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Friday, November 28, 2008

**America's Thanksgiving Parade**

**Thankful for parade traditions**

Novice, veteran spectators jump-start holidays

Leonard N. Fleming / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- For most of Kevin Bradley's life, Thanksgiving celebration was about turkey, Lions games and family. But on Thursday, he added a new tradition: attending the America's Thanksgiving Parade.

So the 38-year-old Detroit resident and his 6- and 16-year-old daughters stood outside with his girlfriend and her family along Woodward Avenue near Peterboro, smiling ear to ear and hyped about the bands, the creative floats and clowns tossing beads to parade revelers who braved a chilly but sunny morning.

"I just wanted to start something with my daughters," Bradley said. Speaking of his youngest, Kayla, he added, "She's old enough to stand the cold."

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Thousands of spectators packed the parade route, with some like Bradley attending their first Thanksgiving Day event, while others notched another year on parade resumes that have lasted decades.

The 82nd event, with the theme "Legends and Lollipops," kicked off on Woodward at Mack Avenue with hundreds of clowns, giant balloons, floats and high school marching bands.

Many lined the sidewalks using small tents, coffee and hot chocolate to fend off temperatures in the 30s.

The parade has been a longstanding tradition in the family of Sarah Gijbsers, 48, of Beverly Hills, who used to attend every year with her dad, uncle, siblings and cousins. Gijbsers skipped the last four years, but her five children, ages 10 to 18, persuaded her to return.

On and off, Gijbsers has been to at least 25 parades.

"It's like a tradition," she said, surrounded by her husband and family friends -- some on ladders from their garage.

"You almost feel guilty about not being here. The kids, they wanted to come back. I'm really happy I did."

Dennis and Darlene Seibel of Clinton Township have started out their Thanksgiving for 18 straight years perched on Woodward in front of the VFW hall across the street from the First Presbyterian Church.

Dennis Seibel, who donned a turkey hat, said they began coming when their 18-year-old twins were babies.

Ethan and Zachary used to play in a band in the parade, too.

"It just wouldn't be Thanksgiving without coming down here," said Darlene Seibel. "It's a great way to start the holidays."

As the floats passed by, she tried to guess who the famous people were.

"That's Brandy, right?" she asked as the R&B singer/actress passed.

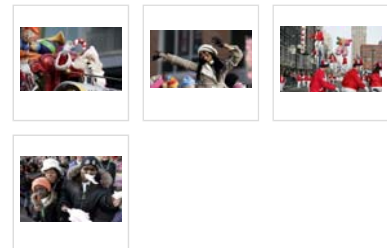
Featured celebrities included R&B singer Lloyd, Nuttin' But Stringz from NBC's "America's Got Talent" and Heidi Scheer, Mrs. Michigan United States.

John Bendzick, 63, of Dearborn, came down as he does every year to watch the parade and commiserate with his Vietnam veteran buddies at the Chapter 9 hall where breakfast was served to parade-goers.



The Redford Township Unicycle Club of Michigan wobbles its way down Woodward. The parade carried the theme "Legends and Lollipops." (Velvet S. McNeil / The Detroit News)

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This year he noticed a more "serious" tone than in years past.

"I think they are concerned about the economy and if things are going to turn around," Bendzick said. "Everyone was happy. I think they are thankful."

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