



Holiday decorations are stored, prepared and shipped from the American Christmas warehouse in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

## Holiday display company: Next best thing to Santa's workshop

By KAREN MATTHEWS  
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MOUNT VERNON, N.Y. (AP)

Inside a massive, nondescript warehouse just north of New York City, it always looks a lot like Christmas.

American Christmas in Mount Vernon is essentially a decorations attic for the nation's largest city and the surrounding area and is piled high with every imaginable holiday decoration to adorn city streets and skyscrapers. There are huge ornaments, toy soldiers, wreaths, trees, pine cones and miles of strung lights. Since early November, workers have been busy putting ornaments on trees and packing displays for delivery.

There were 18-foot-tall (5-meter-tall) candy canes ready to be hung like stockings on a West 57th Street office tower, 8-foot-tall (2-meter-tall) pine cones soon to be installed atop the revolving door at the New York Marriott Marquis in Times Square and a glittering basketball headed for the NBA Store on 5th Avenue. Displays at Radio City Music Hall, Saks Fifth Avenue and Rockefeller Center — except for the giant tree — also are among the 700 separate holiday displays the company will do this year alone.

"It's the Saks Fifth Avenues and Radio Cities of the world that gain us a lot of attention but most building lobbies are doing trees, wreaths and garlands," said CEO Fred Schwam. "We'll go



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and hang a wreath behind a reception desk and that's the whole job, and then we have some of the biggest displays in the world." The headquarters of the holiday display company American Christmas might be the next best thing to Santa's workshop. (Nov. 28)

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In this Saturday, Nov. 18, 2017, photo employees of the American Christmas company set up the Christmas decorations in the lobby of 1221 Avenue of the Americas in Midtown Manhattan. Most of the company's displays are in the New York area but American Christmas has also installed decorations in 35 cities around the country. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



Oversize golden pine cones are stored at the American Christmas warehouse in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.



Large figurines are stored with other Christmas decorations at American Christmas in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.



A variety of Christmas lights are displayed at the American Christmas showroom in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.



A huge selection of Christmas ornaments are stocked for projects at the American Christmas warehouse in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.



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Plastic Christmas trees are strung with lights at the American Christmas warehouse in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.

Most of the company's displays are in the New York area but American Christmas also has installed decorations in 35 cities around the country. It's even put a glittering bow on the Cartier store in Sydney, Australia.

Schwam, who was just 21 when he took over American Christmas in 1988, said he was approached in 2015 by the Innsbruck, Austria-based holiday decoration company MK Illumination about a possible acquisition, and the deal closed just before this year's holiday rush. Schwam said nothing has changed at American Christmas but the merger should open up more international opportunities.

The company's New York City clients include such stores as Tommy Hilfiger, Harry Winston and Ferragamo, which has been revamped this year with red, gold and white lights in a crossover design inspired by a strappy sandal from the Italian shoemaker's archives.



In this Saturday, Nov. 18, 2017, photo employees of the American Christmas company set up the Christmas decorations in the lobby of 1221 Avenue of the Americas in Midtown Manhattan. American Christmas in suburban Mount Vernon is essentially a decorations attic for the nation's largest city and the surrounding area. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



The headquarters of the holiday display company American Christmas might be the next best thing to Santa's workshop. (Nov. 28)

Schwam pointed out one of his favorite displays, the string of giant-sized Christmas lights in front of the former McGraw-Hill Building in midtown Manhattan. Schwam said he and the company's creative director were brainstorming one day when they spotted a string of mini-lights. "We looked at it and decided that's the idea, we just need to make it bigger than us."

A stream of tourists stopped to take selfies in front of the giant lights this week.

"At first I couldn't figure out what it was," said Patty Wilson, of Billings, Montana. "As we came up closer I saw that it was lights. I think it's very unusual and it's cool."



A huge wreath is prepared for a client at the American Christmas warehouse in Mount Vernon, N.Y., Thursday, Nov. 9, 2017.

