

SANTA STILL A BIG HIT, EVEN FROM A DISTANCE

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The lines of cars stretched as long as two kilometres in several directions Saturday night, some people waiting for as long as three hours, all to see the man in a red suit.

The world has changed a lot in the past year, but one thing that hasn't is the desire to see Santa before he makes his Christmas rounds. While most communities were forced to cancel their parades due to COVID-19, Georgetown and Acton came up with a unique solution. Instead of bringing the parade to the people, they brought people to the parade.

"It was way beyond our expectations," said Georgetown Lions Club president Art Hayes.

Hayes estimates that more than 1,000 cars

snaked their way through Trafalgar Sports Park to view the floats and get a glimpse of Santa as he prepares for his big night next month.

Earlier in the day, the Acton Fire Fighters Association (AFFA) staged a similar 'reverse' parade with 276 cars making their way through the Acton High School parking lot for a physically-distant visit with Santa.

While there were no floats at the Acton event, many of the visitors got into the spirit.

"Many vehicles and passengers were decorated and dressed up and impressed Santa with their amazing holiday spirt," said Nick Carroll of the AFFA.

The firefighters dangled a bucket from a pry bar to collect letters to Santa from the passing cars.

Both parades used the event to collect for the local banks. Carroll said they filled a trailer with food and toy donations for Acton Foodshare; in Georgetown, the Lions Club collected more than 2,100 pounds of food for the Georgetown Bread Basket.

In Georgetown, cars started lining up 40 minutes before the park opened and the cars just kept coming. Eventually, realizing they would not be able to accommodate all the cars, Halton police began blocking off roads leading to the park. Even extending the time beyond the scheduled close, they weren't able to get everyone through the park.

"We were somewhat overwhelmed with the community support and even though we tried to cover every contingency, the number of cars created

long waits and some disappointments," said parade chair Louie Violo.

Hayes said the recent changes to COVID-19 protocols in Halton Region almost forced them to cancel. The stricter guidelines meant they could only have 25 people in the park. Even Santa got no special privileges, taking up one of those spots. That meant no people on most floats and fewer volunteers to co-ordinate the flow of cars.

"We have been in the car coming up on three hours moving not very quickly on Maple (Avenue)," tweeted Karen Gasbarino. "But we are singing Christmas songs, playing games, and laughing. This is how memories are made. Thank you."

Hayes said he appreciated people's patience.

"The response was phenomenal," he said. "We



Chris McAloney photo



Acton Fire Fighters Association photo

The Georgetown Lions Club's unique spin on the Santa Claus drew a tremendous response with more than 1,000 cars lining up outside Trafalgar Sports Park, some waiting for as long as three hours to get an opportunity to see Santa. Left: Instead of its traditional parade, the Acton Fire Fighters invited the public to visit Santa in the Acton High School Parking lot. The firefighters collected donations for the food bank and give kids a chance to drop off their letters to Santa.

didn't want to turn anyone away, but some things were out of our hands."

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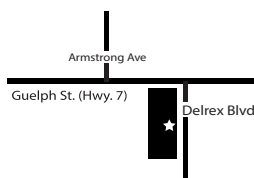


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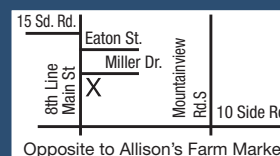


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