



By Paul Grimaldi

Journal Staff Writer

Full-blown electric-meter spinners like the outdoor Christmas display put up by the former Warwick School Committee chairman may be the exception rather than the rule for Christmas 2009.

"Driving home last night, NOBODY has Christmas lights up except me, who spent all day in the rain and drizzle over the weekend freezing his whatzis off to put the mini-lights on the tree outside," said David Graves, of Barrington, who is also a spokesman for power utility National Grid.

The economy, at least locally, seems to have dimmed displays of klieg-light intensity and let the air out of the market for Macy-esque inflatables that began popping up on suburban lawns a few years ago.

"I would say [display goods] are not selling as much as they were a couple of years ago," said Marc Gillson, owner of Mount Pleasant Hardware in Providence. "People are not spending as much money as they have in the past."

Gargantuan Santas, Rudolphins and Frosty the Snowmen were the in thing for a time, bumping aside mangers, holly wreaths and the lighted reindeer that suburbanites used to fill out the field-sized lawns of their McMansions.

With money getting tighter, people got religion.

"What we found, the items that are the hottest sellers ... are very strong religious themes," Chuck Casto, a spokesman for CSN Stores LLC, of Boston, a collection of 250 online shopping sites.

The three wise men, Jesus, Mary and Joseph and similar figures are among the most popular sellers so far in 2009, he said.

"It doesn't get much more religious than that," Casto said.

Also, returning to lawns in 2009 -- reindeer. Whether bent-necked or erect, wooden or wire, lighted or sans illumination, the ersatz animals are migrating back across the suburban tracts.

Abundant around the turn of the century, they faded away for a time.

"Now, they're coming back in popularity," Bromberg said. "I think people wanted to be a little more discrete."