

Alton Memorial Day Parade Continues For 153rd Consecutive Year In Abbreviated/Safe Fashion Because Of COVID-19 Pandemic

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VIDEO OF ALTON MEMORIAL DAY PARADE:

ALTON - It's been one of the greatest traditions in the city of Alton, one that's gone off uninterrupted since 1868.

And even the COVID-19 pandemic couldn't stop it.

The Alton Memorial Day parade marched off for the 153rd consecutive year on Monday, although it was in an abbreviated format due to the pandemic with no publicity, as the parade honored those in the service who made the ultimate sacrifice during wartime.

But going in, there were concerns that the parade might be cancelled due to the pandemic, and the state of Illinois' stay-at-home orders, which are officially in effect until May 30.

"We met back in April, and our concern was that how long the parade was going to be," said Steve Schwartz of the East End Improvement Association. "so we decided to wait until the first of May. But when the Governor (J.B. Pritzker) made the announcement (of extending the stay-at-home orders), we announced that we would have to cancel."

Organizers still wanted to keep the parade's tradition alive, so talks were entered into with Alton mayor Brant Walker about having an abbreviated version of the parade. Walker came up with some suggestions about where to hold the parade and other ideas.

"It was actually the mayor's idea of where to have an abbreviated parade," Schwartz said, "but we couldn't announce any kind of parade, for the health and safety of our community.

"Plus we were under an order from the governor," Schwartz also said with a laugh.

Schwartz and the organizers got invaluable help from Alton Police Chief Jake Simmons and Alton Police Sgt. Emily Hejna in helping to plan out the parade, and Schwartz praised their efforts and hard work.

"They did an absolute great job," Schwartz said of Chief Simmons and Sgt. Hejna.

Originally, the plan was to have about five or six cars in the event, including the Alton Police and Fire Departments, the Alton Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1308, the East End Improvement Association and even a military vehicle as part of the procession.

"When we got there, the community, with the history of the parade, there were many citizens there unexpectedly," Schwartz said, "so the parade grew to 30-plus vehicles. Which was great to see, because of this Alton tradition of having that parade for 153 straight years."

Although holding the parade unannounced and unpublicized, in order to keep residents safe and healthy, a few people lined the parade route to honor the fallen veterans, and the parade went off without a hitch.

"We're very happy about that, and there were not any crowds along the way," Schwartz said. "There were some individuals there, but not very many, and we were able to keep everyone safe and healthy."

The most important thing was keeping alive the great tradition of holding the event, and honoring the soldiers who have fallen while keeping the community safe.

"It was an abbreviated parade, but the important thing was that we were able to honor our veterans, keep the community safe and continuing the string of holding the parade," Schwartz said. "So from that standpoint, it was successful."



