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Massive Department 56 Snow Village Collection Donated to Romeoville's White Fence Farm

In the year 2000, Romeoville resident Darlene Rossok started collecting light up houses and figurines from the Department 56 Snow Village line. And much like any collection, it grew. By the time she was finished (only because she ran out of room), she had 130 illuminated buildings and 228 figurines. She had scenes from both an alpine and New England village, Dickensian London, New York City, Disneyland, Bedford Falls (from *It's a Wonderful Life*), and the North Pole. To add to the magic, she had 77 feet of railroad track that was split into two sections, each running a train. She hung deep blue fabric with a starry night pattern all around the village and further enhanced this by hanging cardboard perforated with Christmas lights behind the fabric. The lights were arranged in the shape of star constellations that reflected the birthdays of her family. She hired a designer, Brian Schroats, to build a base that was fit for her collection. Brian sculpted mountains, ravines, and rivers. He built tunnels and bridges for the trains and the Statue of Liberty had her own island in the middle of a bay. Another hire, Craig Newberg, came in to do all the electrical work, which was hidden beneath the Styrofoam base. When all was said and done, the basement-based display spanned two wall lengths in a giant L formation that was four feet deep by a combined 55 feet long. It was the centerpiece of the room that she and her husband Paul used to entertain guests in their Grand Haven home.



After almost two decades of personally enjoying and sharing the Snow Village with neighbors, friends, and relatives, Darlene passed away. Her house (and the Snow Village within it) fell to her son Jim and daughter Eileen, as Paul had passed away years prior. They were against selling it off piece by piece and ideally wanted to keep the collection together. When White Fence Farm restaurant was made aware of the collection and that Jim and Eileen were willing to donate it if they could keep it in Romeoville as one collection, owner Laura Hastert made room for it. On September 27, 2023, the buildings, figurines, tables, and custom base were delivered to White Fence Farm and setup began. It now stands in the Route 66 Room, available for diners to see all year around.

"The Snow Village is very special to my sister and I," said Jim Elliott, Darlene's son, and president of Diveheart, her favorite charity. "We are very happy that we can donate it in our mother's memory, as a complete collection, to Romeoville, the place she loved so much." Darlene would attend Meet the

Mayor, holiday activities, fireworks, and senior fairs. She and Paul were active members of the Golden Age Club: he was the treasurer and she was in charge of the float for the parade. They both loved the activities and community involvement in Romeoville and Grand Haven.

"This collection is truly awe-inspiring in its size and intricacy," said Mayor Noak. "Darlene showed it to me years ago and I am very excited that everyone will now be able to see it. We are very grateful that Jim and Eileen kept this collection in our community and that White Fence Farm was able to offer it a home."

"So many folks are in awe of this collection," said Laura. "It taps into so many memories for all who are able to take time and walk though. Darlene and Paul would be very pleased to know their collection brings so much joy to so many. Our White Fence Farm family, along with Darlene and Paul's friend Craig Newberg, took great care in reconstructing this beautiful display."

"I look at the Snow Village as a museum quality collection that families from Romeoville and surrounding communities can enjoy," says Jim. "I think of my mother smiling down from heaven with the knowledge that her collection will continue to make people smile for generations to come."

Jim said that Darlene always wanted to help make the community where she lived a better place. Once you visit White Fence Farm (1376 Joliet Road) and see her Snow Village twinkling, you will surely agree that Darlene left her mark on Romeoville.

The official ribbon cutting for the Snow Village will take place on Friday, August 16 at 1 pm at White Fence Farm. Please note: food service at the restaurant does not begin until 4 pm.



Darlene Rossok