

Touching Strangers & Friends

By Jim Peters

Show your Village to the World!

It's one thing to create a marvelous Christmas village display, or fall village display, or Easter village display, or summer Fourth of July village display.

It's another thing to produce a great video (for Facebook or YouTube) that shows the outside world how incredible your village really is. The skill set needed is ***more similar than different***, yet completely transferable – design, color, lighting, creativity, patience, attention to detail. ***You don't need much of a village display to make a really good video.***

Bill Channell, our webmaster of The Village Collector, generously asked me to contribute and to start a Column here about how to make really good village videos. I looked at the other contributors' columns and their credentials – Larry Treadwell, David Spears and Jim Kellow – holy moly! I'm humbled and honored to contribute. So here I am.



About Me

A little about me – I'm not a collector. I'm a displayer. I buy and sell buildings, structures and accessories constantly, with the goal of creating a different large Christmas village each year. That's the fun part for me. I'll use any manufacturer's structure, figurines and accessories if it fits into my vision or imagining for a vignette within each village display. Sometimes I have to build what I want, but I'm in no way crafty. Most villagers are far better at crafting landscapes and building accessories than I am. I use the camera to hide my deficiencies.

I'm a late bloomer to Christmas villages. I'm married to the "Crazy Christmas Tree Lady," as her daughters call her. We're up to 25 decorated trees, 118 Santas, and 49 snowpeople as the centerpieces of a fully decorated house each season.



After seeing a Christmas village in a neighbor's house as part of our neighborhood's 2009 annual Victorian Home Tour, I asked my wife Laura for some space for a small village display in 2010. I was allotted the top of the dining room buffet – all of 2' by 6' of space. That's when I became infected with the "Christmas village disease."

How to start? What to create? What materials to use? What kinds of accessories? I didn't yet know of the existence of our local villager club – the Queen City Villagers – so I learned how to build a village by watching YouTube videos.

That modest little 2010 village square of seven buildings atop the buffet turned into a much larger village in 2011 up on our open third floor – 108 buildings and structures on top of 13 folding tables,

each 2' x 4' and adjustable to 21", 24", 29" or 36" heights (104 sq. ft.), and augmented with styrofoam to further change levels. I made and uploaded my first village video on YouTube in 2011. Facebook was just beginning to rise in popularity in 2011, and YouTube had started in 2005.

It took me six years of trial and error – ***lots of errors*** – and quite a bit of study to figure out how to make a decent Christmas village YouTube movie.



I continued posting village videos each year, and each year's village display and each movie was better than the last. I became progressively better at both village construction and video-making by mostly watching how the best villagers exhibit their village on YouTube. They were so generous in answering my questions in the YouTube comments section. To this day I still love village construction

time lapse videos! If you have 9 minutes and like Department 56 Dickens Villages, here is the best time lapse village video of them all – Nancy builds her Christmas Village (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQOXLuhe2S4&t=2s>).

By 2017 I was making village movies that didn't make me cringe at my errors while watching it. Believe me, I've watched over a thousand village movies on YouTube. If you're a member of a Facebook villager Group (e.g., Dept 56 Villages, Lemax Addicts, De KerstdorpClub, Village Collectors), you can probably see another 300 to 400 each season. Most of them I can't finish, can't watch all the way through. Now with YouTube's new "preview" animated thumbnails, I can tell ahead of time that some videos are not worth watching.

There are slightly more than a dozen village videos each year that contain most or all the things you need to be entertained, feel emotion, and be amazed. They tend to be made by the same small group of villagers. These folks have the "skill" or the "formula" to capture your interest and imagination. The Village Collectors Hall of Fame contains most of this small group of talented video makers.

My goal at TheVillageCollector.com in this forum is to grow that group of villagers who can make outstanding videos to entertain the thousands of viewers out there looking for ideas and inspiration.

