



On November 24th, 2023, George Cohon passed away. As we celebrate the 119th edition of the Parade, I can honestly say that there would not be a Parade today without George.

In 1982, George was sitting with Toronto City Chair, Paul Godfrey, when Paul received a call from Fred Eaton letting Paul know that Eaton's would no longer be able to sponsor the Parade. Paul then turned to George and asked George to save the Toronto Santa Claus Parade. George accepted the challenge, even though he admitted that he knew nothing about running a parade. But George, who was born and grew up in Chicago, knew how much the Parade meant to the City of Toronto and promised to do what he could.

Within days, George along with Ron Barbaro, and our own Peter Beresford, created a charitable foundation and started to work the phones. With little time to spare, they signed up 20 corporate partners each of whom agreed to sponsor a float and the Parade was back on the streets. George's efforts to save the Parade cannot be overstated but, in George's usual modest way, he always said that it was a "group effort", with Ron, Peter, Irv Ungerman, Ray Biggart and Norman Jewison each having a significant role to play.

From that first Parade in December of 1982, George never missed a Santa Claus Parade, and always did so in style, whether it be marching as a Celebrity Clown or in full costume with top hat, riding in a cart with a grandchild or two in the passenger seat. George loved the Parade and the Parade loved George.

The Parade extends its heartfelt sympathies to George's family and a special thank you to George, and our great friends at McDonald's, from the millions and millions of Torontonians who have been able to experience the magic of the Parade over the last 40 years because of our dear friend George.

George, you will be missed but not forgotten. Thank you.

David McCarthy
Chairperson, The Original Santa Claus Parade