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Float Making 101

Introduction

There are several basic things to take into consideration when beginning to build a float. These include the theme of the parade, how much money can be spent on the float, what paperwork will be needed to enter, the type of vehicle that will make up your float, float design, how many people can and will ride on the float, where will the float be built, and how to deal with any last minute repairs that may occur on the way to or during the parade!

Remember, the more planning and decisions that are made in advance, the easier the work along the way will be.

Theme Of Parade

Once you receive the parade float entry application, you will know the theme of the parade. Other information such as the exact time the parade will start and where your line-up position is and when you should be positioned there will be sent in a follow-up email/snail mail. Also, be aware of the time of year and how this seasonal weather may affect the design of your float. Be sure you consider this when selecting your design elements and products. Also, consider how you will display the name of your organization in concordance with your design and theme of the parade.

Funding

A float will take some money to create no matter what size or how limited the design or decorations are. If you have funding in place and can decide on a budget, this is a benefit before beginning the float. If not, then you will have to use creative ways to secure the items needed to build your float. Many things such as a vehicle to build the float on, your organization's banner, carpeting for floor, hay bales to sit on, etc. can be borrowed or may be donated to a float. If you publicize the things you need among your group, you will be amazed at what can be obtained. Many businesses may not be able to sponsor your float in its entirety, but many times they will give a portion of what you need. So don't be afraid to ask!

Paperwork

As soon as the decision is made to go ahead with a float, someone should be appointed to be the contact person for your group in dealing with the parade organizers. That person must then obtain the necessary entry paperwork, the entry fee and all the parade rules and guidelines, which will be necessary for your planning effort. Be sure you know any deadlines and your contact person will be responsible for keeping the group within the rules and deadlines.

“Go N-éiri an bóthar leat” (May the road rise to meet you)

Types Of Vehicles

Be sure you are well versed in any rules pertaining to the type of vehicles allowed in the parade. In addition to making sure your vehicle is in sound and legal operating condition, it is imperative that the height of the float cannot exceed 16 feet. The height of the lowest bridge on Salina Street measures 16'11", from curbside to bridge.

Be sure your assigned driver is licensed to drive and also holds the correct licensure for the type of vehicle you use. Different types of vehicles may be used including a "stake-rack" truck, which is an all-in-one unit or perhaps a truck or tractor that tows a separate trailer. Other options include cars, pick-up trucks and even motorcycles! You may opt for a combination of more than one vehicle. For instance, you could use a stake-rack truck that is led by a few motorcycles or an antique car, etc.

Float Design

Your design will evolve out of the parade's annual theme. Once you have decided upon your float's idea based on the theme, you will come up with your own design. Be sure the design will be compatible with the type of vehicle you are able to secure. A simple sketch can be helpful to see if there are any potential problems with the proposed design before you begin building it. It will also allow everyone to share his or her thoughts that may help to improve the design or make it less costly, if that is an issue. Some criteria to take into consideration might be music, lights, power source, weight, parade route, stability, storage of decorations, loading and unloading of riders and of course, safety. In addition, you must be sure that your vehicle can accommodate the number of riders proposed to be on board during the parade and have the appropriate number of those assigned as "spotters". Your spotters take responsibility for assisting people on and off, thereby insuring everyone's safety.

Be sure to incorporate any thank you posters or banners that list your sponsors into your design.

Materials

Once your float design is decided and you have obtained a truck or other vehicle, and have your sketch prepared, it is time to make a list of materials. Again, remember to use materials that will stand up in the worst weather you might get that time of year and you will be prepared for anything. And don't forget the little things like glue, staplers, tape, rope, etc. It is always better to have things you may never need to use than to be caught without them at that crucial hour!

The Riders

You should discuss and have an idea of who plans to ride before you go to the parade. Also, you may want to discuss how the riders fit into the theme of the float. Maybe you will all wear a certain costume, a certain color, identical hats, etc. Either way, be sure you factor your riders into the theme so they are consistent with your theme, design and overall look.

Where To Build The Float

The place the float is to be assembled is very important. You must make arrangements to decorate with enough time in advance of the parade as possible. Be sure to have your "decorating" volunteers lined up. They may not be the same people who will be riding. Be sure everyone has clear instructions of where and when to report for assembling the float, and that you have clearance with the owner of the truck to adhere any decorations, etc. Another important factor is to be sure the float will be in a spot where it can be locked up after being decorated to keep your

handiwork safe. Also, be sure to bring or deliver to the site the necessary tools, decorations, work materials that will be needed to complete your project.

Workers

Be sure that all persons involved in the project know who is bringing what, who is doing what, and who is building and/or riding, etc. It helps to have an assignment person who will keep a list of all of the above so that nothing falls through the cracks and you are not caught off guard at the last moment.

Moving The Float To The Parade

Remember to plan enough time for moving the float from its build location to the parade. Once your vehicle is decorated and filled with people, you won't be driving at much over 20mph. So be sure to factor in the slow driving speed with your distance to the parade and figure your moving time accordingly. Also, be sure to have an emergency repair kit with tape, rope, tacks, etc. to make any quick repairs that may result after driving the float to your specific parade lineup location.

During The Parade

Be sure to have a game plan for how your riders will appear on the float. Do you want them to wave, sing, play music, cheer, etc? Do you want them grouped around the exterior of the float or in a certain seating arrangement? Do you want some members of your group to walk in front, behind or along side your float?

Most importantly, think about your float presentation when you are in front of the judges' viewing stand. The stand is located on right side of South Salina Street near the end of the parade route. Have a plan for what you will do and how you want to look for the judges once your group/business's name is mentioned by the announcer on the viewing stand. For example, you may want all riders to move to that side of the float during your judging moment and/or perform a short skit or song for the judges.

After The Parade

Have your "float tear-down" team in place so that once you arrive back to where everyone assembled to get on the float in the morning. Plan in advance, on how you will return items borrowed and remember to thank all donors as soon as possible. You could include a photo of the float and its participants with your thank you letter.

If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to contact anyone on the Float Making 101 team!

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St. Patrick's Day Parade Floats Judging Criteria

To All Parade Float Entrants:

The criteria by which the St. Patrick's Day Parade judges score each float is as follows:

The judges allow a maximum of 25 points for each participating float, using a point's scale of 1 to 5 in each of the following categories:

- craftsmanship
- design
- enthusiasm
- originality
- parade theme

Good luck with your float!

Sincerely,

The Float Making 101 Committee