

Santa Claus visited Whitney on Dec. 19



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The weather outside was anything but frightful, but the sun and clear skies in Whitney on Dec. 19 were so delightful at the Santa Claus Parade that began at 2 p.m. Parade organizers Ramona Brown and Tarrah Hovinga did a great job pulling everything together for this year's event, featuring both business and personal floats, as well as one of South Algonquin Township's fleet trucks, also known as Santa and Mrs. Claus' parade mobile. Everyone involved, from participants to spectators, had a wonderful time at what Brown calls "the cutest little Santa Claus Parade you'll ever see."

Hovinga posted about the Santa Claus parade that she and Brown are organizing on her Facebook page on Nov. 29. Although the parade started at 2 p.m. the floats and all participants started to assemble on Lake Street in Whitney at around 1:30 p.m. Brown and Hovinga, both dressed as gingerbread people, were busy with last minute details as the start time for the parade approached on Dec. 19. Brown said that they had some high school students helping out at the parade, who had decorated the truck that Santa and Mrs. Claus were using during the event. She said that random people in the community dropped off confections like candy canes and Rice Krispy squares for the event, which was thrown from the floats as the parade went by, and that Sandra Courneyea from the Algonquin Lunch Bar and Gas Station had donated the hot chocolate to be served at the recreation centre after the parade, when Santa and Mrs. Claus would meet with the kids for photos and to give out the gifts. The Grinch was also present at the parade and the Santa and Mrs. Claus meet and greet, and posed for pictures with some of the kids and their parents. Hovinga mused that the Grinch really stole the show this year.

"The children really loved him. He was the talk of the parade," she says.

This is the fifth year that Brown and Hovinga have organized the Santa Claus Parade, and Hovinga said that they started organizing for this year's event in mid-October when they were both finished with their seasonal jobs at Algonquin Park.

South Algonquin Township council approved the Whitney Recreation Committee's request to have the Santa Claus Parade on Dec. 19 at their Nov. 3 meeting. They also agreed to donate \$300 in prizes, and the Whitney Recreation committee will be matching this amount, according to the committee's chair Joe Avery. The township fire department contributed vehicles and drivers for the event. Brown also gave a huge shout out to the Whitney Fish and Game Club, whose generous donation in addition to the donations of the

recreation committee and others, allowed them to purchase presents for the children that came out to the parade that day.

Brown says that the parade is for the whole community, a process that began that day for her and Hovinga at 10:30 a.m. and ended at 5 p.m. that afternoon.

?The little kids right through to our seniors that are shut in, so they can enjoy it, and that's why we do the route we do throughout our community streets versus along the main highway like most Santa Claus parades,? she says.

One of the business floats was provided by Shawn Pigeon and Alison Tweedie from SPS Multiservice Contractor. The float they entered this year was their first ever, although Pigeon says they'd wanted to do one for many years. They had even gotten in from visiting family in Hamilton at 3 a.m. that morning to get the float ready for the parade.

?So, we had the opportunity to do one this year, and with all this COVID-19 stuff happening, and people not being able to gather, this might be the last kick at the can for a little while,? he says.

There were also first, second and third cash prizes awarded for the best floats in the parade. Brown says she and Hovinga selected three judges at random from the community beforehand and provided them with clipboards to grade the floats.

?What happens is after the parade, we go pick up the clipboards from the three judges. Each year we seem to have different judges as they find its fairly difficult to pick the best floats. So, we tally to see who won and then Tarrah and I actually go to the houses of the people to present them with their prizes and to take a photo of them on their winning float,? she says.

Hovinga told Bancroft This Week the evening of Dec. 19 that the first prize of \$150 went to the McRae Bros. Lumber Company float, the second prize of \$100 went to Debbie and Earl Avery's Santa's Workshop float and the \$50 third prize was awarded to Whitney's KIDZ KASTLE Daycare float.

Overall, Brown is thankful for the South Algonquin community and she says they're just wonderful.

?You need help and they're there. They just randomly drop off stuff and enter floats,? she says. ?And it's not just business floats, it's personal floats as well, which is really cool.?

Hovinga seconds that, and says they look forward to the parade every year.

?And every year it is even better than the previous year!?