

Swift sales at Brighten the Night

By Sarah Vance

Maynooth's annual Brighten the Night parade closed off the town's roads on Saturday, Dec., 12, just after sunset, extending through the intersection at highways 127 and 62, travelling north-east towards the Logger's fields.

It is the type of event that doesn't use a formal registration process but which nonetheless always lives up to the expectations of the community. Saturday night brought out 17 different trucks and trailers decorated with lights and nativity scenes, with families seated around open fires on flat-beds and carol sings on 18-wheelers.

"A number of our participants this year used solar panels to power the lights on their displays," said Brighten the Night co-ordinator, Joe Shulman.

Firemen distributed candy, sirens rang in the air and steam evaporated from log trucks into the starlit Hastings Highlands night.

Entries in Maynooth's parade are awarded prizes by an independent panel of school-aged children.

The three prize winner entries include, in ascending order, Carousel Creations of Lake St. Peter; Gallo-Teck of Maynooth; and D. Spilek & Son of Maple Leaf.

Four decorated all-terrain vehicles; three horses and a whole team of Bancroft Gems gymnasts kept pace in the procession, while performing routines, on Maynooth's main street, under December's cold moon.

In the hours prior to the parade, vendors bumped elbows with their contemporaries at two partnered winter farmer markets that spilled out of the town's international hostel and the Hastings Highlands Community Centre.

"It has been busy today, with 43 vendors in the gym and over eight at the Arlington," said organizer Christine Hass. "I begin taking bookings after Labour Day, we're always booked by October and every year we have vendors on waiting lists."

Local artisans, with offerings from sheep wool scarves to pigs-in-blanket pastries displayed upscale booths at the Hastings Highlands Centre and across the street at the hostel. In its fifth year, the winter market stands out for its professional and plentiful retailer booths that are seeking more space to accommodate their needs.

"My Christmas wish list would be that the municipality gives us a space near the Logger's fields where we could build covered vendor booths for our summer and fall market months," said Christine Hass. "In the summer, many of our vendors have standing orders which they fulfill week-by-week, a permanent location for our vendors would help the market community move forward."

"The winter market is the best place to shop for Christmas presents," said Sophia Amaya Lopez, wearing a Lucky Maloo up-cycled sweater, designed by Miriam Hookings who was among retailers at Brighten the Night. "I purchase gifts for my friends from the market and I love buying here."

Agricultural businesses such as Hillsvieview Farm & Studios and Magnificent Hill stood out amongst the many high quality retail displays for their use of promotional banners with visually identifiable brands.

"At the Maynooth Christmas market I met four new real estate clients, chatted with many about homesteading, furniture refinishing and sold more than half the soap inventory," said real estate agent and Magnificent Hill proprietor Lea Kitler, on her Facebook page on Saturday.

The overall reliability of the products offered at the market has helped situate Maynooth, as the go-to-place for good quality, professionally organized trade.

"Our vendors are specialists in the services and products they offer," said Christine Hass, who sold 21 pies and 1,600 cookies by 3:30 p.m., on Saturday. "Vendors are using beautiful displays and we maintain a positive customer service tone."

Shoppers who packed into the Arlington international hostel found experienced vendors delivering goods, that were both savory and sweet.

"In October we had over 100 more overnight bookings at the hostel than we had in the same month, in 2014," said Bernie, from the Arlington, where the pool table was covered to accommodate local retailers who brought everything from chocolates, clothing and jewelry into town.

With Bob Van Balen Walter acting as parade marshal, the bright procession through town was a festive conclusion to the busy retail day in Hastings Highlands. The floats were welcomed by waving families and children who cheered from both sides of the street.

"It was our 12th year of Brighten the Night and our best in my opinion," said Shulman. "The Town of Bancroft put in an excellent float with Mayor Bernice Jenkins on it."

Father Christmas held up the rear, from atop his flat-bed carriage, accompanied by reindeers Blitzen, Dasher and Rudolph on heel. They were followed by an OPP cruiser, with lights a glowing, as the roads re-opened for traffic.