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## LOCAL : NEWS

# Emily Township neighbourhood creating their own Santa Claus parade amid cancellations

Lorianne Stenson and Jackie Hynes are organizing the parade to celebrate the season with their neighbours

By **Barbara-ann Maceachern**

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After finding out that both the Peterborough and Omemee Santa Claus Parades were cancelled this year, a pair of neighbours decided to take the matter into their own hands.

“It’s a sense of we are starting fresh and new,” says Lorianne Stenson, who is organizing a grassroots Santa Claus Parade with Jackie Hynes in their Emily Township neighbourhood.

“We are pulling together as a community,” she says.

The pair handed out about 75 flyers to homes in the area to gauge the response and so far 16 floats have been signed up, including people decorating their own vehicles and ATVs, in addition to a trio of City of Kawartha Lakes fire trucks and live music by Chris Collins, according to Stenson. The big finale will see Santa ride through the neighbourhood in a 130-year-old sleigh donated for the occasion by the Shield Family Ranch and decorated by Hynes and Stenson, “thanks to Pinterest,” she jokes.

The local Lions Club will also be on hand, collecting non-perishable food items for local food banks.

“It just turned out that everybody wants to be involved,” she says.

“We just can’t believe it.”

While COVID-19 has kept a lot of people close to home, it has also led to some pretty special new traditions being created, says Stenson, noting it has really been an opportunity for neighbours to help neighbours.

Last St. Patrick’s Day, a similar exclusive neighbourhood parade brought a turnout of about 100 people, during a time when many had been isolated for a long time.

Stenson says she got emails from older people in the area, thanking her for the event because they had not been out of their homes for ages.

“It literally made them cry,” she says, adding it means so much to be making such an impact on her neighbours’ lives.

The community will gather at the Lions Club after the parade for free hot chocolate and a chance for the kids to meet Santa.

“The reward is the kids’ faces,” she notes: seeing their expressions makes all the hard work worthwhile.

Although Stenson doesn’t mind sharing the heartwarming story of how her neighbourhood has pulled together to create some Christmas magic for the kids, she adds that, for safety reasons, they will not be publicizing the exact location of the parade. Traffic issues, particularly when it comes to parking, could potentially create an unsafe situation if people come from outside the neighbourhood and park along the roads. Instead, Stenson says, she hopes that other neighbourhoods decide to do something similar themselves.

Even after the first parade, Stenson says the support from everyone in the neighbourhood was a pleasant surprise.

“We’re just thrilled at the response,” she says, noting that she thinks more people are willing to put in the work – not to mention get silly and participate – in a safe environment with people they know.

“It’s heartwarming.”

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