

Thanksgiving Day Parade Planning Underway

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The holiday season seems far off right now as we look for a glimmer of hope that the country and the region will rebound from these difficult times. Of course, the holidays have always been all about hope and Carolinas' Carrousel, Inc., the non-profit organization that produces the Carolinas' Thanksgiving Day Parade, is determined that this year's event on Thursday, November 26, will once again give the community a sense of joy, fun and excitement and a reason to celebrate.

"The parade has been the traditional kick-off to the holiday season in this area since 1947," said Chief Jon Hannan of the Charlotte Fire Department. Chief Hannan is the president of the board of Carolinas' Carrousel. "We intend to keep that tradition alive and to make the 2009 parade the biggest and best ever."

The organization depends on the support of sponsors and benefactors to help them achieve their mission of enhancing the region's community life through the parade and its affiliated Carrousel Scholarship Program. Belk is returning as the parade's presenting sponsor this year. Long-time sponsor Autobell Car Wash will be back as the Carillon Partner and the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (CRVA) and CPI Security Systems are once again on board. Bryan Paschal of Paschal Innovative Promotions is working with Carolinas' Carrousel to reach out to area companies and organizations to secure sponsorships for the parade. "Bryan has a real passion for helping non-profits like us raise the funds we need to produce events that give back to the community," said Linda Healy Vespa, executive director for Carolinas' Carrousel. "I am confident that his enthusiasm will encourage potential sponsors to join us in producing a fabulous parade this year."

"I am looking forward to promoting this great event to potential sponsors," said Bryan Paschal. "I am also excited to have the opportunity to work with Carolinas' Carrousel while raising funds to support college education for students in our community."

Sponsor and benefactor funding also supports the Carrousel Scholarship Program, which awards college scholarships to outstanding seniors from area high schools. Each year, up to 60 area high schools each select a Carrousel representative based on academic excellence and community activity. From this group of remarkable students, judges choose a Carrousel Queen and her Court. These girls win scholarships paid to the colleges they choose to attend. Some area colleges, such as Wingate University, also award scholarships to Carrousel representatives. In addition, the Carrousel Scholarship Program gives scholarships to talented marching band members with matching grants to their high schools.

In October 2008, TravelMuse.com cited the Carolinas' Thanksgiving Day Parade as the fourth largest Thanksgiving Parade in the United States. The 2008 parade drew a crowd of over 100,000 spectators to uptown Charlotte and approximately 285,000 viewers watched the parade on WBTV. Last year the parade started at 10 a.m. rather than at 1 p.m. as it had in past years. The earlier start proved to be a very positive change as it gave spectators and participants more time to celebrate Thanksgiving with family and friends; the change also resulted in an unanticipated increase in Thanksgiving dinner business for some uptown restaurants. Given this success, the parade will start at 10 a.m. again this year and every year going forward.

A goal for the parade is to effectively represent the region's rich cultural diversity, history and local artists. Parade organizers are actively seeking participation from cultural groups representing the ethnic mix of the Charlotte area and they hope to feature an International Float in the parade for the first time this year. Regional performing arts groups are also encouraged to participate. "The Macy's Thanksgiving Parade features cast members from Broadway shows. Our parade should showcase the talented performers we have right here in this region," said Vespa.

The Carolinas' Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Carrousel Scholarship Program offer opportunities for area companies and organizations to promote their businesses while giving the community a time-honored, family-friendly experience. For sponsorship information, please contact Bryan Paschal at 704-643-3038 or e-mail at bpaschal@paschalpromotions.com. For information on how you can participate in the parade, contact Linda Healy Vespa at 704-525-0250 or e-mail at linda@carolinasthanksgivingparade.org, or visit www.carolinasthanksgivingparade.org.

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