

Meet the Griffins: Celebrating Christmas in Rock Hill

It's the most wonderful time of the year, and in Rock Hill, it's hard to find a more spirited couple than David and Cathy Griffin. Their Melrose Drive home is transformed into a winter wonderland every November, spreading joy to friends and grandkids alike.

Cathy is a rare Rock Hill native, and David grew up in nearby Indian Land. When they met at a country bar in the early 80's, it was love at first sight. They were married in 1985 and moved into a home off Twin Lakes Road where they still live today.

Cathy has always loved the traditions and celebrations surrounding Christmas, but her new husband had grown up with more low-key holidays. The first tradition they began together was buying an ornament every Christmas with their names and the year. Each of their four children also got a personalized ornament with their name and the year. All the ornaments hung on the artificial family tree in the living room.

Why an artificial tree? Like most people, Cathy loved the smell of a real pine tree, but after her son was born, she noticed he got very sick every Christmas. After a couple years, they realized the problem—he had a severe pine allergy!

Since then, the Griffins have only used artificial trees. Because they could be re-used year after year, they started to add trees to their collection every Christmas. In addition to the family tree in the living room, they began setting up a tree in the kitchen and in each bedroom. Today, the collection of trees has grown to 181 inside and around 31 outside.

The family tree still stands in the living room, and it holds all of David and Cathy's ornaments from over the years. (When each of their children were married, they received their ornaments to hang in their own homes.) The other trees in the house each have unique themes, from Clemson and Elvis to Star Wars and Cowboys. Some change periodically while others—like the Clemson tree—are a yearly staple.

Cathy loves to craft, and she makes many of the ornaments herself, along with all the wreaths. She also collects "Night Before Christmas" books in different themes, and she sets up over 100 Santa decorations.

As you can imagine, it takes some time to deck the halls of the Griffin home, so they get an early start. On November 1st, after they wrap up the big Halloween party with their grandkids, Cathy and David head to the large shed on their property to retrieve the boxes and get started. David sets up the family tree in the living room and decorates outside, while Cathy takes charge of the rest of the house. It usually takes about a week to complete.

Once it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas in the Griffin home, the holiday traditions start!

So many of the family events center around the Griffins' grandkids. They're lucky to have four nearby: Elias (9), James and Eve (7), and Georgia (4). Two more grandchildren, Sutton and Leighton, live in Missouri, but participate when they can. They bake Christmas cookies, decorate gingerbread houses, and craft homemade presents for their parents, but one of the most beloved traditions is Polar Express night.

The family used to make the trek to the train station for the Polar Express every year, but in 2020, they needed to improvise. Cathy and David decorated their 1950 Ford pickup, passed out tickets and hot chocolate to the grandkids, and drove around the neighborhood in their pajamas. The kids loved their own special Polar Express and haven't been back to the train station since.

The home's festive décor serves as an enchanting backdrop for events all season long, starting with Thanksgiving. While not everyone eats their turkey and pumpkin pie surrounded by garland and lights, no one in the Griffin family seems to mind. They also host holiday parties for family and friends. On Christmas morning, everyone gathers around the family tree to open presents.

A retired history teacher, Cathy also loves taking the family to the candlelight tour at Brattonsville every year. The grandkids like all the activities during Christmasville, as well, and when they can, they all enjoy driving through the beautiful town of McAdenville.

Once the Christmas festivities are over, the decorations come down right away. It doesn't take near as long to pack up than it does to set up, but Cathy, now an adjunct history professor at York Tech, tries to have it all put away before school returns in January.

When David, a retired Army veteran and auto technology teacher, isn't setting up the outside decorations or driving the Polar Express truck, he enjoys taking the boat out on Lake Wylie. Cathy can usually be found running or crafting up some decorations for the next holiday. Both also really enjoy spending time with family.

In fact, family time took on a whole new meaning in 2020, when Cathy's backyard office space was turned into a homeschool set up for the grandkids! She taught them from 8 am until noon. Then she'd send them back inside the house for lunch and playtime with David while she taught her York Tech classes virtually. It was a busy time for the whole family, but some wonderful memories were made.

When summer rolls around, the whole family takes a vacation to Cherry Grove Beach, and though there isn't a snowflake in sight, Christmas is still on their minds. They visit the Christmas Mouse store in Myrtle Beach to pick out their yearly ornaments. They also try to swing by St. Nick Nack's in Callabash to keep the spirit of the season alive all year long.

Cathy, who's usually up before the sunrise, says there's nothing quite like enjoying a cup of coffee in her peaceful living room, surrounded by thousands of twinkling Christmas lights. It's a time of quiet reflection before the house is filled with laughter, excitement, and grandkids.

For the Griffin family, their decorations and traditions may only last a handful of weeks a year, but the love and memories last a lifetime.