

Inside Business

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INSIDE BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT

Norfolk's Grand Illumination more than just a parade

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Courtesy photo

A local marching band participates in a previous year's Grand Illumination Parade in downtown Norfolk.

Everybody loves a parade, especially Norfolk business owners. The annual event attracts more than 80,000 people to the downtown area. It's set for 7 p.m. Nov. 17.

The Downtown Norfolk Council, which puts on the shindig, raises the more than \$100,000 needed to put on the event through sponsorships.

Jessica Kliner, the council's director of marketing and communications, said the cost includes a long list of everything associated with putting on a parade such as radios for volunteers, marketing, promotions and signage.

Presenting sponsor is MacArthur Center. Jim Wofford, general manager for the

center, said the mall has been involved for the past dozen years he has been there.

He said the mall's sponsorship increases as the parade grows and its outreach in the community expands, too.

"It's a great team building opportunity for us," Wofford said of the balloon the center sponsors.

Wofford said team members get excited about walking the parade route and waving to paradegoers – whom he noted are also their customers.

There are community, contributing, hospitality, supporting, balloon and corporate bleacher sponsors. But, it is the building owners who pay to light up their respective structures that make the city's skyline shine.

Mary Robbins, senior property manager for CBRE Real Estate, said several of the buildings they manage participate in the grand illumination including 150 W. Main St., 300 E. Main St., 125 Saint Paul Blvd., and 223 City Hall Ave.

"The DNC reaches out to all of us that manage the buildings to create it. The DNC has done so much for downtown we would support them in absolutely everything," Robbins said.

Building owners pay to install the lights, maintain them and take them down. While it depends on the size of the building – and how many lights are needed – Robbins said it generally costs between \$3,000 and \$6,000.

"It's such a wonderful thing for downtown Norfolk," Robbins said. "We are so fortunate to have the DNC so active in doing what they do."

Peter Freda, owner of Granby Pizza at 235 Granby St., jokingly referred to the parade as both grand and luminous. But on a serious note, Freda said parade day is always their busiest of the year.

He said they have a line out the door for three or four hours, noting this is their 13th parade.

"We wish every month had a parade," he said.

Many paradegoers and participants pre-order their pizza. Freda said they can deliver up to 5 p.m. until the streets are closed down.

"It's a day where if you're good at what you do, you can shine," he said. "All of the businesses down here prepare for it."

Phil Smith, owner of Brick Anchor Brew House at 241 Granby St., also views the parade as a positive event.

“We see a spike in sales of probably 150 percent over a normal weekend day,” Smith said. “Being right on the route allows us also to market our space as a front window view without having to be in the crowd.”

The two-mile parade starts at the corner of St. Paul’s Blvd. and Main Street, travels along Main Street to Granby Street heading north. It then turns onto Freemason Street heading west, turns onto Boush Street heading south and ends on Waterside Drive and Water Street in front of the Sheraton Norfolk Waterside Hotel.

Kliner said there are about 20 vendors along the route and in Harbor Park where the participants are staged for beginning line-up.

“Over the years we have changed the number of vendors we have as our brick-and-mortar options have expanded,” Kliner said.

“We bring in a variety of vendors typical for festivals and events: hot dogs, funnel cakes, seafood, Mediterranean, snacks and treats.”

Smith said they see a bump in dinner sales starting about 5 p.m.

“Some remain and watch (the parade) while others will go and watch somewhere else,” he said. “I think it’s great for the businesses and the downtown larger community. I love the parade just as much as those who come down to view it. It’s a win win.”