

The Great Tidepool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



LIGHT FLURRY

Candy Cane Lane. It's such an annual expectation that many of us locals take it for granted, even though it involves dozens of residents spending scores of hours putting up thousands of lights and decorations. I strolled through the neighborhood on the first official night of the annual display and found everything from a synchronized light-and-music display to a charming song-and-dance performance by young members of Monterey Peninsula Musical Theater. Front yard themes this year range from The Simpsons and the Snow Miser to superheroes and squids, from Thomas the Train to a full-on model train railroad. It is a holiday hodgepodge of whimsy and wonder.



So to celebrate this well-known Pacific Grove treasure, here are some lesser-known trivia tidbits about the neighborhood:



- Although Candy Cane Lanes can be found nationwide—from Clovis (CA) and Corpus Christi (TX) to West Allis (WI) and Williamsport (PA)—PG's is surely the only one whose original decorations were constructed from broken coffins, thanks to the Paul Mortuary.
- When did it start? It depends on the source and criteria. I've seen 1940, 1946, 1952, 1956, 1957... It seems to have begun as a neighborhood rivalry in which the Morse Drive houses and the homes on Egan Avenue battled for best-decoration bragging rights. For years, as late as 2002, the city even handed out cash prizes. Candy Cane Lane dominated the neighborhood category, but in 1988 a new contender took the title—Todd Lane, the cul-de-sac off of Sinex, which styled itself "Santa Claus Lane."
- Nowadays, folks who live along the half-dozen streets in the neighborhood simply tell people they live in Candy Cane Lane (large candy canes that adorned front yards as early as 1940). But as late as the 1970s, newspapers still referred to the neighborhood as the "Country Club Heights area."





- This year marks the 50th anniversary of the only year in which Candy Cane Lane stayed dark. To reduce consumption of energy during the 1973 oil embargo, President Nixon banned “all outdoor Christmas lights, even those used to decorate houses.”
- The neighborhood’s holiday hub has always been tiny, triangular Julia Platt Park, named for a pioneering embryologist and activist who was elected mayor of PG in 1931 at the age of 74.
- In 1959, sheet metal worker Howard Cowen (the high school football stadium is named for the 92-year PG resident) created the 14-foot-tall robotic Nutcracker now on display at Platt Park. For several years, Pierre (that’s his name) wore a firefighter’s helmet and stood in front of the PG fire station. Before Cowen installed electric motors, scouts would climb inside and pull levers to make the arms and legs move.
- Two other men join Cowen as the tinkering triumvirate of Candy Cane Lane. In 1974, Larry Lloyd constructed a large replica of the Disneyland Castle that loomed over the Platt Park for several years. And in 1989, Les Goode contributed a moving Ferris wheel that has been restored and is on display at Platt Park.
- Contrary to rumor, residents DO NOT have to sign an I-will-decorate agreement before moving in. But this year, among the 70-plus houses in the neighborhood, I counted only a handful that were undecorated.
- Amid the myriad reindeer and Grinches and snowflakes and Frosty the Snowmen, I counted two-dozen St. Nicks in this latest iteration of Candy Cane Lane. I didn’t see him leaving many presents, but of course, the gift is the neighborhood itself.

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