

# THOUSANDS USHER IN HOLIDAYS AT PARADE

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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News Mr. and Mrs. Claus wave to paradegoers as they ride along in the Harlem Roscoe Fire Protection District's ladder truck during the 25th annual Downtown Beloit Association holiday lighted parade. Mr. Claus was rescued by Beloit firefighters earlier in the evening to help kick off the festivities.

BELOIT - The 25th annual Lighted Holiday Parade lit up Grand Avenue to the delight of thousands lining the route on Friday evening.

The parade officially rings in the transition to the holiday season for Beloit, with throngs of visitors and Stateline Area residents gathering to experience the parade and holiday festivities.

Santa himself was rescued from a roof landing at First National Bank by the Beloit Fire Department, followed by the jolly big man giving a wink and a wave as the Christmas tree at First National Bank Plaza was lighted. Temperatures for this year's parade were at record highs and it was nearly 60 degrees when Santa helped light the tree.

The Downtown Beloit Association is celebrating a quarter century for the holiday event, with 29 floats participating in the light-hearted and well-lit competition. First place winners of this year's competition were Senz Insurance in the business category and The West Side Combined Flag Corp. took first in the nonprofit category. Second and third place businesses included Willowick Assisted Living and Marx Dance Academy. For the nonprofit category, League of United Latin American Citizens Chapter 341 and Messiah Lutheran Church took second and third, respectively.

Parade-goers were able to enjoy free hot chocolate from the Salvation Army and Mr. and Mrs. Claus stuck around after the parade to hear young children's gift requests at Turtle Creek Bookstore.

For first time parade attendees 6-year-old Ayden and 5-year-old Aryanah Stowers, seeing Santa meant the pair could get a jump on imploring the big man to bring them presents.

Ayden said he hopes Santa brings him a remote control car and Aryanah said she's banking on Santa coming through with "animal toys that move around."

"This is the first time we've been able to do this," said grandmother Brenda Stowers. "I am excited for the kids to see Santa and to see everyone so happy."

Stephanie Stowers, Ayden and Aryanah's mother, said the parade marked the start of the Christmas season.

"It's exciting because it really starts the holidays," she said. "They know that Christmas is coming and is right around the corner."

Downtown Beloit Association Director Shauna El-Amin said celebrating 25 years of the lighted parade was special not only for the organization but also for families attending the holiday event.

"We've built such great partnerships in the community over the years for this event," El-Amin said. "It's great to be able to bring everyone together for this each year to really celebrate the start of the holiday season."

Looking back on the last 25 years, El-Amin said credit should be given to event founders Dave Knudson and Andrew Janke, who helped organize the first holiday parade and Santa's landing.

"People thought they were crazy having Santa land on top of First National Bank," she said. "It's worked out and it's been awesome. It's such a great event for all the families."

The DBA is also hosting Holidazzle this year for those who aren't quite sure what gifts to buy this holiday season.

The event will take place from 5-9 p.m. Friday at around 30 businesses around downtown Beloit.

Vendors will set up shop at all participating businesses and shoppers can hop on a free trolley ride to get from store-to-store. The annual party for the Vision Beloit partners - DBA, Visit Beloit, Greater Beloit Economic Development Corp., and Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce - will be held at the Hendricks Center for the Performing Arts, 409 Pleasant St., during the shopping spree.