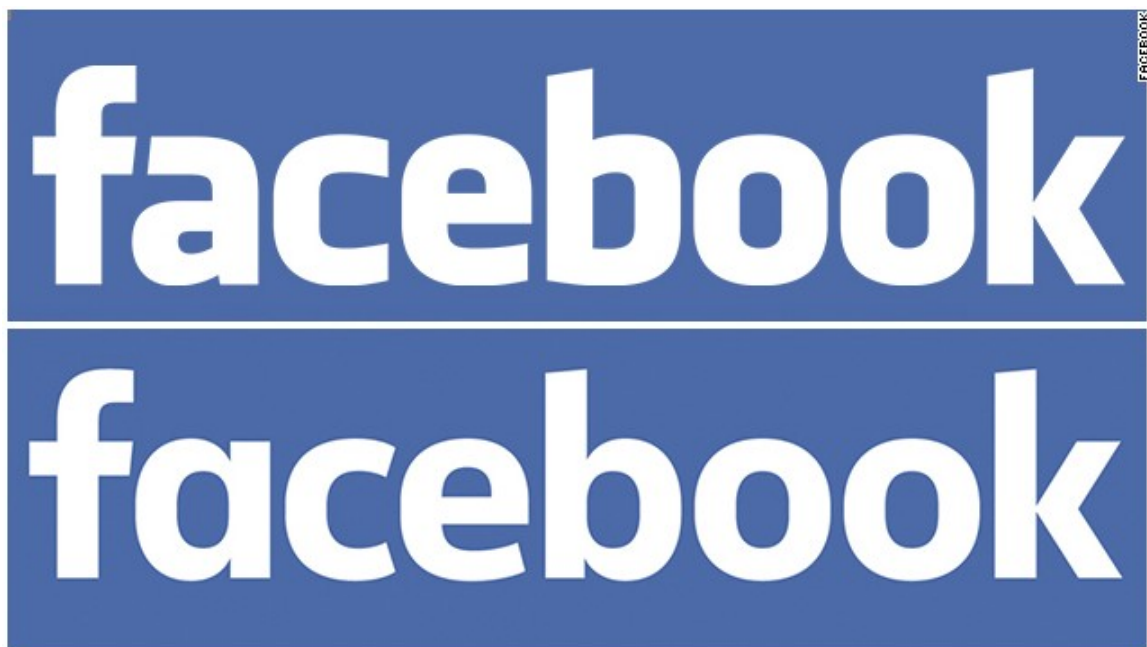
Why Make a Video?

After you've built your village, how many people are going to see it ***in person***? Dozens, or hundreds? Maybe Aunt Ethyl and Uncle Albert can't visit this year and you want them to see it. Let's face it, deep down inside there's some "show off" within us that needs/wants for others to enjoy our small seasonal fantasy land. Putting a video on the internet – it's the ***worldwide*** web – can enlarge the audience significantly.



Facebook or YouTube?

You can put your video on both, or just on Facebook. There are pros and cons for each. Facebook is simpler and widely available to most of us. YouTube is scarier (the unknown) but just as easy to sign up. Uploading videos to YouTube is a little more complicated. On Facebook the effective “lifetime” of your video is about two weeks. After that it becomes difficult to search for it. You can restrict viewing (and sharing) to your friends on Facebook, or open it to a wider audience like Facebook Groups and by allowing sharing. On YouTube the audience can be restricted to subscribers or open to the public. On YouTube your video can be easily searched and is readily available ***for years***.



Below are my YouTube village views by year, totaled up to the end of 2020. You can see that, after three

years of trying, I somehow hit a chord with my 2014 village video. In 2015, I tried an all golf themed village, my most creative village **construction** endeavor. Understandably, the audience didn't care about golf at Christmas. I returned to theme in 2016 and so did the viewers. In 2019 I spent two weeks in "YouTube jail" in December for a parody of a Beatles song (that, ironically, I downloaded off YouTube) that was too realistic for the electronic "bots" (more about choosing songs in later editions), and I lost a valuable initial period of viewer time.

2012 – 1,500 views
2013 – 660 views
2014 – 28,700 views
2015 – 3,300 views
2016 – 17,400 views
2017 – 28,400 views
2018 – 13,100 views
2019 – 3,500 views
2020 – 2,100 views

Every one of these videos continues each month to grow in viewership.

Imagine having 1,000 people touring your house to view Christmas decorations and displays! We were an open house on the neighborhood Victorian Christmas tour in 2016 and had 1,000 people in two days – it was exhausting.



