

An Open Letter to the Community...

So, you want to put on a parade?

Being a member of the Flamborough Santa Claus Parade Committee has given me the behind the scene experience to know exactly what is involved in orchestrating a parade. And yet still I am amazed at the general public's perception of exactly what is involved.

So today, I have taken the opportunity to share with you exactly what is involved in putting on a parade.

Last year's spectacular event was held on November 24th, and by December 12th, we were right back at it ... planning for the 2002 Light the Way for Santa Parade. By the time you have read this article, we will have completed our third meeting, one of at least 15 meetings held each year.

The Committee consists of a dozen or so core volunteers, from Homemakers, to Youth Workers, to Financial Advisers. We are real people with real jobs and real families who find the time and dedication for an event we are all so passionate about. In addition to regular meetings, the FSCPC must also co-ordinate fund-raising events. In 2001, we held only three events (Candy Cane Day, Car Wash, Murder Mystery Dinner) to help generate funding for last year's parade. The committee is extremely thankful to all of you who donated your time, your money, and your gifts in kind. Every cent counts towards making Flamborough's parade so spectacular. By this time, applications have been submitted to the City of Hamilton for a grant request.

Typically we receive \$6,000 in grant funding (less than 20% of last year's Parade costs) and must rely on fund-raising and donations to generate the remainder of capital required for the parade. Plaques are hand delivered to prize winners, who also receive a cash donation in their name to the Flamborough Food Bank. Customised plaques are delivered to our corporate sponsors in appreciation of their generous donations. Editorials must be prepared, and advertising co-ordinated to raise awareness of the parade and our fund-raising events. The Bands are booked early in the year to assure availability, and to allow the committee some time to research any new bands we might invite. By midsummer, we begin the process of obtaining all necessary permits for road closures, and use of public facilities, while we assure that our parade insurance coverage is adequate. After a quick summer break it's full steam ahead. In September, participants from previous parades are contacted and are mailed the entrance contracts for this year's parade. The many rentals are booked, including garbage bins, port-o-potties, and two-way radios. Golf carts, flash lights, safety vests, and generators are also things we cannot do without. By late October, the phones are ringing off the hook. How can I get in the parade? Do you know where I can rent a trailer? Luckily, our float co-ordinator is on top of things. Flat bed tractor trailers are arranged for those groups who are unable to arrange their own. All groups are assigned an entry number to help minimize the chaos amid the excitement of parade day.

So how can all of this cost over \$30,000???

I'm so glad that you asked. Few people realize that the bands are not free. They are actually our largest expense, accounting for almost \$13,000 of our total cost last year. Permits and insurance costs were approximately \$2,000, while total advertising expenses (including newspaper and radio) were almost \$9,000. Our expenses continue to grow as each parade becomes more extravagant than the one before. In addition to those costs that I mentioned, are others including Police services, equipment rentals, and of course, supplies for Santa's sleigh. This year's parade will be held on November 23rd, and while you might think its a long time away, to us, its just around the corner. We have permits to file, fund-raisers to organize, and bands to review. But of course, we expect this year's parade to be bigger and better than the last. Flamborough's parade has become known as the parade to be in! Last years event drew more than 30,000 spectators, almost 10,000 more than the year before. So, if every person were to donate just one Loonie to the Loonie Bin, we could ensure that the parade is an annual event.