

Waitomo kickstarts festivities

A HUGE crowd lined Rora St in Te Kuiti on Friday evening to kickstart Waitomo's festive season in grand style.

Thirty-two floats took part in the annual Waitomo District Christmas Parade featuring elves on bikes, sheep pulling a sleigh, Christmas kiwis and the man of the hour Santa Claus.

Schools, emergency services, community groups and businesses were among the creative float entries representing this year's theme 'A Classic Kiwi Christmas'.

Te Kuiti Primary School won the Ultimate Shield for their sheep-inspired Santa's sleigh float, followed by Creative Kids' Christmas Kiwis in second and Number Twelve's 12 Days of Christmas float in third.

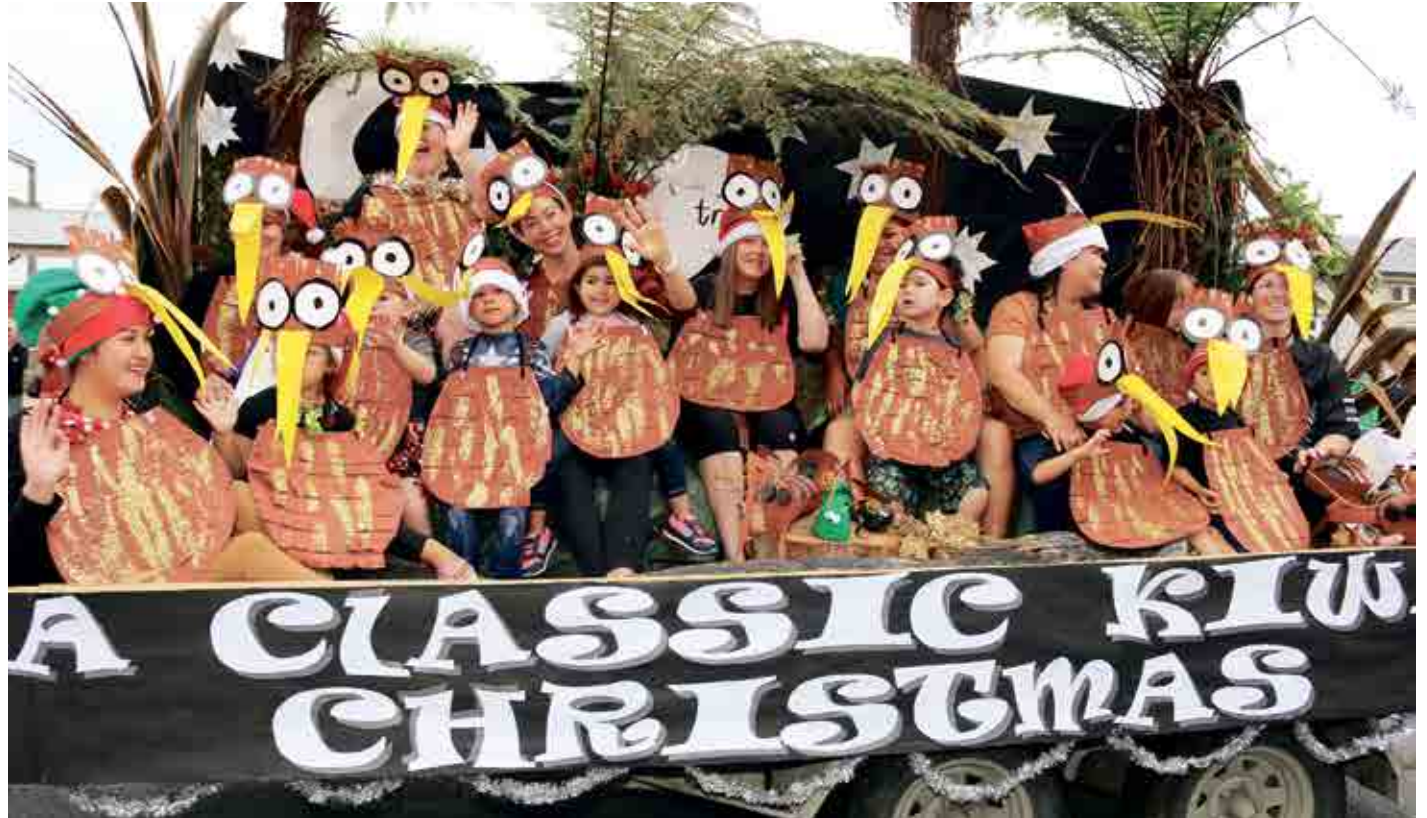
Hosted by the Waitomo District Council, community development co-ordinator Donna Macdonald says: "The whole event was fabulous. The crowd, the floats, the atmosphere – everything.

"People were just buzzing from the word go.

"I don't know if it was the 7pm start that suited everyone, but I think it was the biggest crowd we've had for a very long time – if forever.

"The highlight for me was that so many people came along and enjoyed the night because it is a community event and it had a real community feel."

At the end of the parade, which Mrs Macdonald estimates was attended by more than 3000 people, with many staying in town to enjoy a free sausage, listen to traditional Christmas carols and witness King Country Energy chief executive Rob Foster and Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna activate the



KIWI KIDS: Creative Kids Preschool in Te Kuiti created an eye-catching float for this year's parade theme, 'A Classic Kiwi Christmas', which won second prize at the annual Waitomo District Christmas Parade in Te Kuiti on Friday.

highly anticipated 'Tree of Light' at 8pm.

Established by KCE to shine a light on a variety of special occasions, the tall Norfolk Pine on Rora St flickered brightly with hundreds of multi-coloured lights to

celebrate the festive season.

"When I headed home later that night, the tree looked absolutely amazing," says Mrs Macdonald.

"It was stunning. You can see it from

all the elevated points around town which is really great.

"I think it is just magic."

PHOTOS P11



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POPULAR PARADE: Clockwise from top left – Te Kuiti Primary School's sheep-themed float won the Ultimate Shield at the Waitomo District Christmas Parade in Te Kuiti on Friday which included year 1 students Cari Jones and Scarlett Reid (above). St John Te Kuiti station manager Irene Straker enjoyed the festivities which were illuminated by the launch of King Country Energy's Tree of Light by Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna and KCE chief executive Rob Foster. Westpac's Amy McPhee and supporter Maz Wanden wave to the large crowd.



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