

Source:

Mills, J. (2019, September 29). Noted chain saw artist will add talents to Winter Spirit. Lewiston Tribune, pp. 1c-4c.

Noted chain saw artist will add talents to Winter Spirit

John Schulz of McCall will start work on Halloween crafting Santa at Locomotive Park

By **JOEL MILLS**
OF THE TRIBUNE

Absolutely no pouting or crying will be allowed for Christmas because Santa Claus is coming to town early this year.

The jolly old elf will arrive shortly after Halloween. But instead of climbing out of his sleigh, he will gradually emerge from a giant ponderosa pine log as a renowned carver of wood, snow and ice sculpts his image with chain saws.

"I'm not all covered in sawdust, so it's kind of hard to tell who I am," John Schulz of McCall said Saturday morning at Lewiston's Locomotive Park, where he will do the nearly 8-foot-tall carving for this year's Winter Spirit holiday lighting display.

Schulz was in town for a few hours to discuss the project with Winter Spirit committee members and iron out some details. He will be back around mid-day Oct. 31 to set up his equipment and

begin the carving process, which could take as much as seven days. Members of the public are welcome to come watch the work as it progresses, and Schulz said he might even take a suggestion or two from the crowd.

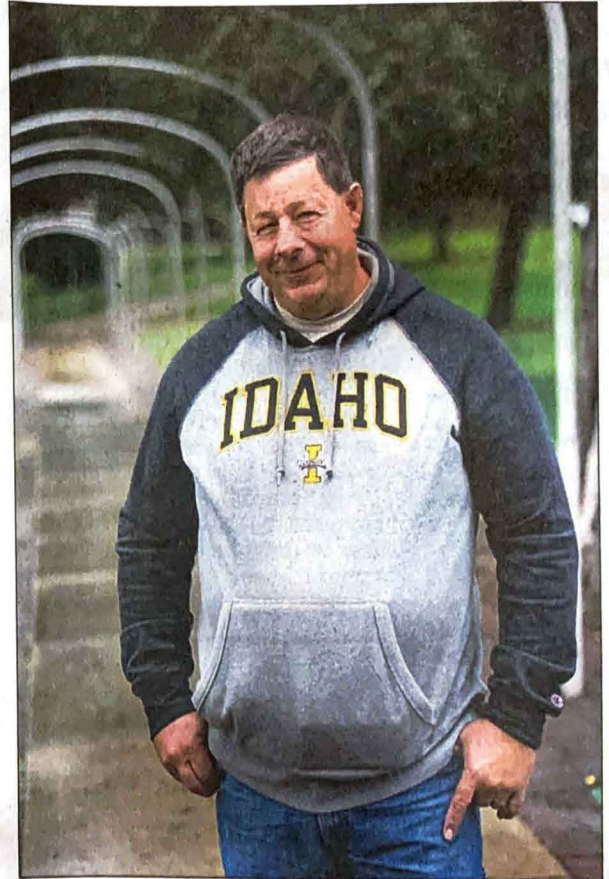
He's got a 25-foot-long, 42-inch diameter log to work with, so Schulz is also going to carve a massive bench that will stretch almost 16 feet long.

"You can get a family of 20 people on it," he said.

Winter Spirit co-founder Larry Kopczynski said Schulz came to the project in a roundabout way. The idea to hire an artist to carve a wooden Santa hatched when the committee learned earlier this year that a large tulip tree in the park would have to be cut down to make way for the expansion of the adjacent intersection.

"Unfortunately, it was rotten in the middle and unusable," Kopczynski said in an email to the Lewiston Tribune.

So the committee asked Bennett Lumber if it could donate a log. One was located after a few months, and a Cottonwood carver agreed to do the



Tribune/Rebecca Noble

Chain saw artist John Schulz, of McCall, will spend five to seven days in Lewiston creating custom pieces for this year's Winter Spirit.

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work for a small fee. But the carver had to drop out of the project because of his wife's illness, and Bennett got rid of the log.

But as they always do in the face of adversity, committee members soldiered on. The persistence paid off. Kopczynski found Schulz, and Bennett found another, better log. Winter Spirit is paying for the work with donated funds, but Kopczynski said the committee is still working to

raise enough to cover the final cost.

And if his reputation is any indication, Schulz will be well worth the money and effort. He and his team members have taken first place in the ice and snow sculpting contest at the annual McCall Winter Carnival nine of the past 12 years, and he has done commissioned work all over the West.

The 50-year-old artist became a full-time chain saw carver 29 years ago after graduating with a degree in fine arts from Spokane Falls Community College. His family moved to McCall about 15 years ago for the good schools, he said, but it

was also a good place for an artist to set up shop.

"The tourism there was good for selling carvings," Schulz said. "It's a high-end community, pretty much."

He completes his carvings with chain saws of various sizes, even the smallest of details. For example, his concept for the Locomotive Park bench includes bears and a moose putting up Christmas decorations, with lights draped around the moose's antlers.

"Pretty much all of the detail is laid in with a chain saw," he said, noting that he does use some power sanders to smooth out some rough areas.

Winter Spirit is one of the area's most popular holiday attractions, with its vast light displays and multiple photo opportunities. Schulz predicted the bench and the Santa sculpture will become some of the hottest attractions on the cold days leading up to Christmas, with pictures peppering visitors' social media pages.

"I have carvings all around McCall, and everybody is always stopping and taking pictures," he said. "It's just super-popular."

Mills may be contacted at jmills@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2266.