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Collins' parade etiquette is panned

Lancaster gets riled by me-first attitude

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Lancaster village officials say Erie County Executive Chris Collins struck a sour note when he did his best drum major impression at Monday's Fourth of July parade.

Parade protocol has long been for politicians from outside the village to get in line behind village veterans, firefighters and elected officials in the annual event.

However, village officials say Collins argued with organizers and insisted on setting off at the head of the parade with his group of campaign volunteers.

"This is the first time I've seen anyone hijack our parade," said Mayor William G. Cansdale Jr.

Collins spokesman Grant Loomis said his boss didn't pull rank on anyone. The county executive walked out on the route early only because he didn't want to slow down other marchers with his handshaking and face-to-face politicking, Loomis said.

"We like to get a bit of a head start before the parade even starts," Loomis said.

The order of march in the parade was set years ago for reasons of pragmatism and patriotism, organizers said.

A Town of Lancaster patrol car drives at the front of the parade, followed by veterans and members of the Lancaster Fire Department, said Cansdale and Gregg R. Smith, the village's assistant events coordinator.

The veterans are given the honor of leading the parade, while the firefighters come next because officials don't want them or their equipment tied up any longer than necessary.

Village elected officials usually come after the firefighters, followed by other politicians and candidates from the town, county, state and federal levels.

"It's a loose formation," Cansdale said.

Cansdale, a Republican; Lancaster Supervisor Robert H. Giza, a Democrat; and County Legislator Dino J. Fudoli, a Republican, were among the elected officials who marched in their assigned spots.

Collins, a Republican running for re-election this year, and his team of volunteers were supposed to march in the eighth slot in the parade, Smith said. Collins' opponent in November's election, Erie County Comptroller Mark C. Poloncarz, a Democrat, also attended the parade. He took his place well behind first responders and other community groups.

But when Collins arrived at about 1:50 p.m. Monday at the Court Street Elementary School parking lot, the staging area for the parade, he said he wanted to march at the front of the line, Smith and Cansdale said.

When organizers told Collins that's not how things are done in the village, "He said, 'You're in my county,'" said Smith, who overheard the discussion.

"I would put it in the category of arrogant and condescending," Smith added. "I was extremely disappointed in his answer."

Collins never said that, according to Loomis, who was part of the group of 12 to 15 Collins volunteers who handed out stickers and candy Monday.

The county executive did try to explain that he prefers to start walking the route before a parade officially begins because he doesn't want to hold up anyone, Loomis said.

"He likes to work the side of the road. He likes to get as close to people as possible. He likes to shake their hands and look them in the eye," said Loomis, and this often leads to impromptu discussions of county business. Collins did not mean to slight the veterans or firefighters at the head of the parade, Loomis added.

Cansdale said that organizers approached him but that he didn't want to get into a fight with Collins over parade protocol.

Collins and his group eventually went off on their own, about 10 minutes before the rest of the marchers set out, Smith said.

When the county executive and his group passed the parade grandstand, they weren't publicly recognized.

"We made sure the parade announcer didn't say his name," Smith said, "because he wasn't part of the parade."

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