

HIGHER CALLING

Arborist donates his services to ensure lights, and celebration, go on

By Sharon Noguchi

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Sixty feet off the ground, Straun Edwards was lacing a strand of Christmas lights around a redwood branch, looking focused but as confident and comfortable as if his feet were firmly planted on the ground.

On Sunday, Edwards was putting the finishing touches on his job decorating a 90-foot coast redwood that stands sentry at the entrance to Willow Glen Elementary School at Lincoln and Minnesota avenues in San Jose.

The tree on Thursday will be the centerpiece of the annual Willow Glen tree-lighting ceremony.

Online Extra

See a slideshow at www.mercurynews.com/extra.

While the Willow Glen ceremony has been a tradition of the neighboring business district and community,

this year the tree-lighting almost was ambushed by the recession.

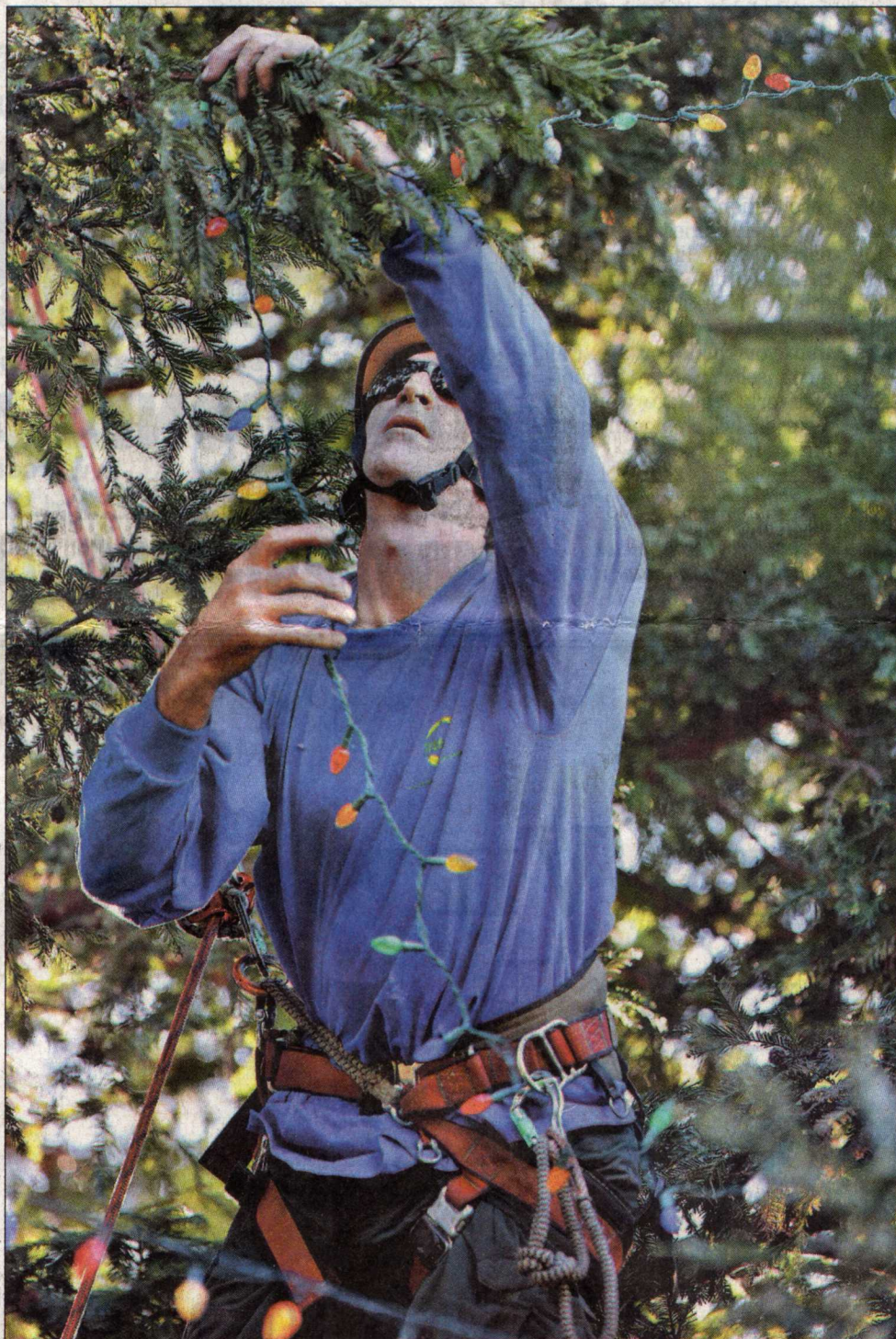
"We were worried we would have a tree-lighting ceremony without the lights," said Samantha Fein, a parent who heads the group Willow Glen Community Tree Lighting.

This year, no one had money to pay to string lights on the redwood. Lights from previous years, which had been left in the tree, had been vandalized.

Then Erika Friedman of the Willow Glen PTA approached Edwards, who had done work on her yard.

The 38-year-old Saratoga arborist volunteered to string the lights without charge, and without using a crane or cherry picker as in the past.

The Willow Glen Business Association arranged for Ace Hardware



JOSIE LEPE — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

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TREE-LIGHTING CEREMONIES IN SAN JOSE

■ The Willow Glen tree-lighting ceremony begins at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at Willow Glen Elementary School, 1425 Lincoln Ave., San Jose. It will feature a book fair and choirs from Willow Glen and River Glen elementary schools and Willow Glen Middle School. Homemade tamales, hot chocolate and churros will be sold. The Girl Scouts will conduct a winter coat drive. The festival is free and open to the public.

■ Another lighting ceremony, billed to be at the largest living tree in the area, will be held at 5:30 p.m.



Volunteer Straun Edwards, 38, world-champion tree climber, strings multicolor lights on a 90-foot coast redwood at Willow Glen Elementary School in San Jose on Sunday.

