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DEIDRE COMBES GORDON
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AT HOME



It's a homecoming, of sorts, for the McCall family and the furnishings they've restored to their 26-room manor

A child's Christmas in Wenonah



Returned: Viki and Louis McCall bought back the house her parents had sold.

Many more choices in satellite TV

For the second year in a row, home satellite-television systems promise to be among the hottest gift items of the season.

Many of the systems feature more than 150 channels of programming and include built-in parental controls. And the cost of owning one of these technological marvels is not as high as you might think.

The latest-selling category of satellite system — and the one credited with reviving the market — is the Digital Satellite System (DSS).

An entry level DSS, with a dish measuring 18 inches in diameter, costs around \$800. Installation costs another \$100 to \$200. This purchase includes necessary hardware — the programming is sold separately and is provided by two companies: DirecTV and DISH.

DirecTV offers the basic and pay-per-view channels, as well as season tickets for football, baseball and basketball broadcasts. Package prices range from \$8 per month for pay-per-view access channels to \$30 per month to receive 150 channels.

Specialty sports packages also add a la carte. For example, you can purchase the NFL Sunday Ticket package, which allows you to see any NFL Sunday game for \$140 per season.

DISH offers premium channels such as HBO, Showtime, Cinemax and the Movie Channel. Prices for DISH range from \$8 per month for seven channels to \$38 per month for 20 channels.

Two companies are offering Digital Satellite Systems: RCA and Sony. RCA introduced the first DSS last year. The company has six models on the market, ranging in price from \$600 to \$1,000.

Three of the RCA models include SmartSet, an on-screen guide that makes locating and recording programs easier than ever. For more information, call 800-336-1900.

Sony recently entered the DSS arena with three models, ranging in price from \$700 to \$900. The Sony models include the manufacturer's Express Navigator system, an on-screen guide.

For more information about the Sony systems, call 800-322-7969. More manufacturers are planning to enter the DSS arena next year, including Toshiba, Hitachi, Magnavox, United, Aphelion and TeleChoice.

For consumers who are leery of investing in a satellite system because they're afraid the advance of technology will make their system obsolete, Primestar offers an alternative.

At a diameter of 3 feet, the Primestar dish is a bit larger than that of the Digital Satellite System. But instead of having to lay out upwards of \$900, you can rent this unit for \$30 per month, which covers programming, a program guide and maintenance.

The basic rental package gives you access to 70 channels. For \$45 per month, you get 90 channels. There is a one-time installation charge of \$150. For more information about Primestar, call 800-PRIMESTAR.

Have a question? Write the Gadget Guru at 88 White Bridge Road, Suite 215, Nashville, Tenn. 37205. If you're an America Online subscriber, you can send a message to the bulletin board (keyword: GADGET_GURU).

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By EILEEN SMITH
Courier-Post Staff

If Santa would grant Viki McCall one wish, she would ask for the bits and pieces of childhood memories — rays of colored sunlight filtered through stained glass, chorale swirling on the boards, three hours carved into the beautifully turned stairway McCall climbed to bed.

McCall still resides in the Tudor manor in Wenonah where she grew up. But somewhere between the time McCall's parents sold the house in the 1980s and McCall bought it back in the 1990s, many of the architectural artifacts vanished — most likely sold off by an interim owner facing foreclosure.

"It was heartbreaking to come back and see what was missing," McCall says.

McCall, her husband, Louis, and their four children reside in the 26-room manor originally known as Little Grange. The manor was built in 1897 by Edward Farr, a wealthy industrialist who fathered 11 children.

Little Grange was a working estate in those days, with a carriage house, 11 acres and a dairy. McCall's parents, George and Marcy Beaman, bought the manor in the 1960s. McCall grew up reading Little Grange maxims, carved in wood over the doors that lead from the foyer. She recalls, "FRIENDS IN EVERY SEASON, BRIGHT AND DIM."

The carved notices are gone, as are two massive fireplaces, dining room cupboards with beveled glass doors, dormer of stained glass windows and a large wood statue of Saint Peter that had graced the foyer.

When the McCalls bought the manor in 1991, they contacted Farr's son surviving son, Billy, who was then 91. The McCalls flew to North Carolina to spend three days with Farr, who proved still sharp as a tack, as well as a font of information about the history of the house.

"Our goal is to keep the downstairs as close to the original as possible," McCall says. "How lucky we were to find wonderful Willy."

How fortunate, too, the McCalls were to locate a tree of leaded glass windows, now restored to their rightful home in the study.

Still intact is a rounded marble fireplace. The big brick mantel in the entry is an original as well, probably spared from salvage because it was too large to



When a mantel of carved cherry rose wood is an English marble piece from the 1830s (left), McCall discovered on a trip to New Orleans.

A new addition to Little Grange is 7-month-old Sean McCall, the first baby to be born since the Great Depression. Sean's older siblings are Heather, 8; Louis, who will be 7 at Christmas; and Christina, 4.

For Sean's first Christmas, Little Grange is decorated with tall trees and multitudes of magical festive swags and flowers are arranged by the McCall's friend and decorator-in-residence, Darlene Vest of Silk Elegance.

Sean also will join in a holiday tradition his mother cherished when she was a small girl — a visit from Babal Hungerford, a neighbor of many decades.

Sony McCall, "It wouldn't be Christmas Eve without her."

If you're going
The McCall house is one of eight homes and five historic buildings that will be open for "A Wenonah Christmas," a tour sponsored by the Wenonah Fine Arts Society. The tour takes place from 3 to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are \$10. For details on food, music and more, call 486-5666. If you have information or artifacts from Little Grange, call 569-2774.

Warm grandeur: The Tudor manor retains its finely turned spindles (above) and some original features. At Christmas, the exterior is decorated with bows and the interior shines with lights.

Christmas lights

To create a warm Christmas glow, arrange candleholders of different styles, sizes and colors. Fill some holders with candles and others with flowers, potpourri or miniature pine cones.

The candleholders shown here are sold at JCPenney stores. Prices range from \$9 to \$50.

Evergreen crafts

The appeal of flowers is perennial — and some flowers last almost that long.

Now even novices can dazzle guests with their floral handiwork, with the guide Flower Craft: Practical Techniques and Projects Using Fresh, Dried, Waxed, and Preserved Flowers (Reader's Digest, \$25).

The book includes 25 projects, ranging from wreaths to gift wrap. To learn more, call 800-795-8646.

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