

Floating a good idea by Elaine Waldorf Gewirtz

Rotary marches on —in the Rose Parade

It's one thing to work on a project to proclaim harmony and peace throughout the world. It's quite another thing to do so while supervising 30 exuberant Interactors. In December 1989, California Rotarians Ken Roberts and Mike Chilcoat did just that, while decorating the Rotary International float for the annual Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena, California, U.S.A.

Ken, a member of the Rotary Club of Palm Desert-Palms To Pines, and Mike, a member of the Rotary Club of Big Bear, are big fans of the Rose Parade, a U.S. New Year's Day tradition for more than a century.

The "finishing touches" for the 1990 float took place on the three days prior to New Year's, but work actually started months earlier. That's when the Rotary Rose Parade Float Committee, a group of California Rotarians, adopted a design that linked Rotary programs to the parade theme, "A World of Harmony." (Endorsed by the R.I. Board of Directors as a valuable showcase for Rotary, the float is financed by donations from U.S. and Canadian Rotary clubs.)

The 1990 float, "The Peaceable Kingdom," represented global harmony through a representation of a bold lion living in peace with a meek lamb. The pair rested in a flower-and-butterfly-filled garden.

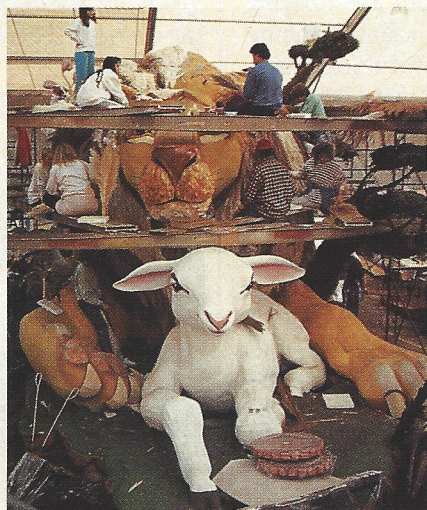
The 1990 Rose Parade was a two-hour pageant that included 60 floats, 22 marching bands, and 300 equestrians. A million people lined Colorado Boulevard to see the parade, and an estimated 280 million more watched it on TV. (The parade was broadcast to 52 countries.)

In a day-long shift, Ken, Mike, and the Interactors helped transform sculpted forms designed by Fiesta Parade Company into a blossom-bedecked masterpiece. (Parade rules require that floats be covered only with blossoms, grasses, or seeds.) The lion's pelt was made of butterscotch mums. His mane was a mix of roses, orchid stems, and various grasses.

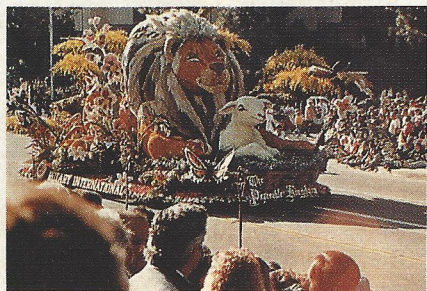
Lacking big budgets for staff, most float construction companies rely on loyal volunteers to place the flowers. Crews work around the clock to clip, glue, and poke thousands of seeds, petals, and buds on the forms.



Some volunteers cut stems off mums as others apply glue to the flowers.



Perched on scaffolding, workers glue flowers to the 1990 Rotary float.



Animal attraction: The finished product marked Rotary's 11th year of participation in the Tournament of Roses Parade.

The work itself was organized chaos, a mix of fun and drudgery, knit together by an unflagging spirit of camaraderie. Ken's daughter, Kendra, who is also in Interact, added finishing touches to the lamb's ears. A group of students exchanged stories while separating strands of uva grass. Three boys good-naturedly jockeyed for position to dip into the two cases of rice. Each boy claimed to have the best handful to glue to the lion's eyes.

"Get some more glue up here for the mane," yelled Thad Roberts from atop the scaffold. Below, other teens spread glue, then stuck individual mums to the lion's body.

Not all the tasks were fun, so Mike carefully rotated the teens to different work stations. "The important thing," he said, "is to keep them motivated through the boring tasks. Stripping thousands of date palm fibers apart can get downright tedious."

Prem Narayan, 16, a Rotary Youth Exchange student from India, was awed by the process. "This parade is beautiful," she said. "Everywhere, fragrant flowers fill the air."

Working on the float was also a lesson in leadership. Although Ken and Mike supervised on site, they delegated most of the organizational tasks to the Interact officers weeks earlier. "The clubs elected their own chairman and enlisted members to make the trip," said Ken.

As the hours slipped by, the floral forms slowly took shape. Soon it was time for dinner, shift change, and the three-hour trip home. It was a long day. Some of the Interactors were sad that they wouldn't see the float's completion. A few were glad they didn't have to look at another glue container. Others vowed to return next year. All eagerly awaited seeing "their" lion and lamb on TV.

As the Interactors left, new volunteers arrived. The next two days would be hectic but exhilarating as crews strived to finish the float in time for judging. The 1990 Rotary float garnered no trophy, but it was a winner anyway—thanks to the blue-ribbon dedication of the Interactors and Rotary workers.

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Note: On 1 January, look for "Ropin' and Rompin'," Rotary's 1991 Rose Parade entry. The parade's theme is "Fun 'n' Games."