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Spirited man continues family legacy through festive display

Stephanie L. Smith | Staff Reporter | Posted: Sunday, November 29, 2015 5:15 pm

Sometimes the true meaning of giving during the holiday season is overshadowed, but Tim Sucher, also known as Father Christmas, has been shining light on this matter locally over the years.

“That’s been my nickname for quite a few years,” Sucher said.

The 62-year-old is a self-appointed holiday caretaker who creates a magical Christmas wonderland at the Christian Moerlein Malt House Taproom. He also coordinates a live nativity scene and petting zoo in the St. Francis’ courtyard with animals from Sunrock Farm in Wilder, Kentucky.

“This Christmas thing has been going on like most of my adult life,” Sucher said. “Well, most of my life, I should say because when we were kids growing up, my father was a Christmas buff.”

His father’s love of Christmas came as a result of the family’s Christmas Club contributions — a savings account designed to collect deposits every week of the year to fund holiday festivities.

“Someone who had lived very frugally throughout the year, [my dad] would always go nuts at Christmas time,” Sucher said. “He did all the decorating. He did all this stuff. I don’t think my mother would have been able to decorate a tree if her life depended on it. And as kids, it was always exciting.”

Previously held at St. Francis Seraph’s friary, this is the second year Sucher’s holiday display has been at Moerlein brewery. The display keeps growing in size, as well as excitement, as Sucher’s collection grows not only with purchases he makes, but also from people gifting him Santa figurines and nativity sets from different places around the world.

Sucher’s collection includes over 40 nativity sets from countries such as Ireland, the Philippines, Uganda and Italy.



Moerlein Display

A miniature Dickens' village display at Moerlein Brewery. Stephanie Smith | Staff Photographer

The display is also part of Sucher's ministry. He is the assistant pastor of St. Francis Seraph but, inspired by Pope Francis, he was released from his administrative duties to work on the streets.

"[Pope Francis] is challenging us to get out of the rectories, get out of the friaries, get out to where people are," Sucher said.

"One of my favorite sayings that he said is, 'You've got to smell like the sheep.' Ever since Pope Francis has been elected and all this stuff he has done — not just what he's said, but what he's doing himself — has challenged me to say 'what can I do?' I'd like to be free to spend time with the folks out on the steps of our church, and also to be in more places like the Moerlein taproom."

A familiar face among the crowd at Moerlein, Sucher can be found sitting in the bar most nights during the holiday season to talk and listen to people.

"When I was here last Christmas I had a number of various profound encounters with young adults who just wanted to talk," Sucher said.

Most young adults Sucher met struggled with the meaning of life, questioning what they were raised to believe in.

"It is my belief that at some point in everybody's life, they're called on this journey," Sucher said. "And this journey entails basically questioning everything that you've been taught, so that when you're kind of at the end of that journey, it's not somebody else's beliefs, or something somebody's kind of forced on you, it becomes your own."

Sucher has incorporated Christmas into his own personal journey. While he may indulge in Christmas decorations, his holiday season is dedicated to helping others.

"Everybody is called on this journey," he said. "Now some people refuse to go. They just never go. But if you go, this is what you can expect — there's a lot of fear involved, there's a lot of disorientation involved and there's a lot of confusion involved."

"But as someone talking to you from the other side of that journey, I can tell you it's all well worth it. You'll get through it, and you'll work through it, and you'll be much better off because of it."

The St. Francis Seraph Christmas display can be seen through Jan. 1 at Christian Moerlein on 1621 Moore St.