

Brockton hopes luck of the Irish translates into new Santa hat record

City in Ireland to make joint quest for world record-**By Justin Graeber**-Posted Nov 16, 2012 @ 06:00 AM

BROCKTON — Nollaig Shona Dhuit!



Robert Fontaine, 1, of Fall River, takes a skeptical peek at Santa as they stand with hundreds of other people wearing Santa hats on Main Street in Brockton in front of the courthouse on Sunday to kick off the holiday season. Organizers said a crowd of 1,792 wore Santa hats in the downtown celebration, more than doubling the Santa hat-wearing record of 872 persons last year.

That's how you say "Merry Christmas" in Irish, and organizers of the annual Santa Hat Challenge are hoping the luck of the Irish translates into another world record this year. After Brockton set the world record for the most people wearing Santa hats in one place in 2008, the record was broken by the village of Mullingar in Ireland. "For the past few years we've been talking about doing this together," said John Merian, an organizer of the event.

Merian was contacted last year by an Irish journalist who wanted to know what was going on with the hat challenge. Through her, Merian connected with town leaders in Mullingar. "We could talk about maybe creating a sister city, a kinship in regard to this thing we're doing," he said. Martin Mulligan of Mullingar called him, and the two decided to try to break a new record by having hundreds don the Santa hats in Brockton and Ireland at the same time. "Nobody's done this in two separate places at the same time," Merian said. He is hoping the event will be able to be viewed on streaming video on the santahatchallenge.com website.

Merian said he recently got a picture from Mullingar school kids in Ireland wearing the hats, with the message: "More to come. People are really getting excited over here." "We're a city of many cultures and we're connecting to other cultures because of our story," Merian said. "I think it's magical."

The event was inspired by the story of the first department store Santa, Brockton native James Edgar. "We're bringing two communities together in the spirit of James Edgar," Merian said. "I can't write a better script for this." Merian is hoping to add a city in Australia to the event next year.

Mullingar, a town in central Ireland in Leinster province, County Westmeath, doesn't have the size of Brockton – the population is 20,103, compared to Brockton's 93,810 – but they love their holidays. The Irish town is turning the Santa Hat record attempt into a daylong celebration and will attempt several other world records, including the world's largest greeting card and the world record for Christmas tree cutting as part of a festival that includes live music.

Brockton's celebration, which will also include music and dance performances, kicks off at 11 a.m. Sunday in front of the downtown parking garage on Main Street.

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