

## Winter wonderland or not, Santa Claus is coming back to Town this Saturday!



**By Brock Weir**

Last year's Santa Under the Stars Parade was certainly one to remember.

A sudden, massive snowstorm may have meant the hundreds of people lining Yonge Street last November could barely see a few feet past the ends of their noses, but any repeats of last year's snow blast won't be enough to keep Santa from returning to Aurora once again!

Santa Claus, his eight tiny reindeer, and a couple of hundred of their closest friends in the forms of marching bands, dancers, musicians, and float riders are due to make their way down Yonge Street from Orchard Heights Boulevard beginning at 6 p.m. this Saturday, November 22.

"We are going to be thankful for that experience and hope that only half of that returns this year," says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora, of last year's winter wallop. "Those challenges turned into opportunities and based on the feedback I heard, it actually enhanced the festive feeling.

"What surprised us all was the number and volume of people who continue to come to the parade despite the weather, so it really demonstrates how strong the spirit is in Aurora. Last year was eventful, but we have measures in place and we just had to resort to some contingency plans."

In addition to the floats entered into the starlight parade by myriad of local service clubs, businesses and bands, there are a few new additions to this year's festivities to keep things fresh. Pachi the Porcupine, the colourful mascot for the 2015 Toronto Pan-Am and Parapan Games will make an appearance in all his glory, sporting all 41 quills representing all 41 participating countries coming to the GTA next year.

He will be joined by students from Cardinal Carter Catholic Secondary School who are spending this week preparing for their parade debuts.

"We are very proud that Cardinal Carter has a brand new marching band and they will be debuting in this parade," says Ms. Ware. "It is always exciting to get the youth involved in that capacity. We have been fortunate that bands from as far north as Sudbury have wanted to participate in the parade and we are fortunate to have them be a part of it."

What often sets Aurora's Santa Under the Stars parade apart from the others are efforts taken by organizers to scrutinize the floats, making sure they are appealing and strong entries. Aurora was among the first municipalities to move their Santa Claus parades to the nighttime, so that adds an added layer of novelty and twinkly magic to the proceedings.

As Aurora's population continues to grow, so too do the number of ways Aurora families celebrate the Holiday season and that adds to the flavour of the event.

?Whether it is the traditional Santa Claus theme, or whether it is the traditional Chinese Lion Dance, the spectrum of displays in there, and I think the fact we do have a spectrum on display is what makes each float unique and what makes spectators anticipate what comes next,? says Ms. Ware.

?At the end of the day, my happiness is equated by the response from the community, and the response I got from the community [after last year's snowfall] is that they loved it because it was festive. It was a bit cold, it was a bit much, but people say it really added to it. As long as the community is pleased with it, if it were to happen again, as long as the community gets out of it what we try to do, that is all that matters.?