

Brockton's Santa Hat Project goes international

City in Ireland to make joint quest for world record-By **Justin Graeber**-Posted Nov 13, 2012

BROCKTON —The city's Santa hat project – in which hundreds of people don red and white caps in an attempt to break a world record – is going international. The Santa Hat Challenge began in 2008 to honor the memory of Brockton's James Edgar, the world's first department store Santa. "We hold title to a very endearing story," said event founder John Merian. "It resonates out into the whole world."

Merian, who is working on a book about Edgar, said the department store Santa tradition dates back to 1890. "When he brought that character to life ... what we want to do is start telling the story of him, it wasn't done for commercial reasons," he said.

Last year, organizers say 1,792 people wore Santa hats in downtown Brockton – a feat that more than doubled the city's Santa Claus hat-wearing record from the previous year when 872 people wore the hats. This year, people behind the holiday stunt are hoping for even more as they reach out to a town in Ireland.

After Brockton set the original record of more than 500 people wearing Santa hats simultaneously, the town of Mullingar, Ireland, broke it the following year and a friendly competition was born. "I started to laugh, I had a smile on my face," Merian said, about reading about the Irish town's feat in a newspaper.

This year, Merian and his Irish counterpart, Marty Mulligan, are joining forces. While Brockton residents gather at the high school stadium, Mullingar residents will see them live via a giant video screen.

Merian said a 24-by-16 foot stage is being built, and the event will be live-streamed across the Atlantic and shown a 60-foot screen. "We're creating a joint venture ... creating a common bond between two communities, two cultures," he said.

"Things are really shaping up for the challenge ahead on this side of the pond," Mulligan said in an email. He pointed out that Mullingar is also trying to set the record for the world's largest greeting card (the planned card is more than four stories high.) "Just trying to figure out how many stamps I'm going to need!" Mulligan wrote.

Merian is hoping the event, along with the city's annual parade, will help Brockton's downtown become a holiday destination. "The event gets better and better the more you think about it," he said.

The Santa Hat Challenge is next Sunday in downtown Brockton, at Main and Crescent streets in front of the parking garage. Check-in is at 11 a.m. and the official count will take place at 1 p.m. For more information visit santahatchallenge.com.

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