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DAILY TIMES NEWS

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Neal Zoren: Time to celebrate Thanksgiving with annual Philly parade



Channel 6 anchor Rick Williams, left, and weather anchor Cecily Tynan will be back Thursday to anchor the 6-ABC Dunkin' Donuts Thanksgiving Day Parade

By Neal Zoren

Gobble. Gobble.

For the 98th time, Philadelphia celebrates Thanksgiving, the beginning of the winter holiday season, and the official arrival of Santa Claus, with a massive parade with all the trimmings – celebrities, marching bands, floats, balloons, and live performances.

For the 33rd year, the Thanksgiving Day Parade is being produced by Channel 6, which rescued the event from extinction in 1985 and has owned it ever since.

Assembling the parade is a year-long process. Before Christmas, work will begin on the 2018 march. We need concentrate only on Thursday, when with Dunkin' Donuts as a title sponsor, the 6ABC Dunkin' Donuts Thanksgiving Day Parade steps off down Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 8:30 a.m. The event lasts until noon and can be seen, of course, on Channel 6, which in turn feeds it to other markets.

Returning as hosts for this year's "do" are "Action News" noon and 5 p.m. anchor Rick Williams and 6 and 11 p.m. weather anchor Cecily Tynan. Reporting from the crowds are Adam Joseph, Karen Rogers, and Alicia Vitarelli. "Good Morning America's" Lara Spencer will be on hand, too.

Special guests are numerous. Many come from the shows that will light up the Academy of Music and Forrest Theatre as part of the Kimmel Center's season of Broadway tours. The most exciting to me comes from a different theater, where a very special performer is once again showing he is the Tom Hanks of musical theater.



JUSTIN GUARINI

It's Justin Guarini, who earned national attention as one of the two finalists in the first year of "American Idol," but who earns constant kudos for his naturalness and ability to inhabit any character in Broadway and regional musicals.

Guarini currently stars in a hilarious world premiere show, "The New World," at New Hope's Bucks County Playhouse. He plays a Native American, next in line to be chief of the Massasoits, who falls in love with a Puritan daughter of Miles Standish and vice versa. There's even a turkey in this exhilarating show that winks at political correctness while using good, old-fashioned musical comedy fun to show the positive side of people from different cultures coming together.

Also from “American Idol,” which will enjoy a revival on ABC in March – around Oscar time, I hear – are competition winners Ruben Studdard and Melinda Doolittle. NBC’s “The Voice” is also represented by Josh Gallagher and Billy Gilman.

Other pop stars taking their talent to the Parkway are Ty Herndon, Kwame, MARI, Treena Ferebee, Benita Washington, and Evin. Touring shows are represented by Carrie Compere from “The Color Purple,” which arrives at the Forrest on Dec. 12, Korie Lee Blossey from the Disney staging of “Aladdin,” Will Ray from “Les Misérables, and Stephanie Torns and Brandon Kalm from “Waitress.” In addition to Guarini, local theater is represented by the Walnut Street Theatre cast of “Annie.” The Pennsylvania Ballet, which has been doing such exquisite work to unfilled houses – it’s become my choice for most unfairly neglected of Philadelphia arts treasures – also makes an appearance. Needless to say, the ballet is currently performing “The Nutcracker” at the Academy of Music.

The bona fide dean of pop music presentation in Philadelphia, the Geator with the Heator, the Big Boss with the Hot Sauce, the ageless and indefatigable Jerry Blavat also is part of the march. So are Miss Pennsylvania, Miss New Jersey, and Miss Delaware, and other pageant winners representing those states. Other performers are the lively string quartet Well Strung, singer Billy Flanagan, cast members from Disney on Ice’s “Dare to Dream,” assorted characters from Disney World, the Eagles Cheerleaders, Swoop, the SoulMates, Garrison Carida, Marvel Universe LIVE!, and who else but those iconic couples, Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus and Mickey and Minnie Mouse.

Marching bands include the troupe from A.I. DuPont High School in Wilmington and Pennsbury High School in Bucks County. Among dance schools are corps from Ridley Park’s Janice’s Danceworks, Malvern’s Desiree Catania Dance Center, and Bridgeport’s Bowman Dance Company and School. Tap schools perform from throughout the region, including Wilmington’s Brandywine Tap Company, Pottstown’s Pottstown Dance Theatre, and Oxford’s KMC Dance. A great local program is also featured as Special Units including the Upper Darby SummerStage Shooting Stars and the Garnet Valley Dance Team.

Making a local stand among choirs are one from Stonehurst Elementary School in Upper Darby, Park Lane Elementary School in Darby, Eisenhower Science & Tech Academy in Norristown, the Pocopson Elementary School in West Chester, and St. Ann School in Wilmington.

As always, the 6ABC Dunkin’ Donuts Thanksgiving Day Parade includes a Food Drive, during which people can donate canned and other securely sealed packaged goods, adding a gift to their bills at Acme Markets, or purchasing a large hot coffee at Dunkin’ Donuts locations, which will contribute 50 cents of each \$1.49 cup ordered by a DD Perks Member from Friday through New Year’s Eve.