



PATTY SPENCER JONES, shown with her dog, Dinky Louise, readies Christmas gifts for family and friends in "Santa's room".



DONNA JONES adds a finishing touch to the Christmas tree at her parents' home.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

# Patty Jones Celebrates The Spirit Of Christmas

BY SUSAN USHER

One look around her home and it's obvious: Patty Spencer Jones loves Christmas.

Every room of the house is a celebration of the holiday—from the ribbons and centerpiece on the dining room table to "Santa's room," the bedroom that each December is transformed into Santa's workshop, a place where family members know not to plunder.

Even Dinky Louise, the family Chihuahua, gets in on the act with a colorful Christmas cap and scarf.

Mrs. Jones always likes company, but about two weeks before Christmas, she encourages friends to come enjoy her decorations and visit a while in the house built by her husband, C. R. Jones Sr., 31 years ago.

"I always tell everybody to come by and see me, anytime of day. We always have the house full of cookies, pies and other treats," she said. Mrs. Jones lets her severe rheumatoid arthritis interfere with daily life as little as possible, including getting ready for Christmas.

It was the same during her 14 years as the "bookmobile lady" for the county library; Mrs. Jones always decorated a small tree right in the middle of the bookmobile, played Christmas carols on her radio and treated patrons to holiday goodies as she traveled across

Brunswick County.

Her love of the season dates back to childhood, growing up in the country near Antioch Church between Bolivia and Southport.

Her memories of childhood Christmases are a collage—the big bag of chocolate drops and fruit her father bought each year and hid until Christmas; the first Christmas tree she can recall, a holly berry tree decorated by her mother; and Rosie May, the doll she received when she was three years old and still has, minus her beautiful china head.

"I believed in Santa Claus until I was a big girl. Growing up in the country we didn't go anywhere to hear anything different," she said.

"It's a special time of year," she reflected during a recent visit to her home on N.C. 179 just outside the Shallotte town limits. "It's the bestest time of year."

"But the most important thing is the meaning of it—the birth of Christ. My mama and daddy instilled that in me.

"It's a time of year I think people ought to appreciate more than they do. They ought to celebrate it the right way. If they did, they would get more out of it."

For her, Christmas is a time for giving, for showing her love for others. She keeps her eyes open year-round

for gifts that will especially please family and friends.

While her own children, Shirley, C.R. Jr. and Donna, were young she did her best to make Christmas special for them, an almost magical time of year. She still does, and her children share Patty Jones' love of Christmas.

"She's decorated like this ever since I can remember," recalled her daughter, Donna, of Shallotte Point, who took charge this year of decorating the large tree in the living room. "She adds a little bit every year."

When the children were small, each had a small tree in his or her room. Today Mrs. Jones has only one small tree, in her hobby room. It is decorated with tiny churches of all types, including one with the name of her church on it, Village Point United Methodist Church.

Beneath the large tree in the living room nestles a wintry New England village, with a short-line railroad running nearby. Most of the ornaments on the tree were gifts from either family members or friends.

"I love them all, but I do like my Santas," she said, looking around.

Other decorations are "finds." Mrs. Jones and Donna set out the day after Christmas each year looking for special buys for the following year. She stores her

decorations in a special shed behind the house built just for that purpose. "I store it real good because I plan on being around the next year to enjoy them," she said.

While she enjoys new decorations, Mrs. Jones said the old ones are special; she always finds a place for them. She still has a papier-mache Santa Claus thrown from a fire truck at a Christmas parade she attended in Wilmington as a child.

Mrs. Jones keeps Christmas in mind year-round. As the unofficial chronicler of the Spencer family, she collects tidbits of information on the family genealogy—old photographs; transcripts of interviews with older family members; copies of deeds, birth certificates and other records; gravestone inscriptions—anything she can find. Each Christmas she makes copies of everything she's uncovered during the year and shares the information with 31 family members. "Some people just collect the data," she said. "But what I enjoy most is the personal information—what color someone's eyes were, their favorite foods, what they did for living, that kind of thing."

"You know, my family really appreciates it and I love doing it."

That's because Patty Jones enjoys the spirit of Christmas all year long.

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