

Unique entry will go back to work after parade ends

With humble apologies to the stage play Oklahoma; writer Oscar Hammerstein and composer Richard Rodgers, we thought this modified version of Surrey with the Fringe on Top might best describe a new velocipede added recently to the service fleet operated by general manager Patrick LeBlanc of the O'Neill Funeral Home.

On Saturday, Patrick and staff aboard their unique eight-passenger lorry, will share the celebratory spotlight in Stouffville's Santa Claus Parade. Our lyrical descriptive follows:

*Dogs and cats and kids better depart
When Pat goes for a ride in his golf cart
When Pat goes for a ride in his golf cart
With the fringe on top.
Watch that fringe and see how it flutters
It's a cart not meant for just putters
Curious folks will peek through their shutters
And their eyes will pop
For that shiny little golf cart*



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

*With the fringe on the top.
The wheels are yellor, the upholstery's brown,
The dashboard's genuine leather.
With isinglass curtains y'can roll right down
In case there's a change in the weather.
Two bright sidelight's winkin' and blinkin',
Ain't no finer rig he's a-thinkin'
You c'n keep your float if you're thinkin'
That he'd care to swap
For his shiny little golf cart
With the fringe on the top.*

Watch for it. An eight-passenger battery-powered golf cart, the O'Neill Funeral Home's first-ever entry in Stouffville's Santa Claus Parade.

And possibly the first-ever vehicle of its kind in any Santa Claus parade.

It'll be part of a mile-long procession Saturday that will begin at 2 p.m. from Tenth Line North and Aintree Ave. and conclude on Main St. West at Weldon Road.

The event is hosted by The Kinsmen Club. Storybook Christmas is this year's theme.

It was six months ago that Mr. LeBlanc began looking for such a vehicle. He wanted it to complement the current valet parking service already in operation in its parking-challenged downtown neighbourhood.

Unfortunately, he would discover limousine carts accommodating eight passengers to be few and far between.

To his surprise, however, he learned a firm called Bennett Golf Cart Co. was located locally near the intersection of Tenth Line North and the Bloomington Road, just north of Stouffville. With head office approval he placed an order.

Three months later it was delivered to the door.

"We put it to use the same day it arrived," Mr. LeBlanc said. "It's been going steadily ever since."

The need for such a unit became obvious, he said, after a funeral service, arranged for EastRidge Evangelical Missionary Church, forced many people to walk considerable distances to the chapel from the rear of the parking lot. Added to this was his personal observation of a similar unit in operation at Mt. Lawn Cemetery in Whitby.

"I submitted my request to head office and their response was totally positive," he said. The purchase price was \$9,600.

The cart is fully licensed and insured although licensing is not customarily required because such vehicles are generally confined to private properties, Mr. LeBlanc explained. "But it surely is a conversation piece," he said. "It makes passengers feel special."

The maximum highway speed isn't known, he says, because there's no speedometer. He guesses 10 km/h would be the limit.

A covering (or fringe) can be lowered to protect riders from the rain, snow, sleet and sun.

The cart is powered by eight batteries, each of which can be recharged after eight hours' use.

To fit the décor of the day, the cart will be gaily decorated with Christmas lights and garlands. Proper signage has been ordered. The majority of staff will either be on board or walk alongside including: Mr. LeBlanc and daughter Chloe, Tim Jones, Francis Kelly, Brandon Loughheed, Bob Tabone, John Halse and Kelly Martiniello, accompanied by spouses and family.

Other staff members will be kept busy serving free hot chocolate from a booth at the corner of Church and Main streets, a tradition that's been popular with parade goers the past three years.

"Christmas is a very special time," says Patrick, "it's an honour to be a part of so important an event. He says looking out into a sea of smiling faces, both adults and children, brings to life the true spirit of the season.

"We're very excited."

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

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