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## Crowds greet Santa at Royal Oak parade

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Billed as Santa's first stop in metro Detroit, downtown Royal Oak's Holiday Magic Parade kicked off the region's Thanksgiving-through-Christmas period this morning with a blend of yule tradition and electric guitars.

Organizers estimated the crowd at more than 20,000 that crowded sidewalks from 10 a.m. until noon on both sides of South Washington from Lincoln north to nearly 11 Mile, watching a parade whose date over the years has crept earlier and earlier on the calendar until this year it predates Detroit's big parade on Thanksgiving Day by five days.

There were plenty of traditional sights and sounds, like the award-winning Ferndale High School Marching band and the Shriners making rapid circles in their mini-roadsters. But right behind the Ferndale marchers, with their shining brass instruments and pressed uniforms, was a float of vastly different notes — those of teen musicians from the Detroit School of Rock and Pop Music, located in a former bike shop on the same street as the parade.

There were seven electric guitarists strumming, one drummer pounding, and one generator electrifying on the platform draped with signs identifying the school whose aspiring rockers also have performed at Royal Oak's Memphis Smoke nightclub and at the Detroit Zoo.

"We played 'Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree' and the other tune was 'Greatest Time of Year.' It's a Christmas song that was done by Aly and AJ, a Disney act of a few years back," said Gittinger, who pulled a wagon-load of the school's brochures behind their float, hoping to interest some newcomers in his school.

As the rockers rolled past, others waited their turn — including two performers who leaned against telephone poles, seated a full 12 feet over the pavement on unicycles. Doug Oliver, 16, of Redford Township and Bryan Alexander, 19, of Dearborn Heights towered over mounted police of the Oakland County Sheriff's Office, who as they rode by said, "How'd you get up there? That's a lot harder than climbing on a horse."

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CLOSE UP: PARADE



Perched this morning on their 12-foot unicycles, Doug Oliver, 16, of Redford Township (left to right) and Bryan Alexander, 19, of Dearborn Heights hang onto telephone poles in an alley off Lincoln near S. Washington, awaiting a signal to enter the Holiday Magic Parade in Royal Oak.. (BILL LAITNER/Detroit Free Press)