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Briles gave Christmas rhythmic twinkle

By Jordan Stutts | SPECIAL TO THE NEWS | Dec 22, 2025



Roger Briles let his light for life shine through his inventions.

He was a dedicated craftsman who worked as hard on his inventions as he appreciated meaningful moments in life. He built a small business called Roger's Products, volunteered in his community, and loved nothing more than for friends, family and strangers to enjoy the things he built.

From his workshop in downtown Kernersville, Briles turned his interests into ideas and his ideas into tools, gadgets and devices. He made fishing gear, fire extinguisher nozzles and reusable plastic luminaries. His most well-known invention: a string of outdoor decorative lights called Blinkies.

Blinkies create a peaceful, calming illumination especially popular around Christmas. For years, Mr. Briles strung the lights across Kernersville — along Main Street, outside churches and in his neighbors' frontyards. He would drive around in a bucket truck, replacing dead bulbs and adjusting lights to perfection, son Brad Briles said.

"He loved to make people smile when he put those lights into trees," he said.

On Nov. 20, a few days before Blinkies began brightening Kernersville again this holiday season, Briles died from complications of a stroke. He was 79 years old.

'A real good citizen'

Briles used Blinkies to serve as a friend to his community.

He was the type of friend you call for help at 4 a.m. and would show up "like he was part of your family," according to Clarence Lambe, a longtime Kernersville resident.

Every year, Briles maintained the upkeep of Blinkies strung in two 75-foot pecan trees outside the Harmon House, a historic landmark on Main Street owned by Lambe.

The lights help give Kernersville a "Christmas spirit," he said. "Roger was the beginning of a good thing. ... He's what you call a real good citizen."

Town Manager Curtis Swisher said Briles "saw the vision" for how Blinkies could "set the town apart."

What began with Blinkies placed in a row of trees along North Main Street has grown to lights on Pineview Street, the courtyard at town hall and even on the highway ramp to Interstate 40, according to Swisher.

“He had the heart to see Kernersville look good and really went after it,” he said.

‘It just went boom’

Rick Pierce, a friend and neighbor of Briles’, said the inventor’s defining trait was follow-through.

“Roger was a doer,” Pierce said. “He didn’t just stop at an idea. He took it to the end.”

Pierce first saw Blinks when Briles invited him over to ask for his opinion on the lights he had strung in a tree in his front yard.

“It was like the tree at night came alive,” Pierce said. He remembers telling Briles, “People are going to want these lights.”

Ken Idol, owner of Farmer’s Hardware in Kernersville, said he got to know Briles when his store became the first to sell Blinks.

Initially, Briles promised that Farmer’s Hardware would be the only store to sell the lights, and Idol said Briles kept that commitment for years.

But as the lights grew in popularity, demand quickly outpaced expectations.

“We couldn’t keep up with it,” Idol said. “It just went boom.”

On Fridays, Briles would stop by the store and quietly watch customers line up. Idol said he would catch Briles shaking his head in disbelief that so many people were enjoying what he had built.

“I’d look over, and he’d just smile,” Idol said. “He was just pleased that people were pleased with his product.”

Always learning

Before Blinks became part of Kernersville’s Christmas decorations, Cathay Michael knew Briles simply as her life partner — someone who could spend long nights working in his shop and still find time to dance.

He was a “smooth” shag dancer with natural rhythm, Michael said.

At work, Briles was focused and committed to seeing his ideas through. When he first invented Blinkies, Michael said, selling them was not easy.

“Everybody thinks you’re an overnight success, but that wasn’t the way it was,” she said.

Briles beat the pavement and stayed dedicated.

“The reason Blinkies are where they are today is because he gave it his all,” she said.

Brad Briles remembers there was always something to fix or build or work on when he was growing up — a boat, a go-cart or a new project waiting in the yard. If work needed to be done, his father expected him to be there, learning alongside him.

“Even when I didn’t realize it, he was always teaching me things,” Brad Briles said.

One lesson that stayed with him the most: No matter how hard you work, make time to enjoy family.

After Briles died just before Thanksgiving, the season felt heavy.

“Very shortly after,” Brad Briles said, “I turned onto Main Street in Kernersville and realized it’s that time of year when the Blinkies turn on.”

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