Written by Steve Ostermann
Wednesday, 04 November 2009 19:43

Singer Danny Gokey will appear in 30th annual event, perform at GHS on Nov. 28

Santa Claus won’t be the only celebrity wowing spectators at the 30th annual Grafton Christmas Parade on Saturday, Nov. 28.

Danny Gokey, the Milwaukee singer who reached the finals of this year’s “American Idol” television contest, will be a special guest at the 11 a.m. holiday event and perform during a community Christmas celebration later the same day at Grafton High School.

Gokey’s appearances have been arranged by the Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce, which has again organized the parade as part of its annual holiday festivities.

“We’re thrilled to have Danny coming to Grafton,” said Nancy Hundt, Chamber executive director. “It’s very exciting to have someone this popular want to be part of a showcase event for our community.”

Gokey is scheduled to ride in a parade vehicle accompanied by family members who will collect donations for Sophia’s Heart, a charitable foundation he established in memory of his wife.

During the community celebration at 4 p.m. in the Grafton High gymnasium, Gokey will perform three songs, Hundt said. The celebration, which replaces the traditional evening community Christmas party, will also feature a “fifth quarter” performance by the University of Wisconsin

Marching Band and the presentation of the Chamber’s annual awards for outstanding citizen and community group.

Norbert Studelska Sr., a longtime Grafton resident known for his years of community service, is this year’s citizen honoree. He will serve as the parade marshal.

Ozaukee Family Services will receive the group award.

Tickets for the program at the school are $15 for general admission and will be sold through the Chamber’s Web site — www.grafton-wi.org — starting Wednesday, Nov. 11. No tickets will be available at the Chamber office or at the event.

Hundt said the Chamber’s goal is to sell 1,500 tickets, which will be mailed to purchasers. “That’s how many people we can seat in the gymnasium,” she said.

Following the celebration, Gokey is scheduled to hold a V.I.P. autograph session. A limited number of tickets for that event will be sold separately through the Chamber office.

Organizers of Grafton’s holiday events have been working for months to secure Gokey’s appearance in the parade, which this year is being sponsored by Columbia St. Mary’s Hospital.

“When we started planning things months ago, one of our committee members suggested that we try to get him here,” said Pam King, the Chamber’s assistant executive director.

“At first, no one was sure we would have a chance, but then we started looking into it more seriously and realized we did.”

Gokey, who has relatives living in the area, “really wanted to come here and told his manager he wanted to make it work,” said King, who helped arrange the singer’s appearance.

“Having him here will help make the 30th year of the parade extra special.”

Grafton’s holiday festivities will officially begin with the lighting of the community Christmas tree in the Paramount Plaza at 6 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 22.

Preceding the parade on Nov. 28 will be the annual Breakfast With Santa from 7:30 to 10 a.m. at the Circle B Recreation Center in the Town of Cedarburg.

The parade, the largest holiday event of its kind in the area, will again feature more than 100 units, including acclaimed musical groups such as the South Shore Drill Team.

The addition of Columbia St. Mary’s as the presenting sponsor “will allow the Chamber to keep the parade the highly entertaining event that it has grown to over the past 30 years,” Chamber President Mike Cibulka said.

Hundt said the parade has a $25,000 budget which is funded exclusively through donations from local businesses.

Donations can be sent to: Grafton Christmas Parade, P.O. Box 132, Grafton 53024. For more information, visit the Chamber Web site or call 377-1650.