

PRETTY FLASH

LINDSEY DUCE

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Dazzling \$10k prize hots up towns' Christmas lights

Competition fierce for glittering \$10k prize

WENDY Bowyer and her family have taken out top honours in the Barcaldine Regional Council Christmas lights competition for the past three years. But with an added incentive this year to the residents of Alpha and Jericho, the contest just got a little fiercer.

The \$50 first prize has skyrocketed to \$10,000 after Australia's richest woman Gina Rinehart put her hand up to sponsor the council's festive event through Hancock Coal and GVK Group.

With judging taking place from now until next Wednesday, residents are sleeping with their fingers and toes crossed as they hope to take out the top spot and win a trip to Singapore for two adults and two children including return flights, five nights' accommodation at Traders Hotel, taxes, breakfasts,

high tea at Raffles, transfers and to top it off, \$500 spending money.

But Wendy said she would be just as happy to take out second prize, which is \$2500 of cold, hard cash.

"It's amazing, because every other year you ask people if they are going to do the lights and they always have an excuse not to, but all of a sudden they've got time this year," she said with a laugh.

For Wendy, her husband Rex and their three children, putting the lights up each year was about more than just winning any prize.

"My husband and I just enjoy watching the kids come around and gaze at them. We don't do it to win the prize, it's more of a social thing. Some nights we don't even get inside until after 8.30pm because you just talk to everyone and catch up. It's fun and we enjoy it," she said.

With fairy lights, rope silhouettes, inflatable characters and solar powered candy canes and deers, Wendy said it was scary to think just how much she had spent on lights over the years.

"I have a large yard, so I try to fit in as much as I can," she said.

"I try to use as much solar as I can and it's taken me a good couple of weeks to slowly go at it."

Barcaldine Regional Council Mayor Rob Chandler said this year's prize was fantastic and an excellent incentive for Alpha and Jericho residents to get into the Christmas spirit.

"I took Mrs Rinehart for a drive around Alpha and Jericho after the floods and she said she wanted to do something for the people. So she came to us with the idea of sponsoring the Christmas lights competition and the gardening competition held recently," he said.

"It's a great way for companies to get involved in the community and Hancock Coal has been very proactive in the community."

Cr Chandler said he hadn't seen the amount of people who had entered the competition, but with 600 people in the Alpha and Jericho communities combined people were pretty excited about their odds.

"I think everyone is pretty excited, it's a great prize and I think a lot of people will have a crack at it," he said.

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