

# The Parade Company's World-Renowned Big Head Collection!



The iconic papier-mâché heads that march down Detroit's Woodward Avenue each Thanksgiving have a rich history dating back to the Tuscan city of Viareggio, Italy. Inspired by the Carnival of Viareggio, display director Charles Wendel of the J.L. Hudson Company introduced these towering figures to Detroit's inaugural Thanksgiving Day parade in 1924.



Originally crafted in Viareggio over eight decades ago, these Big Heads are now created and maintained in Detroit. Each piece, made with Italian newsprint and paint, preserves the history and legacy of their Italian origins. Today, The Parade Company boasts a collection of over 300 Big Heads, making it the largest papier-mâché collection in the world.

Local Detroit artists, trained by Italian artisans from Viareggio, continue the tradition of crafting these whimsical figures. Each Big Head undergoes a meticulous process, starting with a sculpted face and then layered with papier-mâché before being painted. This labor-intensive process can take several weeks to complete.



The Big Head Corps was established in 2007 and oversees the collection, its members, as well as the selection of new Big Heads each year. Detroit icons like Aretha Franklin, Bob Seger, Gilda Radner, and Stevie Wonder have been added to the growing collection.

While over 300 Big Heads are in the collection, only about half participate in the parade annually. Some are retired for preservation, while others simply haven't been selected by Big Head members to be worn.

Anyone can become a Big Head Corps member by enrolling online and paying a membership fee. Returning members typically have the first choice of their previous big head, while others are selected on a first-come, first-serve basis, considering factors like size, weight, and height of each big head.

**If you are interested in joining  
the Big Head Corps, please scan  
this QR code...**

