

## Simple Christmas wish marks Tree Lighting Ceremony



**By Brock Weir**

Moderate rain at the start of the evening led to many families huddling inside the lobby of Aurora Town Hall on Wednesday night to await the start of the Town's annual Tree Lighting Ceremony.

While they waited for the rains to dissipate and the crowd to form, however, those seeking shelter didn't waste any time; some of them took the opportunity to slip in a wish to the Big Man In Red through his wife, Mrs. Claus.

"I just wanted my family to be together," said 10-year-old Rachel Howe.

It was a simple wish, but one which struck a chord with Mrs. Claus.

"I think that is just lovely," said Mrs. Claus, reflecting on the ask. "Children often come up to me, and Christmas cookies are usually a big thing. They also ask me what I am going to be doing on Christmas Day, and, of course, I tell them I am going to be with Santa. Cooking is usually the main thing though, but?" she breaks off to confide in a whisper. "I don't really like cooking!"

But thankfully there is no cooking required to fulfil Rachel's wish.

"I think it is a great idea," said her mother, Erin. "We just love this event, the Town Crier, the tree lighting ceremony, and we love to go to the Seniors' Centre to hear Mrs. Claus tell a story."

Rachel was joined at the event by her younger sister Jessica, 4, as well. A performer with the Canadian Children's Theatre Company, other commitments later that evening kept Rachel from joining her friends on stage to perform *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*, but she is eager to get in the role at next year's festivities.



New this year were five of Santa's reindeer, who took a few hours out of their training schedule to greet party-goers on the deck of the Seniors' Centre. After a pit stop at a farm in Port Arthur, they were ready to go. And they saw a few old friends along the way.

"I am really excited about seeing Santa's reindeer again because I haven't seen them in a couple of days," said elf Twinkle, who was booked for Wednesday night's gig by her agent Shelby McClenny. "I was in the North Pole and Santa asked me personally to be here. He asked if I would be interested in working in his workshop, but specifically with Mrs. Claus and hanging out with her, and she needed a buddy."

Twinkle wasn't the only buddy in Mrs. Claus' entourage last week. They were joined by Jingle, represented by agent Galen Strathdee, whose enthusiasm was in the blood.

"My father was in the elfing game and I thought I would get into the family business and also help Mrs. Claus," he said.

By the time the rain had mostly cleared, hundreds gathered in the forecourt of Town Hall to join Mayor Geoff Dawe, Town Crier John Webster, several Councillors, and members of the Salvation Army band to count down to the tree lighting and Santa's arrival.

"It is a well-known fact that years ago people came together on this very spot for the Aurora Tree Lighting Ceremony," said Mr. Webster. "It has become a tradition, a time to greet old friends and make new acquaintances, a time to experience the tradition of carolling, a time to pause and enjoy the lights of our collective spirits as we push back the night."