

New York's March of Santa Volunteers Canceled After 100 Years

New York's Sidewalk Santas, who for a century have marched up Fifth Avenue the morning after Thanksgiving to collect donations from **Black Friday** shoppers, are hanging up their suits.

The Sidewalk Santa Parade was an annual tradition organized by the Volunteers of America-Greater New York to raise money for its Hope & Hearth campaign, which last year gave over 1,200 families vouchers for groceries during the holiday season, communications director Rachel Weinstein said.

But the one-day parade of about 50 bell-ringing volunteers never raised much money and the cost of storing, cleaning and transporting dozens of Santa suits was rising, Weinstein said.

"We wanted to expand the food voucher program and we needed to find ways to raise more money, and save money (where) we weren't doing it before," Weinstein said. "In reality it wasn't raising the money we need for this program."

The tradition began in 1896 when Ballington Booth, the son of the **Salvation Army** founders, traveled by horse-drawn carriage across the city to deliver hot holiday meals to hungry New Yorkers.

With more hungry families in the city now than at any time since the Great Depression, Weinstein said cutting the parade costs was a practical decision. The group also takes private donations through its website, .

Instead of the parade, the group has set up a collection bin at the Plaza Hotel to collect donations from the parents who

bring their children to sit on the lap of the Plaza's Santa.

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