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Wet welcome for Santa

By DONAL O'CONNOR, Staff Reporter

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Bradley Karpowics, left, and Ethan Zehr were among spectators keeping dry with umbrellas on Ontario Street during Sunday's Santa Claus parade. DONAL O'CONNOR/The Beacon Herald

Nothing, it seems, can spoil a good parade.

Despite the incessant drizzle Sunday evening, an estimated 3,000 spectators lined the downtown route for Santa's Parade of Lights while paraders sang Christmas tunes, played their musical instruments and honked their horns.

"It's a great day of the year despite the weather," said on-looker Shiloh Pettipas. "All the locals managed to get together and have a good time."

Mr. Pettipas was one of numerous spectators who congregated in the area around city hall. He and his wife Natasha brought along their children, two-year-old Angelina and one-year-old Cali.

"We come out every year, rain or shine," said Ms. Pettipas, "We really like having the parade at night, which is different from the others."

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And Ms. Pettipas said her family appreciated the treats given out by Tim Hortons and the [Stratford Optimists](#).

Getting into the Christmas spirit for sure were a group of volunteers from Knox Presbyterian Church who were offering free cups of hot chocolate.

The group included Grace Rothwell, Charles and Margaret Lupton and Vivian Harding.

Just down the road from there, on Ontario Street, Laurie Zehr and kids Cody, 3, and Ethan, 7, were well protected with rain gear and umbrellas as they watched the parade approaching.

Jim Krueger, his wife Jolene Burnett and their children Christie, 9, and one-year-old Indy sheltered under a beach umbrella at Market Square.

"It's great even if it's a little wet this year," said Mr. Krueger. "The kids love the hot chocolate and hot dogs."

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The family came in from St. Pauls for the fun.

A significant part of the parade this year was the participation of a large contingent of paraders from Bethel Tabernacle.

The group included about 80 costumed participants, said Ruth Kneider, who credited co-ordinators Andy and Jane Pearson for the staging which included an authentic looking Nativity scene at city hall along with several farm animals and shepherds.

"We really had huge support," said Ms. Kneider, who noted the church was invited by event organizers to become involved.

She said there was lots of interest in the Nativity.

The evening event culminated with a biblical reading of the Nativity story by Stratford Shakespeare Festival actor James Blendick.

"We are just super pleased with the turnout, given the weather," said Ted Blowes, downtown master of ceremonies.

Parade chair Dale Bast said the Optimists got a lot of positive feedback from onlookers.

Only one of the 77 parade entries was a no-show, he said, and that was because of a breakdown on the way to the parade.

"Everybody showed and, in the rain, to me that was incredible."

The parade was a full hour, running from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

There was only one minor glitch, said Mr. Bast, and that involved an entry that experienced a flat tire.

They abandoned their vehicle and kept on going on foot.

The parade was discussed afterwards at the Optimist hall, said Mr. Bast, and the consensus was that it's the perfect week for kicking off Christmas and people are happy with the nighttime event.

"I think we're generally happy with where we're at," he said.

Winding up his fifth year as parade chair, Mr. Bast estimated there were about 3,000 spectators stretching from Ontario Street down to the YMCA.

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