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## Fired up over torch

By BRIAN SHYPULA

Updated 11 months ago



Regional route co-ordinator Candace Woodside briefs local media on this Sunday's schedule for the torch relay through Stratford. SCOTT WISHART The Beacon Herald

Organizers are preparing for a crowd of 8,000-15,000 for Sunday's 2010 Winter Olympic torch relay event downtown.

The estimate is based on the turnout at relay events in Peterborough and Lindsay last week.

It had Mayor Dan Mathieson stressing patience yesterday, both to make sure everyone has a chance to see the flame at the free celebration and during accompanying road closures over the weekend.

"We hope that everyone shows the true holiday spirit and the Olympic spirit and is patient and works with us to make sure this is a great celebration," he said at a media briefing.

The event area bounded by St. Patrick, Waterloo, Wellington and Ontario streets will be closed to traffic beginning Saturday at 6 p.m. to allow for setup. It will remain closed until roughly 6 p.m. Sunday to allow crews to disassemble and pack up gear.

People are being encouraged to take public transit to the event. The bus rides are free.

For those who drive, parking will be available at the Erie and St. Patrick (Cooper site) lots and surrounding residential streets. Handicapped parking will be at the LCBO lot on

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Public washrooms will be set up in the Albert Street and BMO parking lots. Handicapped washrooms will be available at city hall, but otherwise city hall is closed to the public during the event.

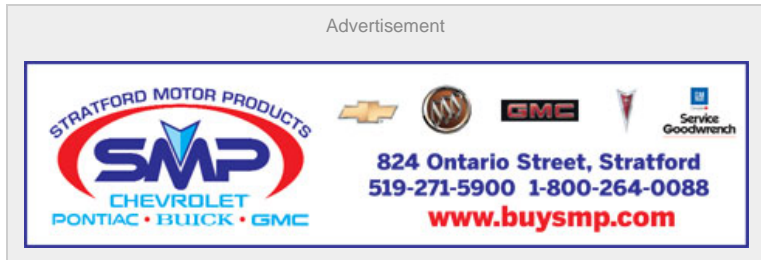
A big crowd could be a boon for merchants.

"Businesses have been encouraged to stay open in the downtown core," Mayor Mathieson said.

The day begins with a community breakfast put on by the [Stratford Optimist Club](#) at 8 a.m. There will be 600 breakfasts available for \$3 apiece. An ecumenical church service organized by Stratford Council of Churches will be held in the Central Secondary School gymnasium at 9:30 a.m.

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The formal program of entertainment and family-oriented activities runs from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. with performances by Judy's School of Dance, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and singers Gerry Reynolds and Steve Rae.

Organizers tried to get hometown teen sensation Justin Bieber to perform, but his schedule didn't allow it.

The flame is expected to arrive on Stratford's outskirts around noon. It will come into the city along Downie Street, starting near Lorne Avenue, with each torch bearer carrying it about 300 metres.

Stratford Olympic swimmer Julia Wilkinson will run the final leg before lighting the cauldron at city hall at around 12:30 p.m.

On stage with Ms. Wilkinson for the ceremonial lighting will be Stratford native and resident Stephen Monteith, who helped Canada win a bronze medal in hockey at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble.

Sixteen students from Central Secondary School will kick off the flame's departure. The route will follow Downie Street to Ontario Street and then east to the city limits before carrying on to Shakespeare.

Stratford police will supervise short-term road closures along Downie and Ontario streets for the safety of the torch bearers and relay convoy.

Mayor Mathieson revealed yesterday that he is one of the torch bearers. He'll carry a torch from Front Street to Queen Street. He was selected by RBC, one of the relay sponsors.

If the weather is bad, the entire event could be moved to the Rotary Complex. But that seems unlikely.

The mayor said he's been watching weather forecasts compulsively.

"It's safe to assume right now that we'll be holding it outside," he said.

City crews will be on standby to remove snow and apply salt with both snow and freezing rain in the forecast for the weekend.

Ray Nothdurft, deputy director of engineering and public works, said being part of the local organizing team has stirred fond memories of playing for Canada's international soccer squad in 1982-83.

"This is very special for me because it reminds me of how special this country is," he said.

Some 12,000 Canadians will carry a torch through 1,037 communities, covering 45,000 kilometres. Stratford is one of 189 celebration communities.

The games begin Feb. 12.

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