

## Parade Stokes Passion For Season

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By Carolyne Regan

If Kingsville's Christmas parade is an example of the season to come, it will be thrilling, exhilarating and prosperous. The small town put on a really big show on Saturday as the first in an exciting line-up of parades and events produced by the Windsor Parade Corporation (WPC).

This is the first year that the WPC had moved the parade to Saturday night. It not only allowed citizens more freedom to enjoy the event, but it also allowed WPC to be much more creative with the entertainment line-up, according to Maggie Durocher, Executive Director of the WPC and Manager of the Parks and Rec Programs for the Town of Kingsville.

The parade featured numerous entries from community groups, local schools and area businesses. In addition, two marching bands from Detroit added a musical and visual intensity enjoyed by all who came out to welcome the beginning of this year's Fantasy of Lights Festival.

"It's the 20<sup>th</sup> annual parade and it's the biggest and best ever," confirmed Mayor Nelson Santos. "The music, the sounds, the energy made this festival kick-off probably the best we've seen in two decades."

In addition to five marching bands were numerous riding groups including the Canadian Cowgirls who will be making their way to Pasadena, California to take part in the Tournament of Roses Parade on New Year's Day.

The parade made its way towards Kingsville's Lakeside Park, where Santa Claus officiated the Fantasy of Lights opening ceremony. An impressive fireworks display followed, with crowds of children and adults marveling at both the lights in the sky, and those lining the paths of the park.

Clearly, everyone is excited about what these kinds of events can do for the community. "It's good for the town's morale. It's great for the season. It brings people downtown and it's a nice reflection of what the town can be," agreed Ernie Demarse. The owner of Ernie's TV Sales and Service was one of the primary sponsors of the events in conjunction with Harold Remark Prudential Select Realty and the Corporation of the Town of Kingsville.

This kind of entertainment is only the beginning in what the WPC has planned. There will be four more parades in each of the towns of Amherstburg, Tecumseh, Windsor and Essex. And each of the parades, all of which have been planned by the WPC, will be showcasing something special and unique.

"Windsor's parade is totally locked and loaded," stated Durocher. "It's packed with entertainment both before and after the parade." Being held in Olde Sandwich makes this parade especially significant. WPC's theme, the 1812 Bi-Centennial, helps connect the community to the historic relevance of the area.

Durocher, who has been with the WPC since 1994, has helped produce 57 parades since her days with the Windsor Jaycees. “We have 44 years of experience,” she stated in reference to the planning and coordination of the WPC and the vast numbers of businesses and volunteers that have come together to bring the holidays to the municipalities in the area.

“It’s more than just coordination,” Durocher added. “It’s relationship development.” Relationships must be maintained not just with the sponsors, but with the groups providing the entertainment. “These people come when they trust you. It takes a long time to cultivate that kind of talent.”

That talent, however, does not come cheap. Each of the municipalities provides funding to its own parade. With the state of the current economy, it takes a lot of partnerships to produce these parades. Local business can only help so much. “I look forward to sponsoring the parade and events every year,” agreed Ernie Demarse, who has sponsored the Kingsville parade for the second year in a row, “but I also encourage other business owners in supporting the events.”

“I can’t say enough about the people that work with the WPC, our board and our volunteers who make all this happen. It’s a collective effort and a wonderfully cohesive group,” Durocher proudly announced. For without the help of the volunteers and sponsors, the parades would not exist, and almost didn’t survive past 2005 for that very reason, according to Durocher.

“Every parade is developed through joint funding between the key sponsors, the municipality, and sponsors who provide funding across the board for all the parades – WFCU, UCCU, the CAW, local BIA’s and Allan Candy who provided us with 850 pounds of treats,” Durocher explained.

Not only does sponsorship help create an event for the community, it can help revitalize the core areas as it has done with Olde Sandwich. According to Durocher, when the WPC brought the parade to Sandwich, the community embraced the events from the beginning. “All the businesses opened their doors to everyone, not just customers.”

Not only is a parade a product of the community, but the community can also be a product of the events it supports. And this year, WPC has planned some entertainment that will, according to Nelson Santos, “... bring family and everyone together to enjoy an event which is meant to be for the community.”

## River Lights Marks Opening of Holiday Season

By Carolyne Regan

For some Amherstburg and Essex County area residents, the Holiday Season officially began with the opening of the River Lights Festival on Friday night.

The switch for the town's approximately 130 light displays was flipped – lighting the holiday season spirit for hundreds of people who flocked to the Navy Yard Park. The 6<sup>th</sup> annual celebration was accompanied by fireworks that enhanced the atmosphere, impressing the community and visitors.

Children and adults marveled at the spectacle of lights as they wandered through the various themes displayed throughout the park. Wandering was hampered only by the large numbers of people that turned out for the opening of the festival.

The atmosphere catered to the families with complimentary hot chocolate and cupcakes, a big-screen showing of Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer, and free carriage rides. "It's a back to the family thing," explained Karen Gyorgy, Festival Administrator. "It's about bringing the family together.

Also open to guests, the Toddy Jones Park pavilion was, for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, transformed into the Warming House, where festival-goers could view the entries submitted for the gingerbread contest. The contest received over 60 entries in three categories for adults, teens and youth. Some of the entries included edible versions of some of the town's historic buildings, as well as gingerbread ship with tortilla sails created to mark the celebration of the 1812 bicentennial theme of the festival. Gyorgy was there when the entries were being brought in on last Wednesday. "To see the entries come in ... some of them are absolutely amazing. It makes it all worthwhile," she stated.

Planning the festival which brings so many people together from neighboring communities is no easy feat. According to Gyorgy, who has headed the festival group for 5 years, planning begins in January with a review of the previous year's events. In depth development for the upcoming festival starts in September.

"We were very, very fortunate this year," Gyorgy declared referring to the wealth of sponsorship they received. Scotiabank was the main presenting sponsor this year, and the corporation was more than happy to help bring the festival to life. "We're delighted to give back to the community. It's not just an Amherstburg event, but a Windsor – Essex County event," said Dave Wilson, Scotiabank District VP for South-western Ontario. "Many people in the area come out to enjoy it. It's a great way to start celebrating the holiday season."

Two other major sponsors included the WFCU and Sobeys, as well as many others. "It's a huge partnership," Gyorgy confirmed expressing pride at the number of corporate and local sponsors that made the festival possible this year.