



OregonLive.com

With: **Willisboro Argus**



Watch it on AT&T Digital Cable. SPECIAL OFFER: Get 2 months FREE! LEARN MORE ▶



- Home
- News + Biz
- Local
- Sports
- Forums + Chat
- Cams + Radio
- Living
- Entertainment

- Marketplace
- Classifieds

NEWS

The Oregonian

Click here to subscribe!

» [More From The Oregonian](#)

Environmental News

INSIDE News

- » [Business](#)
- » [Columnists](#)
- » [Live Traffic Report](#)
- » [NewsFlash](#)
- » [Obituaries](#)
- » [Opinion](#)
- » [Search](#)
- » [Weather](#)

▶ [SEND THIS PAGE](#)

SPEAK UP!

- » [Got something to say? Talk in our forums!](#)
- » [Log On to ChatXtra Now!](#)

HomeTown

Local News, Links & More!
Enter Town or Zip:

- » [Marketplace](#)
- » [Coupons](#)
- » [Auctions](#)
- » [E-Stores](#)
- » [Yellow Pages](#)
- » [All Classifieds](#)
- » [Find an AUTO](#)
- » [Find a HOME](#)
- » [Find a JOB](#)
- » [Place Your Ad](#)

» [Make hotel reservations worldwide!](#)



2% Buy-Down on selected homes

FROM OUR ADVERTISERS

- >> [Power your resume](#)
- >> [Click for Auto Insurance Quote](#)
- >> [Find your dream home](#)

» [Advertise With Us](#)

More twinkle for a lot less jingle

12/05/01

MICHELLE COLE

Oregon officially flipped the switch on its Christmas tree at the state Capitol on Tuesday, setting aglow 4,650 tiny red, green and yellow lights.

Don't get the wrong idea. State officials still care about conserving energy. And, no, the Capitol in Salem hasn't been exempted from this fall's electricity rate increases.

In fact, the thousands of lights decorating the 29-foot noble fir in the Capitol rotunda are nearly as environmentally correct as decking the tree with no lights at all. Donated by Portland General Electric, the lights will consume a small fraction of the energy of those that adorned last year's tree.

Capitol trees in Washington state and Montana also will be outfitted with the new lights, which are energy-saving strings of light-emitting diodes, or LEDs.

They demonstrate that you don't have to give up Christmas lights to conserve energy, said Margaret Gardner, executive director of the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance.

Even though the Northwest probably will escape the mandatory power blackouts that were predicted for this winter, the Portland-based alliance continues to promote conservation and energy efficiency in four states.

"You can build a coal plant, a gas-combustion plant, wind, geothermal -- or you can conserve that kilowatt hour," Gardner said. "If you compare the cost, conserving the kilowatt hour is about half the cost of any alternatives out there. And there are the environmental benefits as well."

The energy-saving lights used this year to decorate the Oregon state Christmas tree were developed by a small Pennsylvania company that started developing light-emitting diode technology for holiday string lights five years ago.

LED technology has been used for some time in traffic stoplights, brake lights and emergency-exit signs. This year, Fiber Optic Designs of Yardley, Pa., introduced what it says are the first indoor-outdoor LED Christmas lights that can be plugged into each other end to end, as well as directly into a standard household electric wall socket.

Built from tiny solid-state chips similar to those found in computers, LED lights consume one-tenth the energy of the miniature lights that most people use to decorate their indoor Christmas trees and just one-hundredth of the energy of the larger glass bulbs typically used to decorate outdoors.

The plastic LEDs do not conduct heat as the other bulbs do, and a string of LEDs will continue to function even with broken or missing pieces. And the manufacturer claims they will last more than 20 years.

The new lights represent a significant advance in holiday lighting technology, said Mike McSorley, an energy specialist at Washington State University who tested LED strings this fall for their energy consumption.

Although it appears that Fiber Optic Designs has the LED market to itself this holiday season, McSorley said other manufacturers are sure to follow next year with low-energy holiday lights of their own. "Holiday lighting is a \$2 billion industry," he said. "I know GE (General Electric) is looking at the technology."

A few wrinkles still must be ironed out.

Fiber Optic's lights, sold under the name "Forever Bright" in some Portland and Vancouver -area Rite Aid, Albertson's and True Value stores, are available this year only in red, green and golden yellow because of the cost and limits to LED color technology. But David Allen, Fiber Optic's president and chief executive, promises to have blue and crystal white lights in the stores next year.

LED lights are so new that few people have heard of them. The Oregon Zoo says it's interested in the lights for its holiday display but has had difficulty finding a supplier.

Lloyd Criner, who decked his Northeast Portland home with 100,000 lights last year, said he didn't know anything about low-energy lights. Sure, he'd give them a try, he said. But not because they save energy or money. Criner plans to hang 150,000 lights this year.

"I like to see a lot of pretty lights," he said. "And what the heck, the world might blow up, and then I won't have to pay my electric bill."

You can reach Michelle Cole at 503-294-5143 or by e-mail at michellecole@news.oregonian.com.

» [Send This Page](#) | » [Print This Page](#)

MORE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

- » [Agency gears up for wolf visits](#)
- » [Agency readies itself for arrival of wolves](#)
- » [More twinkle for a lot less jingle](#)

[More Environmental Stories](#) | [30-Day Archive](#) | [Complete News Index](#)

MORE FROM THE OREGONIAN

[Latest News](#) | [The Oregonian Links & Archives](#)

[User Agreement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help/Feedback](#) | [Advertise With Us](#)

© 2001 OregonLive.com. All Rights Reserved.