

Roses on Parade

Experiencing America's grandest New Year's Day tradition through the eyes of "a White Suiter"

By Laurie Snyder



Retired Maj. Ed Stevenson has likely been part of your family's New Year's Day nearly every year for the past 30 years without you ever realizing it. One of a select few Americans to have the honor of putting on the distinctive white suit worn by Tournament of Roses Association volunteers, Stevenson has been among the earliest on scene and last to leave, helping with everything from float decoration to judging, as well as troubleshooting to keep the Rose Parade running smoothly. Photo Ohlen Alexander

Tiny tots wowed into silent wonder by the sheer awesomeness of ginormous, flower-bedazzled floats. Parents pumping fists proudly as their high schoolers strut with marching bands. Americans have been engaged in a shared obsession with the Tournament of Roses Parade since 1898 when East Coast newspapermen first traveled west to cover the phenomenal flower fiesta.

Although Ed Stevenson wasn't on hand back then, he has witnessed many exciting times since joining the Tournament of Roses Association in 1984. Stevenson, who recently retired as general manager of the Lafayette Veterans' Building, gave Lamorindans a behind-the-scenes glimpse of life as "a White Suiter" during a December talk at Orinda's Masonic Lodge.

"I grew up in Sunnyvale and was in the high school band," said Stevenson, a California State University, Hayward graduate. Earning a Bronze Star Medal with the Marines in Vietnam, he retired as a major. In 1982, work took him to Southern California, where he began helping La Cañada with its Rose Parade float. "That's how I got hooked." To join, said Stevenson, you

must work or live within 15 miles of Pasadena City Hall. But once you're in, you're in – even if you relocate. Now an Honorary Life Member, he served on 11 different committees before finally earning a spot with the Judging Committee. It's a coveted spot because the majority of floats now range in cost from \$100,000 to \$500,000 each due to animation and exotic flowers used. Many are now built by professionals.

Still others exude a different beauty. Stevenson still chokes up when recalling the work of Donate Life (www.donatelifefloat.org/). Each year, the group honors deceased organ, eye and tissue donors while educating viewers about the shortage of organs available for transplant.

The History of the Tournament of Roses

The Rose Parade began, according to the Tournament of Roses Association, "as a promotional effort by Pasadena's distinguished Valley Hunt Club." In 1890, members lured "former East Coast neighbors to a mid-winter holiday, where they could watch ... chariot races, jousting, foot races, polo and tug-of-war under the warm California sun. ... continued on page B4



In 2012, the Odd Fellows & Rebekahs wowed the crowd with "Shining Knights Still Exist," and were justly rewarded with the Tournament of Roses' prestigious Isabella Coleman Trophy for best presentation and harmony of color. Photo used with permission. Copyright: Ed Stevenson, 2012.

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