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### Misunderstanding led to Shriners no-show

By Sue Buck

Staff Writer

The question on many minds the week following the Farmington Area Founders Festival was, "Where were the Shriners?"

Suzanne Lichtman, executive director of the Farmington Founders Parade, said the Moslem Shriners declined an invitation this year but she wasn't given a reason.

Larry Leib, general counsel of the Shriners, attributed their absence to a "complete misunderstanding."

"We will return intact," Leib said. "The Shriners will return. They want to return. The public wants the Shriners back. We've been in it since the beginning. We do parades for communities and the kids."

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He believes the misunderstanding arose in conversations with the administration of both sides involved and also included the issue of how many units would be entered in the parade.

The Shriners, with their red fez hats and colorful entries, stick in the minds of residents. The group receives about \$1,500 for their participation in the Farmington parade, which goes toward the local transportation program for sick children. The 22 Shriners Hospitals for Children treat children with burns or orthopedic problems. Typically, children from this area have to go to the hospital in Chicago.

They love a parade

Parade Chair Dick Tupper said last year he sent a letter to the Shriners, the contents of which he said he'd rather not discuss.

"I don't think there was anybody who didn't like it," Tupper said of the Shriners.

He's heard more comments in support of the Shriners participation rather than against it.

"It is reparable, we can get out the bumps," Tupper said of any misunderstanding. "We're optimistic. We're working on it."

Though, he added, the less published about it the better.

Misunderstanding

The Shriners' absence this year wasn't related to previous concerns voiced by the Multicultural Multiracial Community Council about the group's stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans and

cowboys, though parade attendees remembered it.

"The two sides attack," Leib said, explaining the group's parade presentation. "The Indian gets shot in the end. The Indian is a real Indian, a Native American."

"MCMR made a request (several years ago) and we have been trying to repair the situation ever since," Tupper said.

Karen Bolsen, co-chair of MCMR, said concerns about stereotypes are always of interest. But the answer as to why the Shriners weren't in the parade this year doesn't lie with MCMR.

"We haven't made any comments for the last three years," Bolsen said.

Bolsen added that concerns were voiced years before she became MCMR co-chair, by Ann Therese O'Sullivan, a previous MCMR co-chair, and Budge Gere, the former minister of First Presbyterian Church in Farmington.

"We've said our peace," Bolsen said. "Everyone knows our opinion."

In other communities, the controversial presentation isn't in the parade, and it was left out one year in the Farmington parade, Bolsen said. "We don't want any group to be stereotyped or made fun of."

Leib said he's heard no other community mention the cowboy and Indian presentation besides Farmington.

Farmington resident Kathy Thomas expressed her support for the Shriners and wondered where they were at this year's parade. "They have been in the

parade for years," she said.

John Cowley of John Cowley & Sons was more vociferous the Monday after the parade. He even made a trip to the Farmington Observer.

"The Farmington Founders Festival seemed to be a success but the Shriners were sorely missed in the parade," Cowley said. "The Shriners were a big part of the Farmington Founders Festival. We hope to see them come back to the Founders Festival next year."

Other comments

Tupper said people have made other comments, like the parade is too long or the weather is too hot.

"You hear it all," he said. "If it's too long, they have the right to go home. If it's too hot, they can drop out."

The heat caused the Pug Rescue group to drop out last year. It's also been an issue with the Mothers of Multiples group, Tupper said.

For more information about the Shriners, visit [www.shrinershq.org](http://www.shrinershq.org). To volunteer to work on the parade committee next year, call (248) 932-FEST.

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