

Santa Claus Parade moves from Yonge Street to AFLC due to health restrictions

Thousands line Yonge Street each November to see St. Nick make his way down Yonge Street at the culmination of Aurora's popular Santa Under the Stars parade.

But this year, when such gatherings have been put firmly on ice at least until 2021, Santa is once again polishing up his sleigh for an Aurora parade. Yet, rather than him coming to you, once he and his reindeer arrive at their top-secret local landing place, holiday revellers are invited to come to him in a re-thought parade to reflect our new normal.

On Saturday, November 28, the Aurora Family Leisure Complex (AFLC) will be the scene of a 'stationary' Santa Under the Stars parade. Nearly two dozen floats will be firmly in place around the Industrial Parkway North recreation centre, socially distant, and ready to welcome caravans of vehicles that will pass by through a specially-designed driving route.

'We started developing this concept back in late May and early June because we knew once the Health Unit started approving drive-in events like concerts and movies, we thought if we can't do a parade in November and we didn't know what November was going to look like we could do a drive-in parade,' says Shelley Ware, Special Events Coordinator for the Town of Aurora. 'This was always our fail-safe plan. Now that it has come to fruition [with York Region returning to Stage 2], it is like creating a brand-new event all over again. With that comes new opportunities because unlike the traditional parade, we can have buskers and character elements we couldn't have in a moving parade.'

Once the kernel of a drive-by parade germinated, it was a matter of finding the ideal location for the event. Working with York Regional Police, York Region EMS and Central York Fire Services, a route was hammered out for the AFLC which will see cars travel south on Industrial Parkway North from St. John's Sideroad, turn into the parking lot, loop around the parade route, and continue south on Industrial towards Wellington Street.

'Santa was hesitant about the plan at the beginning, but we wanted to make sure that no one was disappointed and when we did some research and looked into it, Santa was confident that this would be the right way to go,' says Ms. Ware. 'He wanted to make sure there was a way he could still be included and included comfortably.'

'This is going to be one of the warmest parades families will ever attend in the month of November. As soon as they pull into the parking lot area, they will be greeted by staff and they will be walking away with some valuable household safety tips and tools from Central York Fire, and we have been very fortunate to work with Santa who has also become very innovative and technologically advanced. He is going to be speaking to families [into their cars] through a radio frequency so they will be able to hear Santa throughout their entire parade experience, unlike when he is on Yonge Street where it is very difficult to get his voice to travel it is pretty cool how technology has worked with us!'

Advanced registration for the 'stationary' Santa Under the Stars parade is encouraged at aurora.ca, but everyone is welcome to attend and no car will be turned away.

'It's not an experience they will be able to stop and get out of their vehicles, but I am hoping they will be enchanted the entire time,' says Ms. Ware, noting that members of the Optimist Club of Aurora, the Fifth Aurora Scouts, Marquee Theatrical Productions, the Aurora Chamber of Commerce and more will be on hand to enhance the enchantment. 'It is going to be a smaller parade with about 15-17 floats, but it will still be mesmerizing.'

By Brock Weir Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter