

## PG LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

### *David Hartle*

This month, we speak with David Hartle, a true shining light in our community.

For several years, David has been entertaining and inspiring locals with his artistic light displays on the mountain just above Pleasant Grove. With many designs over the years, he's helped capture the emotions of holidays and events to bring the community together as we look to the mountain lights. For the first time, David tells the full story behind his artistic light installments.

### **Where are you from, David?**

I was born and raised right here in Pleasant Grove, and I'm a graduate from Pleasant Grove High School. I have spent much of my life in Pleasant Grove.

### **What are some of your earliest memories of the arts?**

As a kid I played the guitar for a few years. During that time, I enjoyed playing some older music, like the Beatles, but I didn't stick with it. I enjoyed music, but it wasn't my passion at the time.

In High School, I had an increasing interest in getting into drawing and other forms of fine arts. I didn't have any experience, but I wanted to learn. I completed a few drawings and paintings, but I wasn't very satisfied with the results.

Over the years, I still had a growing interest in the arts. My wife knew about my interests, and she was very supportive of me trying new things. Early in our marriage, my wife surprised me with a paint by numbers set. As I didn't have much experience, we thought it may be a "fool proof" way to get into painting. I tried it, and I really liked it! In fact, after building up some confidence with that kit, I decided to take the next step and I completed a new painting without the paint by number kit. It was challenging, but I was proud of how it turned out. I suppose it helped to give me a little confidence in this growing interest in the arts, and I really enjoyed that learning experience.



## Where did you go from there?

After that positive experience, my wife encouraged me to take painting lessons to further pursue my interests. After considering some options, I decided to take painting classes from the notable and local Salt Lake City artist Marilyn Gandre. I was focusing on oil painting, which I absolutely loved! While oil painting can be challenging, I loved the richness of the colors in oils, and how you can work with that medium. I also had the opportunity to paint with acrylics, which I also enjoyed very much.

I took those classes for a few years, where I learned an incredible amount about painting. It was wonderful working with Marilyn.

## Did you continue painting after your classes?

I have continued painting since then. There's a Russian painter named Vladimir Vulegov that I follow. He creates stunning paintings of flowers, portraits and other scenes. I love his style, and I find myself trying to mimic his work at times. In fact, I even completed a portrait painting of my wife based on his style, which turned out great!



I haven't gotten into painting commercially yet. At one point, I did put a few paintings for sale at a family yard sale. I actually sold one of my paintings! It was a beautiful oil painting of the Heber Creeper. While I'm proud to say that I have sold some of my art, I have to humbly admit that it was my mother that bought the painting. She is so kind!

Today, I still find time to paint. More recently my life has been preoccupied with the construction of our new home, but now that we've moved in I am excited to carve out more time to continue this passion.

## You are also involved in the visual arts. Could you share the story of the lights on the mountains in Pleasant Grove and how that began?

I would love to share the story. As you may have seen, from time to time there is a light display on the mountains above Pleasant Grove near the "G". It's an interesting story about how that began, but before I get into it, I need to give a little more background.

I love designing landscaping, which truly is an artform of its own. Several years ago, I was working with some landscaping lights in our yard. As I was working with the lights, I could see the mountains above Pleasant Grove in the distance, and I began to wonder what it would look like if I were to put up some standard landscaping lights on the mountain to light up the trees. I decided to run a little test - I grabbed a single solar-powered landscape light, and I hiked up the mountain, set up the single light, then went home.

When it was finally dark enough that my landscape lights at home began to flicker on, I went out into my yard and looked up to the mountain. It took a moment, but I was finally able to pinpoint the location of that single landscape light up on the mountain, which was barely visible down below. This was the beginning of a much larger journey, and little did I know at that time what it would become.

A short time later, I decided to run some additional tests so that the lights could more easily be seen from my home. I created a plan for a big dipper design using several landscaping lights. I carried the lights up on the mountain, set them up in the big dipper shape as a part of the design, and then waited for nightfall to see how they looked. As they began to flicker on, I realized that they were absolutely visible in some sort of shape, but I really couldn't tell what they were. It was a flattened form of the big dipper with the wrong perspective. I was learning a lesson about designing visual arts to be seen at a distance; the mountain slopes are not flat - there are cliffs, hills, and rough terrain, as well as the aspect ratio to consider for viewing at a much lower vantage point in the city. I was realizing that there was more to simply setting up the lights. I had to calculate distances between lights and consider the elevation changes in the design so that the actual viewed display from in Pleasant Grove translated correctly.

### **Did you take down the lights immediately?**

I did take down the lights after that initial night. Interestingly, we weren't the only ones noticing the light display on the mountain - it was causing quite a stir! People throughout Pleasant Grove were seeing the lights that night, and they had no idea what it was. In the darkness of night, people couldn't see the mountain, but were only seeing these irregularly placed lights way out in the distance without a clear formation.

People began to speculate what these shining lights were through social posts and comments. I hadn't told anyone about my light tests, so no one knew it was me that put them up there, and no one knew the purpose. Some people thought that it was the letter "L" for Lindon City (because of the distorted perspective). Other people thought it was a large checkmark on the mountain. And others thought it may be aliens... in fact, a member of our community, Cyd LeMone, posted a Facebook message about the lights as speculation grew over a period of a couple hours, comparing the lights to the movie "Close Encounters of the



Third Kind". I let it play out, as it was fun to hear the many comments and speculation that was happening. It really got people talking in a short period of time!