Broadcast Yourself™

Under each video you upload to YouTube is a "Comments" section where viewers can correspond with you, much like posting in Facebook. Mostly people tell you how much they like your village or video or music. Many times they ask what building or figure or structure that is. Occasionally they ask how did you do or build something. If you choose, when you upload a video you can turn "off" the Comments section – but what fun would that be?

You're just hoping to touch people with your video, but sometimes they really touch you in return. Here is one such Comment (added italics are mine):

"Jim, your Christmas village is AMAZING!!! I have never seen a village like this and no word is sufficient to describe its beauty! In my opinion it is the best in the world! Also the music you chose is perfect. I watched the video several times and *it inspired me* to arrange the little houses in my village. Of course it does not compare to yours: I started collecting Lemax lighted buildings in

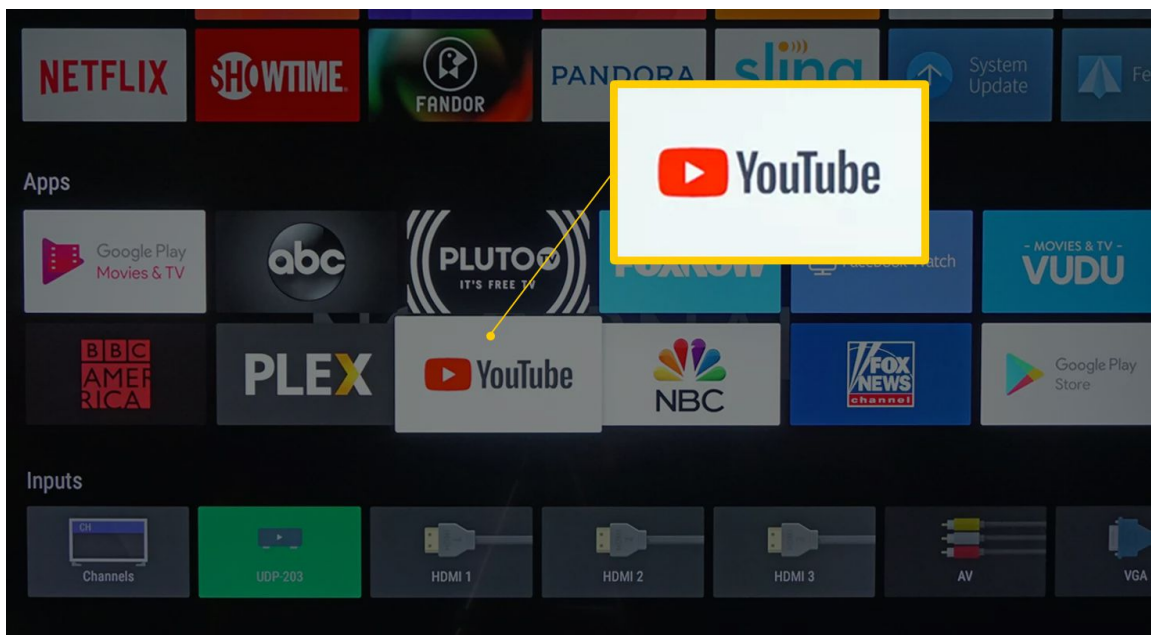
November 2015 and now have 11 houses, 2 table accents, 42 trees and several figurines. I am just a beginner, but I hope it becomes large over the years... Thank you for sharing your masterpiece! I wish you and your family all the best for the New Year 2017! Greetings from Italy, Elena”

Here is another short one:

“This brought tears to my eyes! So beautiful, Wow!!”

