

Santa's Back in Town: Parade takes over Yonge Street this Saturday night

By Brock Weir

Santa Claus is making a comeback!

The Jolly Man in Red is set to return to Aurora this Saturday for the annual Santa Under the Stars Parade, which will make its way down Yonge Street from Orchard Heights in the north to Murray Drive in the south from 6 - 8 p.m.

A firm family favourite, which sees thousands of youngsters - and the young at heart - line the route not only to see Santa himself, but scores of colourful floats, marching bands, and street entertainers, is a storied local tradition, and one that Santa looks forward to each year.

This year, however, Santa is not the only one making a list and checking it twice to make sure he's ready for the big day; Mrs. Claus has her own game plan to make sure her husband is Aurora-ready.

In an exclusive telephone interview from the North Pole last week, Mrs. Claus shared some last minute preparations, and a few sneak previews, with The Auroran.

The Auroran: This is a big night for Santa Claus, not to mention the families who look forward to it each year. What are you doing to help Santa prepare for the Santa Under the Stars Parade?

Mrs. Claus: This is a parade that he is always very excited to be a part of and, of course, it is at the magical evening time for sparkling lights. One thing I do differently that day is serve his dinner at lunch so he only has snacks and cookies to eat along the parade route. We flip his meal schedule around. For snacks, I also ensure he has lots of lozenges and candies because I know he wants to say hello to all the children he recognizes throughout the parade route, which is kind of a lengthy one.

TA: Are there any special things you keep in mind for the trip?

MC: The honest answer would be that I pack what he needs, but truthfully this is my chance to get out of the North Pole. I pack just as much for me as I do him because this is my little weekend getaway. Coming to Aurora, which is full of fantastic restaurants and such unique shopping, I am just as excited as he is. In terms of packing for him though, I always ensure his suit is spectacular and very, very clean. As excited as he is, he likes to be in tip top shape as well. Because the temperature is always unpredictable, I make sure I keep those hot pods that keep his hands warm. He likes to take his time and make sure he gets to wave to all the children - and I need to make

sure his feet stay warm too. He loves his little candies and he can't travel anywhere without his candy canes. We make sure we come well-stocked.

TA: I know that the parade organizers add a few new details each year to keep the parade fresh ? and that Santa usually gets a sign-off on all the changes. What are you two particularly excited about this year?

MC: Santa is going to have a gorgeous, sweet ride that evening. I understand when speaking with the Town staff that some very special parks staff have been doing a lot of work to transform his ride and to make it look really fresh and really spectacularly new this year. As well, I know the Town's roads crew have been working extra hard to make sure the road is going to be in tip top shape, so not only will we have a sweet ride, we'll have one of the smoothest rides. Of course, Santa sits higher than anyone else in the float, so he always gets joy in looking at the incredible floats. Floats not to miss include the Optimist Club of Aurora. They always do a stand-out job on their float, as well as the Knights of Columbus, which comes with their big model ship. In between, there are many marching bands. Personally, I don't think you can ever get too many marching bands because they are all such a delight. We have several dance groups that will be performing throughout the parade route. They are so dynamic, I think they certainly give the entertainment value similar to a marching band. In addition to that, there will be a few new community entries coming out as well, so it will be great to see them getting involved and making a spectacular way for my husband to travel in.

TA: The parade involves a cast of hundreds, not to mention the thousands lining the route. Does the amount of people ever get overwhelming?

MC: The volunteers make everything so easy. As you know, our elves work throughout the year to get Santa ready for the big day. It goes on par with the Santa Under the Stars parade because our elves tell us that the Optimist Club volunteers their time and work tirelessly to ensure that it is a safe parade evening. They shuttle the floats in, they take care of the volunteer groups, and even ensure the parade route is safe all the way down. I definitely want to say a special hello to the Optimist Club of Aurora because they are keeping us safe along with the Roads and Parks staff that evening. One thing I do know that Santa did remind me of his concern is many families actually sit on the roadways waiting for him to come, but it is his personal request that people watch him come by standing on the sidewalk at the side of the road. The Town of Aurora is so generous with how long the parade route is, it does lock up Yonge Street for a considerable length. If there are emergency safety calls on any of the side streets, they have to access that closed road. He really wants to see his faithful children and families watching the parade from the sidewalks.

TA: I don't know if you've heard, but the parade route is passing once again through Aurora's Historic Downtown Core, but this is the first year the area's Business Improvement Area (BIA) will be on the ground.

MC: Oh, yes, we read about that. In fact, they reached out to us with some ideas of how to become involved.

TA: Oh? What do they have in store for Saturday?

MC: The BIA is very passionate about the downtown core and they always look forward to this event coming up. Many of the shops will be decorated, will be staying open late. This is one of the highlights visiting Aurora, discovering the retail shops and the eateries along Yonge Street. There is something for every appetite. Take advantage of the parade night and get some gifts.

TA: I hope I can check a few items off my Christmas shopping list! Thank you for your time.

MC: You're very welcome. See you Saturday!