

Volunteer to decorate a float

Decorate A Float

by Stephanie Bernhagen

Have you ever watched the Rose Parade on TV and wished you could see it in person? We have, but then we realized we would probably never drive into the big city and put up with the crowds to be there. Then we learned that Portland, Oregon has a Rose Festival in June every year. Part of the celebration is the Grand Floral Parade, the second largest floral parade in the U.S. If we modified our travel plans a little we would be able to see this parade.

When we told our friend in Vancouver, Washington that we planned to hang around for the parade, she asked if we would like to help decorate the floats. Okay, let's give it a try, we said.

On a quiet Sunday morning we followed a string of cars into the warehouse district of Portland. After finding a parking space we followed the people back to a sign-in table. From there we were sent off to one of two warehouses where Styrofoam and fiberglass floats sat side by side waiting to be covered from top to bottom. They had been painted like paint by number pictures and now every square inch of them needed to be covered with seeds, coconut, straw flowers, fresh flowers, evergreen boughs, and every other imaginable plant item.

Spirit Mountain float



We were assigned to the Spirit Mountain float. The float had three bears fishing in a river for trout, which came jumping out of a real stream at the bottom of a waterfall. When we arrived we were given a lesson in covering a float with seed. First we painted on Elmer's glue, then we were shown how to place the seed on the vertical sides of the float without a lot of waste. Different types of seed were used to achieve different colors. When seeds could not provide the appropriate color, dyed coconut, straw flowers and many other plant items were used to achieve the desired effect.

We returned a second day thinking we would help finish the Spirit Mountain float. But when we arrived the float was nearly finished and they were setting up for a ceremony for the float. We could not believe this was the same float we had worked on a few days earlier. It had really been transformed during the week!

We were then assigned to the Anheuser floatAnheuser Busch float, which was the only one in the parade pulled by horses. This time I helped cover ducks with straw flowers. We also covered the float with seeds and evergreen boughs.

When parade day came it held more excitement than other parades as we had helped to create this one.

Parades across the nation need people to help decorate their floats. If you have a favorite parade that you would like to volunteer to be involved with contact the Chamber of Commerce in that city or surf the internet for information on the parade and volunteering.



The Portland Grand Floral Parade float design and decorating is done by Studio Concepts Inc. They also do the floats for the Pasadena Tournament of Roses and the Phoenix Fiesta Bowl. If you would like to volunteer to help decorate the floats for any of these parades, visit their website to find out what the schedule is and sign-up. Or call them at 503-222-0077.



Portland, Oregon Rose Festival Events

The Grand Floral Parade is just one of the many events during the Rose Festival. Here are a few we attended:

The Starlight Parade is early in the Festival. All the floats and people in the parade must be lit for this parade at dusk. There were also two fireworks displays on the river.



The milk carton boat races are a family event. Creativity is key here as boats are built with empty milk cartons as floatation devices. There are races for the kids as well as for the parents. Some races require you to row, while others require a sail. Made even more difficult when there is no wind like the day we attended. The most creative families build boats that qualified for several races.

The U.S. and Canadian Navy bring ships in for the Rose Festival. The ships are docked at the river front park and open for tours. In fact, another way to volunteer during the Rose Festival is to host a sailor for a weekend.

If you are planning to attend the Grand Floral parade, you will want to plan ahead. Some people put their chairs along the parade route a week ahead of the parade. Groups will even chain the chairs together. Others will campout on the street the night before. If you want to avoid this hassle, pay for a reserved seat. Since we saw this as a one time activity we spent the money for a reserved seat.

There were reserved seats outside at the beginning of the parade, but we didn't want to sit in the sun and we also did not want to get rained on, which is pretty typical for the Grand Floral Parade. So we opted for the seats in the coliseum. By the time we bought our tickets the only seats left were in the second level of the coliseum, which we were not sure were such a good deal.

However, when we actually sat down and the parade started we knew we had the best seats in the house. For the first time ever we were able to see the floats front to back in one glance, where from the curb we could only see them a little bit at a time. In addition, there was an announcer telling us about each entry in the parade. Now we are spoiled and will probably be disappointed in future parades.

