

North Pole moves south

**Bigger and better
is the new normal**

**By Ed Byrne
The Brillion News**

TOWN OF RANTOUL – The North Pole Christmas display that began in Troy Campbell's yard at his home in Kaukauna has moved south. Not to palm tree country, but definitely in a southerly direction, namely in the Killsnake Country on Lemke Road at the southeast corner of Rantoul.

The story has made TV news in the area, but "there's more to the story."

Troy Campbell, who started the big display and Christmas light show 15 years ago, moved his whole life and family to the small farm on Lemke Road.

The story begins with Campbell being a truck driver who suffered a career-ending injury - a broken neck. "After that, I was unable to work," he said.

When he was in the hospital, some fellow dressed in a Santa suit made his rounds cheering people up, and the idea of building up some homemade Christmas cheer grew in Campbell's mind and heart.

He also had twin sons who were disabled – one on a ventilator, the other autistic.

Campbell was also aware of the elderly in nursing homes and other people for whom cheer is a rare thing, and decided he would try to send some joy their way.

"I devoted my life to trying to change the world, to make it a better place for these people who co-exist with us," he said.

Campbell started doing a massive, high-tech exhibit at his home, but then moved it to a vacant lot in an



On Monday, the Chilton Chamber of Commerce welcomed the Official North Pole as a new "not-for-profit" chamber member. The award was made at the indoor maze of Christmas-themed displays at the North Pole's new location on the Town of Rantoul. Margaret and Troy Campbell (l-r) were given their certificate of membership by chamber President Jamie Wieting. (Ed Byrne/BN)

industrial park. It had neighborhood opposition in both places because the crowds of viewers got so big, and so Campbell began looking for a home out in the country.

"I pictured the old Frankenstein movie with people showing up with pitchforks and fire," he said.

The display also took about three months to put up, and two months to take down. Campbell wanted a place where he could leave it up year-round. Kaukauna was obviously not that place.

"People say I'm very eccentric," he said. "I take it way over the top, but you have to [in order] to get the attention of people to come and see this."

Over the years, the display itself evolved. At first, it was just "drive by and look at all the lights." Now, it is more up close and personal.

"It is interactive, where you don't have to stay in your car," he said. "You can get out, walk to the display, touch it and interact with it."

Most first-time visitors are surprised.

"When they get here, there's sensory overload," Campbell said. "That why people from all over the world come."

Visitors sign the North Pole guest book. In Kaukauna, the display had drawn spectators from every one of the United States and from 46 foreign countries.

"People come here just to see the display," he said.

The move to Rantoul happened quickly after Campbell decided to sell his home and move to a place where the North Pole would have a permanent home.

The six-acre Lemke Road property had only been on the market for three days when Campbell found it.

His first stop was to see the Rantoul Town Board, to make sure Rantoul would be cool with the North Pole coming to town permanently. The town welcomed him and so he brought the property.

Campbell put up a building to house many of the displays, and then went to New York to work with an

animatronics fabricator – "I design stuff and then he builds it."

In Rantoul, much of the attraction is indoors. That makes it ideal for anyone who is physically handicapped, especially people who must use a wheelchair.

"It becomes a safety issue [because] you can't push a wheelchair through mud," Campbell said.

There are all new displays. There is also a gift shop, a food area and a place for Santa – all ADA approved for access by the physically handicapped.

"It's going to be interactive, a family event," he said.

Besides the indoor displays, there are outdoor displays as well.

Campbell and his wife, Margaret, have been married for 34 years. They have four adult children – two sons and two daughters – plus grandchildren.

Most of the ideas for the North Pole displays have come from visitors.

The new site also includes plenty of parking for visitors.

The displays require so much electricity that Campbell had to have 400 amp service installed.

But one thing hasn't changed: It's all about lighting up displays to light up the eyes of people for whom the joy of Christmas is really something very special.

The display is open to the public Monday through Friday from 6 to 10 p.m.; and on Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 10 p.m. It is located at N5207 Lemke Road.

Private showings are also available by going through the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/The-North-Pole-Official-Page-933039680121435>.