

Santa Claus parade going strong after 70 years



Every year Santa receives children at his Bancroft house to hear their Christmas wishes. Mr. Claus's last day at Santa's Village House this year was Dec. 23 ? the day before his busiest of the year.

/ TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

In small town Ontario, including this region, Santa Claus parades are often organized by the local Lions club. This is the case in Apsley, in Barry's Bay, and in Bancroft. The Bancroft club was formed at the end of the Second World War. It staged a Santa Claus parade the same year. Although there had been parades before, since 1945 it's been a Lions project.

One of the club's founders, Cec McAlpine, a returning RCAF veteran, took charge of one of the parade hallmarks: the packing of bags of Christmas candy for Santa to hand out to the children paying him a visit. Every year, after their auction, the Lions still get together for this task.

The candy used to be handed out from a truck parked at what is now the Village Playhouse. Inside the Playhouse, children's movies would be played, so as to give their parents a chance to shop ? especially those who didn't live in Bancroft itself.

Nowadays, the parade, which has always started from the works yard, ends at Riverside Park, where Santa descends from his float (always provided by the fire department) and goes to his little house to receive young visitors and hear their Christmas wishes. The house used to be in the Flint Street parking lot. These days, Santa is ?in residence? several times a week, not just on parade day.

Incidentally, when the Centennial Manor was built, the parade originally did a loop around it, so the residents could enjoy the spectacle. However, the logistics and the physical exertion to get up the hill and back down eventually led to the elimination of this part of the route. However, after the parade and Santa house reception, Santa pays a visit to the Manor and the hospital.

For some years, the parade has attracted an average of about 30 participating groups ? floats, marchers, and musical performers. Further back, up to 50 groups might participate. While they were in operation, the mine companies put in quite elaborate floats. For the last two years, Leveque Brothers have had the winning float.

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