," Gebis says. "It was quite amazing."

Gebis isn't content to just have people drive by. The teen wants to understand what appeals to them the most and what makes them stop, get out and enjoy a closer look.

"I use a very sophisticated surveillance system (which he, of course, installed himself) that has artificial intelligence that counts the cars that drive by, cars that stop and how long," Gebis explains.

The system tells him what the light show is doing when the visitors are there, so he can assess what keeps their interest and what makes them drive past without stopping.

Recently, he decided there could be other uses for the surveillance system, so he installed one at his grandmother's house so the family can remotely monitor her and make sure she's OK.

"I've started programming software so other people can do this as well," Gebis says. "She likes it and she was OK with the idea. She said she's willing to be a test rat."

And while Gebis' family is willing to support his



Zach Gebis

PHOTO COURTESY ZACH GEBIS

endeavors, right down to the electric bill that comes with having a son who's a genius at light displays, for the most part, technology is something they just don't get.

"In fact, my mom and dad do not know how to send an email. They have to have me put a DVD on," Gebis says.

Gebis starts the light displays Dec. 1 and they generally are on 6-10 p.m. daily at his home at 27W537 Timber Lane, West Chicago. He says his house can be difficult to find, so visit his website for a detailed map, lightsofillinois.com.

**YOUR
FAMILY**

BY LIZ DeCARLO