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Following in Pop’s footsteps

Mummers’ legend Joseph “Gootch” Bryson passed away earlier this year, but his family is making sure that the wench brigade that he founded doesn’t lose its marching beat.

By Bill Gelman

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How important is the Mummers Parade to the Bryson family?

The intensive care unit of a hospital wasn’t even enough to keep one member away from marching in the annual tradition. The leader and founder of the Bryson NYB, Joseph “Pop” “Gootch” Bryson, was in the unit dealing with medical issues last year. The family members planned on picking him up from the hospital so he could march in his 76th parade, but there was no need, as the man nicknamed “Gootch” had checked himself out. It ended up being the last parade for the 81-year-old, who passed away in September.

“The Mummers pretty much meant everything,” his son, Ed Bryson, said. “It’s what kept him alive these last couple of years.”

He added that the last four months of his father’s life were really tough with a rotation that included regular dialysis treatments, frequent admission into the ICU unit and trips to the Jersey Shore. But planning for and participating in the Mummers Parade always took top priority. Those responsibilities are now in the hands of Ed Bryson and his fellow family members.

“This is what my dad wanted,” Ed said. “We have to keep it going for him.”

There is a lot of work involved with executing this year’s theme of “Ain’t Nothing Like a Family Business.” The brigade consists of 150 children, with at least one parent marching with them. Just like his father would’ve done, Ed Bryson spent the majority of Saturday making 26 children’s costumes.

“I don’t get much sleep this time of year,” Bryson, who noted that he is running on adrenaline, said. “Come New Year’s Eve, I will still be making costumes.”

The wench and comic brigades came together last weekend for the Pop Bryson Memorial Mass at Sacred Heart Church, 1404 S. Third St., which will become a new annual tradition like the Mummers Mass held New Year’s Eve at Mount Carmel Church, 2319 S. Third St.

Pop was very set in his Mummery ways. There were years where the other family members started putting him on a scooter for the parade, but “it was against his wishes.” Ed Bryson recalled one year where it was freezing out, and he asked his father to get in the truck. The response truly displayed the elder Bryson’s passion for the Mummers.

“If you put me in the truck, you might as well take me home,” Ed Bryson recalled his father saying.

Joseph Bryson, one of Ed’s brothers, is currently in the hospital getting dialysis treatments. Like their father, he

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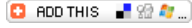
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will likely find a way to make sure he is at the parade. Of course, it might mean getting in the truck.

Pop Bryson's lasting legacy on the Mummers Parade will be on full display this week as blankets, flags and posters of him will be on full display for this year's event. For those attending the parade, mention the name Joseph "Pop" "Gootch" Bryson, and it may likely start a very lengthy conversation.

"He is a legend. Everybody looked up to him," Ed Bryson said. "He never had a bad word to say about anybody."

Contact Editor Bill Gelman at bgelman@southphillyreview.com or ext. 121.



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