Members had decided to disband after Sunday's Christmas party, parade

The annual Christmas parade that will be held Sunday night in Belgium — an event started by the Belgium Community Club almost 10 years ago — will be an extra joyous occasion for club members who were prepared to disband after the event.

"This was going to be our last hurrah," said club president Chris Schmidt. "We didn't have enough members, and we were burned out."

Instead, the club has been revitalized by an enrollment effort that has brought in 18 new members so far.

More members are expected to join during a second enrollment event that will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 14, at Chrissy's Now & Then Pub, 745 Main St.

The club didn't plan a Halloween party this year because there weren't enough people to help, Schmidt said.

The club formed about 10 years ago when the Belgium Jaycees, which sponsored community

events for more than 30 years, disbanded. The new club did not have age restrictions nor did it pay dues to a state organization.

"That way we could keep more money in the community," said Sally Bley, a former Belgium Jaycee who helped organize the new club and has been active ever since.

The organization started with 50 members, Schmidt said, but over the years its membership dwindled to the point that only club officers, spouses and a few dedicated volunteers could be counted on to pull off the traditional events.

In addition to the Christmas parade and Halloween party, the club held Breakfasts with Santa — which they hope to have again this year — Easter Egg hunts and village-wide rummage sales, its only fundraiser, and packed countless holiday fruit baskets.

The club also awarded scholarships to Belgium area graduates and supported numerous organizations, including the Belgium Fire Department, Broncos youth football and Belgium Athletic Association.

"Basically, if someone asked for help, we helped them," Bley said. "But it was the same 10 people doing the work. Some of us have families, and it wasn't fair to them. We have been trying for years to ramp up our membership without success."

When several people heard the club was going to disband, they offered to help. Developer Mike Ansay, who supported the group financially, offered the services of a marketing specialist who suggested strategies and designed eye-catching posters that highlighted the club's efforts.

Christine and Bill Ungs, who own Chrissy's, joined the club and held an open-enrollment party at their pub last week.

Bley is amazed by the turnout and enthusiasm of new members. Many members who joined that night have volunteered to help with the parade and party, signed up for other projects and offered suggestions for new programs, she said.

"They joined just a week ago and a lot of them are already helping. It's been fabulous," Bley said. "With this group, I think we can do a lot more stuff. They all seem like go-getters with a lot of energy and new ideas, which is what we need.

"The more members we have, the more we can do. There is a lot of excitement among new members, and we older members have renewed hope that everything we've started and worked on for so long will continue and get even better."

Now she is looking forward to, not dreading, this year's parade and party.

The parade will start at 5 p.m. at the corner of Lar-Ann and Main streets and proceed west on Main to Community Park, where festivities will continue.

The Cedar Grove-Belgium Middle School Band will march in the parade and perform at the park.

Santa and Mrs. Claus will arrive in a horse-drawn wagon, then visit with children in the gazebo.

There will be free hot chocolate courtesy of Belgium Hardware and Beverage, chili made by Subway and other refreshments donated by local businesses.

If the weather permits, there will also be a bonfire to take away the chill.

For more information on the club, call Pat or Michele Wester at 285-7158.

A BRIGHT-EYED CHILD rode on a float in last year's Christmas parade. This year's parade will begin at 5 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 28. Festivities, including visits with Santa and a bonfire, will follow at Community Park. Ozaukee Press file photo