

His niche is Christmas kitsch

Leg Lamps top list of Christmas movie memorabilia available

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BY KELLY PUTTER

The iconic leg lamp, from *A Christmas Story* (1983), is one of the more popular items at RetroFestive.ca

OAKVILLE – When Tyler Schwartz tells people he sells leg lamps for a living, the range of responses he gets runs from squeals of delight to contemptuous grunts and groans.

“It does feel weird telling people what I do,” explains the diehard fan of the holiday movie classic *A Christmas Story* in which the tacky leg lamp is a comic foil to dad’s delusions of grandeur. “People who are fans of the movie say, ‘You sell what? That’s got to be the coolest job ever.’ Others say, ‘The leg lamp is one of the ugliest things I’ve ever seen.’

“Oftentimes, the next thing they say is ‘That’s a business?’”

Either way, the iconic fishnet-festooned leg lamp is working well for the 34-year-owner of RetroFestive.ca, an online business that sells many of the cherished movie props found in popular Christmas movies and TV shows. By the end of his short four-month selling season, Schwartz will have wrapped up \$100,000 in sales.

His success, he says, is all in having a niche.

“On the Internet these days it’s hard to be a startup company unless you find a successful niche,” he says. “I can’t say I’m the Wal-mart of the Internet because there is one already. I need to find a specialty product. I know a guy who sells ties and that’s his niche and he does a really good job with that. The power of niche marketing is why I’ve gotten the attention I have. That’s how I’ve been able to go from zero to 60 with this.”

The 1983 movie *A Christmas Story* has enjoyed a slow climb from obscurity to No. 1 on many top Christmas movie lists. Filmed in St. Catharines, Toronto and Ohio, the old-fashioned movie offers indelible images that include the fiercely sought-after Red Ryder BB gun, a pink bunny costume and, of course, the leg lamp.



The Schwartz home boasts a leg lamp in every window.

The lamps come in different sizes including two desktop versions, a nightlight, a string of leg lamp lights for your Christmas tree and – for the real *A Christmas Story* aficionado – one that’s 127 cm tall. Price range from \$20 to \$250. For \$100, you can purchase a 70th anniversary edition of the Red Ryder BB gun.

But Schwartz’s seasonal online offerings don’t stop there. Remember *South Parks* Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo? Schwartz has him in bobble head form. He also carries a replica of the sad and sparse Charlie Brown Christmas tree, moose mugs from the *Christmas Vacation* movie, Festivus poles from *Seinfeld* and the Heat Miser and Snow Miser from *The Year Without a Santa Claus*.

Because of the popularity of the leg lamps and moose mugs, Schwartz is looking at expanding his collection of sentimental Christmas movie memorabilia to include items from *It’s a Wonderful Life*, *Nightmare Before Christmas* and others.

He’d also like to expand his selection of movie posters and T-shirts to include such classics as *White Christmas* and *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Schwartz and his wife, Jordie, a high-school teacher, inadvertently fell into the business of selling Christmas movie kitsch while making a fan film about the making of *A Christmas Story*.

The documentary, Road Trip for Ralphie, took two years to research, interview and film and sent the couple on a quest for behind-the-scenes stories about the movie. The pair stumbled upon props and costumes, which they subsequently donated to A Christmas Story House in Cleveland, opened in 2006 as a museum and tourist attraction by another diehard fan and businessman Brian Jones. Jones and Schwartz struck up a friendship, and Schwartz was asked if he'd be interested in selling leg lamps in Canada.

"I certainly understand the desire to own a little piece of a Christmas classic," Schwartz says. "It's about tradition and at Christmas-time, every family seems to have that one festive favourite they simply must watch every year.

"So I think it's only natural to want to display a piece of that tradition in the window or on the tree."

"When I was a kid, our family always watched A Charlie Brown Christmas. Now when it's on, I don't just see Linus and Snoopy, I reminisce about all the great Christmases we had as kids. That's why people love what I do. I help people rekindle childhood memories and create new family traditions.

"Quite often people are truly overjoyed, even giddy, when they find our website."

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