

Trinity Remple

Vernon Christian School

The Winter Carnival - Building Community Since 1893

Although we aren't alone by any means – Vernon possesses a metro population of 67,086 – the annual Vernon Winter Carnival brings the community together. It allows people to get out of their houses after a long hibernation, giving us a place to regroup, rekindle and reminisce.

Growing up, I spent a lot of time in downtown Vernon. My parents opened the doors to Pooh's and Beans Sweet Shoppe in 2000, and it quickly became my second home. The lead-up to Christmas was a flurry of excitement yearly as Main Street was set aglow with twinkling lights. And just as the memories of each Christmas began to fade, the town came alive again, buzzing with preparations for the much-anticipated Winter Carnival.

When we were five and seven, my big brother Liam and I started setting up a little hot chocolate and candy stand during Winter Carnival activities held in the downtown core. Our small sign was hung, with its scribbled letters, proudly proclaiming "Pooh's and Beans: Hot Chocolate and Treats." I'd stand on an overturned milk crate, pouring hot chocolate for eventgoers who were quick to appreciate my skill & confidence as I served them and how Liam always accurately counted back change. We'd set up right where we could see all the commotion, often stealing glances to enjoy what was happening around us and feeling like we had something important to contribute. People would stop and chat with other customers or us. Which parade float was the best? What other activities would be fun to check out? And which of the many activities planned was our favourite?

From my experience, community events like the Vernon Winter Carnival bring out the best in people. It's where I've seen people at their happiest and most caring. Memories are tied to the Winter Carnival, creating inextricable bonds that can instantly generate camaraderie amongst strangers while sharing their best experiences - or fiascos- of years past.

The importance of community is widely reported, and articles online and in magazines consistently remind us of the benefits of belonging to a community. A 2020 Forbes article titled "How To Build Community And Why It Matters So Much" emphasizes that

communities are great for overall well-being, shared purpose and building resilience. Over the years, carnival coordinators and volunteers have provided the platform and created this legacy for our residents. And whether a planner or a participant, the Vernon Winter Carnival gives us a role to play in the bigger picture of where we call home.

The Winter Carnival remains a source of joy and nostalgia, capturing the spirit of our town and the memories we hold dear. As Vernon's kids have slowly grown, the many events, the bustle to round up volunteers and the sights, sounds and smells of the Winter Carnival have shaped our perspective of our hometown. Instilling not only in us what it means to be a part of a smaller interior community but an incredible connection to where we grew up.

I will always hold memories of my family going to see the balloon glow close to my heart - admiring the different patterns of each balloon and choosing which were our favourites. Or going to the ice palace in Polson Park, and when I got older doing the polar bear swim; even now, as I visit the event nearing adulthood, I'm still filled with the same child-like delight as when I first experienced the Winter Carnival.

Annually, the celebration casts a spell over Vernon, transforming it into a wonderland. The streets are alive with the sound of drums, motors, and high-flying batons as kids march with grins stretching from ear to ear. Events like the Winter Carnival make Vernon unique from other places; the deep-rooted tradition evokes the fondest memories of our town. The Carnival serves as a bridge, connecting all community members and making everyone feel welcome, whether they are outsiders or lifelong residents. The Winter Carnival remains a shining example of what makes Vernon extraordinary and why it holds such a special place in the hearts of those who call it home.