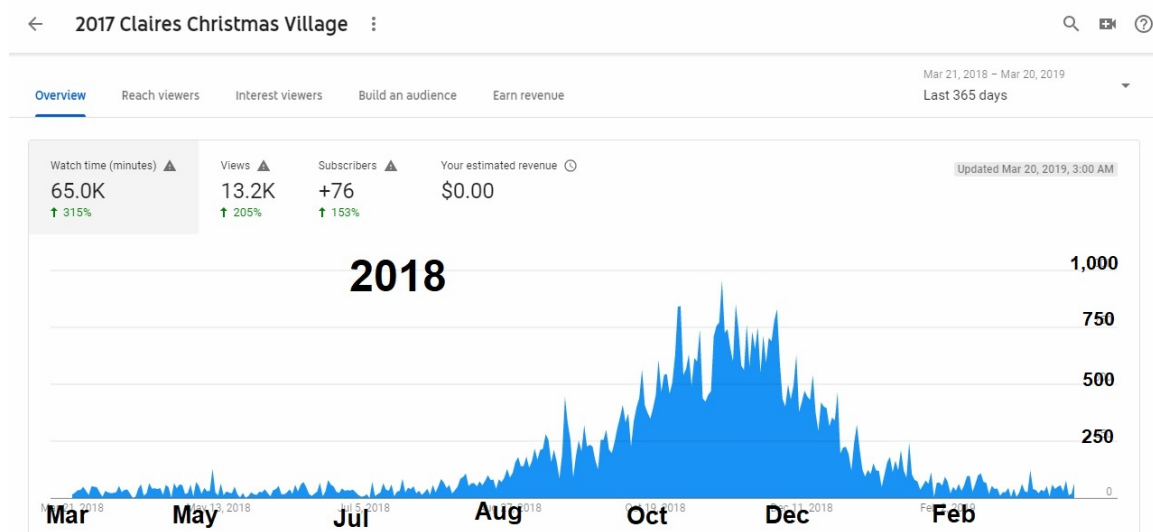
Okay, just one more:

“This is absolutely spectacular! I stayed watching the whole 16 minutes, and usually, I never stayed watching videos until the end – I fast forward them. You made me cry and smile, and love every second of your story. What a beautiful city, definitely not a village! Bravo!!!!!!!!!!”



I have YouTube subscribers and correspondent friends from all parts of the U.S., Europe, South America, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand. I've learned that these folks count on you to brighten their Christmas ***each and every year***.

Here is a YouTube analytics viewer volume chart of my 2017 video, which shows mostly what goes on in the next year after uploading in December.



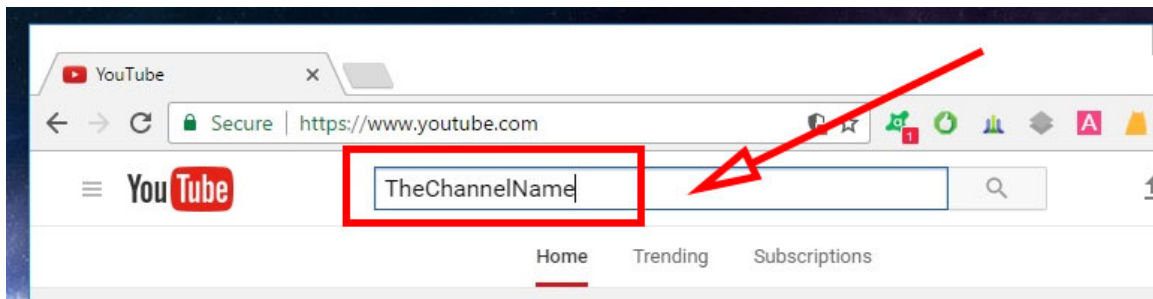
Come autumn, people are searching for ideas, inspiration and motivation for their own village displays. They may be looking for ways to improve their own videos (I hope!).

My favorite YouTube Video Villagers are these folks, listed by their YouTube "channel name" for easy searching:

- TheBigCrabCake (Maryland),
- pammyj100 (Pennsylvania),

- Steve F (New Zealand),
- bosmailman (New Hampshire),
- marvpat74 (??),
- Madison Sebastian (Australian living in Orlando),
- vaggelis kokalis (Greece),
- Dolly (Texas),
- Kathryn Riley-Cuglietta (Florida),
- mogas98 (Netherlands),
- Winterpep (Quebec, Canada),
- Dutch Mini Landscapes (Netherlands), and
- MasterSullivan (Canada).

Just type in their “channel name” in the Search bar on YouTube and press enter.



Most of them have multiple postings of yearly village videos. You can see in their videos how they grow and improve each year. They are all generous with answering questions. It's not exactly a brotherhood or sisterhood, more like a village-hood.

Questions, comments and/or suggestions are always welcome. I'll do my best! You can contact me at: jpetersgolfpro@gmail.com, 419 Washington Avenue, Newport, KY 41071.