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It started with one snowman — actually with several of those somewhat-cheesy-looking, blow-molded plastic snowmen that Bridget Molitor would see glowing on lawns as she traveled around Fargo, N.D., as a sales representative in 1998.

Bridget Molitor with a few of her favorite snowmen. Photo by Sam Arendt

“They didn’t look that fabulous one on one, but I thought, ‘Wouldn’t they look great as a group?’” said Molitor, who now lives in Port Washington with her husband Mark and 71 snowmen.

The little men are lined up, two to three deep, on the front lawn of their Ashley Drive home, prompting people to stop as they walk or drive by and sometimes take pictures.

Several families have had Christmas photos taken with the snowmen.

“People seem to really enjoy them. It’s a gift we give to the community,” Molitor said. “We all try to do what we can with little things.”

Molitor also has a pumpkin display for Halloween and rabbit decorations for Easter, but the snowmen capture the hearts of most people.

“A mother and daughter gave me a Christmas plant because they said they enjoy them so much,” Molitor said.

“We got the nicest letter from a neighbor on the hill who said they look out at them every night.”

The Molitors moved into their Port home after they were married in August 2010, so this is the second year the snowmen have decorated their front lawn. They added outlets for the snowmen.

Molitor’s favorite is a smiling snowman with a perky carrot nose, jaunty top hat with a sprig of holly, green earmuffs, red scarf and a sleigh under his arm.

The oldest one holds a Merry Christmas sign.

No two are like. Several are from the same mold, but painted in different colors, including one with a green hat and yellow scarf for the Green Bay Packers. Another one sports Minnesota Vikings colors, but the couple are Packers fans.

Molitor believes she is missing only two snowmen styles — a tramp clown she once saw for sale for $600 and a sad clown.

“I don’t think the tramp will ever be mine. I’m not paying that kind of money. I don’t want the sad clown in my collection,” Molitor said. “This is a happy season, not a sad one.”

Her husband tolerates her collection, Molitor said, hauling them out of their basement every Christmas season. She hopes to someday have a separate storage shed for them. Mark makes sure each one lights up, then connects them together.

They’re timed to go on at dusk and shut off at 10 p.m.

“Mark’s afraid we’ll disturb the neighbors if we keep them on too long,” Molitor said.

He may also be thinking about their electric bill, which was three times higher than normal last Christmas season. They switched to high-efficiency light bulbs and so far this year, their bill only doubled, Molitor said.

The snowmen appear on their lawn after Thanksgiving and go back into storage in early January.

When Molitor started collecting the snowmen, she took whatever she could find. Now, she wants only unique ones.

“I went on eBay to find them. Friends would pick them up at flea markets. If someone had a

large collection, I would put a note in their mailbox to see if they wanted to sell them," Molitor said.

"I like the variety. I guess I like that retro vibe."

In 2000, Molitor moved from Fargo to Port Washington. She had eight to 10 snowmen her first year in Port.

"That winter it snowed 54 inches and they didn't get uncovered until March," Molitor said.

That was when she met Mark, who was a neighbor.

After three years, Molitor moved to White Bear Lake, Minn., where the collection got larger, thanks in part to an anonymous friend.

"Every year, someone secretly added to the collection. I never figured out who it was," Molitor said. "I thought it was an old neighbor, but he insists it wasn't him."

When the couple were married, a snowman and a snow lady dressed in wedding attire mysteriously appeared at their reception in Upper Lake Park. Guests had their pictures taken with them.

Molitor also collects snowman cookie jars and a Christmas tree is filled with snowman ornaments, but it's the ones outside that she likes most.

Each old-fashioned blown snowman seems to have a personality and has become a friend over the years, Molitor said.

"Mark likes to protest about them, but I think he secretly enjoys them," she said.