Eventually, people started realizing that these were some sort of lights that had been installed on the mountain, and there were concerns about fire safety expressed. It was around that time that I felt it was time to take ownership of the experiment and explain that the lights were perfectly safe. The next day, we took down the lights.

### **Your lights were getting attention. What happened next?**

I realized that there was potential for creating something fun for our community with these lights. I began thinking up new designs in my backyard. I would pull out lights and arrange them into shapes and patterns, and then I'd have to figure out how they would visually translate from a flat yard surface, to a more varied mountain terrain surface.

My next project was a Christmas star, as it was the holiday season. I wanted it to be large and spectacular. I designed the star in a simple pattern that included around 40 total white lights. I enlisted a few helpers, and we hiked up the mountain to install the first "real" design to be seen in Pleasant Grove. We set up the design, waited for dark, crossed our fingers, and... it was breathtaking. The display was seen from down below just as I had imagined.

It wasn't my intention to leave the light display up for long. But people were loving the star on the mountain. To some it was beautiful. For others, it was inspiring. I was encouraged to leave the display up through Christmas for the whole community to enjoy, which I did.

### **Did you ever have complaints about the lights?**

There were never really any major complaints, as most people in our community enjoyed seeing them. At one point, we did have a complaint filed through the state about the location of the lights, and whether they were violating rights on public land. The complaint snowballed into a larger ordeal, which could have permanently shut down our whole operation. But after some research, we found that the land where the lights were being installed was privately owned. We contacted the owner of the land, and he said that he had seen the lights and loved seeing the designs. He was thrilled about what we were doing and encouraged us to continue - and we have!

### **What designs have you displayed over the years?**

Over the years that I've been displaying the lights, I've had many different designs displayed. For Strawberry Days, I display the large strawberry. For Christmas, I've continued to display the star annually. I like to create designs for holidays and special events. I've put up the olympic rings during the olympic season, various designs during Halloween, such as a ghost, a bat, and a pumpkin. I've worked with the Choose Kindness organization in Pleasant Grove to display a large heart on the mountain.

## Do you have a crew to help you with the lights?

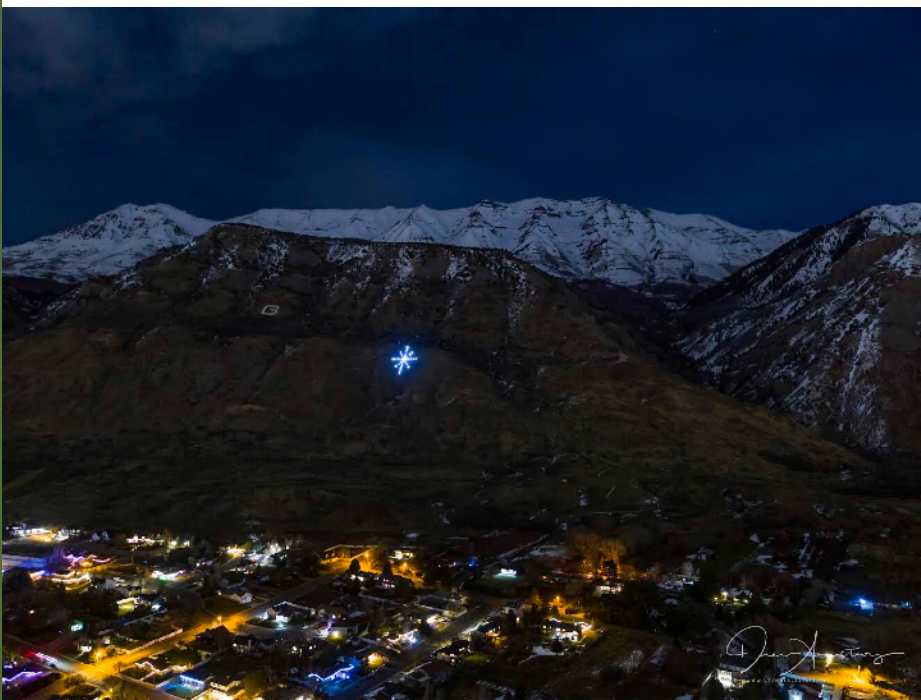
I've had so many volunteers over the years, most of whom are friends and family that provide the service of helping with the light displays. I am so grateful for their willingness to help bring these visions to life for the whole community to enjoy.

And I have to give a special expression of appreciation to my wife - for all your support over the years, and also all the time she spends helping with the mountain lighting projects. She works along side me through every installation, from conceptualizing the display, to the final quality control during installation. Often times, I am up on the mountain setting up the lights with my wife on the phone while she's down in the city. She tells me which lights need to be repositioned so that our design displays optimally. Sometimes those calls last for long periods of time, and I'm thankful to have her help and support in bringing everything to life.

## What's next for your light displays?

These light displays are a service to the community. We enjoy seeing how much people love seeing the lights, and we've received countless social comments, phone calls and text messages encouraging our projects and sharing appreciation for the displays. This is what keeps us going and inspires us to create new designs. We are grateful for all this community support.

And our light displays will continue. This year for Halloween, we are preparing a fun new idea. Keep your eyes on the mountain and try to be the first to see the new Halloween display! We hope that our designs will help you to be a light to others in your own way.





## CONNECT WITH DAVID HARTLE



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