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Lancaster elves decorate governor's residence (and bake these showstopping sweets)



ERIN NEGLEY | Staff Writer Updated 4 hrs ago Comments





The governor's mansion welcomed the holidays this year with a towering Christmas tree covered with gold ornaments and red berries. In the dining room, sculpted chocolate showpieces wow visitors and an elaborate train display chugs away in the state room. And it's all thanks to Lancaster County designers and pastry chefs.

In time for last week's open house, the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania set up the model train. The Old Candle Barn decorated the dining room and the grand hall entry and Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts made a festive tiered cake, plus several showpieces from chocolate and fondant. All of this happens at a busy time of year, yet the locals rearranged their schedules to take on the high-profile volunteer work.

For The Old Candle Barn, the timing was after the post-Thanksgiving decorating rush and before the business' own open house, its busiest weekend of the year. Still, designers thought it would be fun and said yes, said owner Missy Hurst.

For the cooking school, the assignment was a welcome challenge and a chance to spread the word about the pastry arts program, said Susan Notter, program director.

Plus, it was special to overhear at an open house people comment on their hard work.

"Wow you can do this with sugar and chocolate?" they said.

We asked our local decorators and bakers about their work at the governor's residence and how you can do something similar at home, even if you don't have a mansion.



The Old Candle Barn, Intercourse, decorated the dining room and the grand hall entry.

The theme: The Old Candle Barn worked with the house's existing colors of deep reds, golds and bronzes.

Point of pride: "The dining room table," Hurst said via email. "As soon as we saw the room, we knew we were going to use glass cylinders with candlelight. The wooden boxes used to contain the glass cylinders are handmade by a local craftsman and are sold at The Old Candle Barn."

The work: The designers spent more than a month pulling items, buying new things and decorating in a staging area in the business' basement. Decorating the house took seven people (including Hurst's mother-in-law, sister and three daughters) six hours.

Ideas to borrow: "Go with the style of your room, using similar color theme throughout," Hurst said. "Use versatile pieces, like the glass cylinders and wooden box, where you can simply change the accessories to fit the season."



The [Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania](#), Strasburg, provided an operating train and village under the tree in the State Room.

The theme: Christmas through the years. “We utilized two G-scale train sets (“White Christmas” and “A Night Before Christmas”) generously donated to us by Bachmann Trains, a Pennsylvania-based company,” Deborah Reddig, museum advancement director, said via email. “We set the stage with various buildings, people, trees, other accessories and snow for a small winter wonderland.”

Point of pride: “We are delighted to represent the great institution of railroading that has an historical and contemporary significance in Pennsylvania and our nation,” Reddig said. “It is also our pleasure to see children and families, people of all ages, come together and enjoy the trains.”

The work: Installation took a team of four from the museum four hours.

Ideas to borrow: “Probably the best thing for people who are starting out with an operating train layout is to keep it relatively simple,” Reddig said. “There are many fine model trains, sets and accessories available from companies like Bachmann, Lionel, Walthers, Bowser and others.”

Visitors can see layouts and learn tips at the museum’s Model Railroading Days Aug. 20 and 21.



Faculty at [Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts](#), Lancaster, made a tiered cake and several showpieces from chocolate and fondant.

The theme: Three faculty members, Notter, plus Joe Cumm and Andrew Sciarretta, had free rein. They made a large showpiece with a poinsettia, candles and a small snowman, all edible. They made a tiered cake with layers covered with “cobblestones,” snow, ice and evergreen icing. And there were tall Santa sculptures, all made from modeling chocolate and fondant.

Point of pride: Notter was personally pleased with the look on her Santa’s face. “It’s hard sometimes to capture expression,” she said.

The work: Notter spent two days alone working on the Santa head. Students have helped with the baking in the past, but the time commitment’s extensive. That’s one reason why faculty did the work this year.

Ideas to borrow: The pine cones and Christmas ornaments are made of chocolate, but you don’t need to be a professional to get the same look. Stores sell molds to easily make your own. Add a little piping to make them look even more decorative, Notter said.

You can spot more of the decorations made in Lancaster in this video:

