

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

WEIHNACHTZEIT / CHRISTMAS SEASON

NIKOLAUSABEND—NICHOLAS EVE
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YOU'D BETTER NOT POUT—KRAMPUS IS COMING TO TOWN

mas, it's cool; but we want to show people our tradition from very long ago. We love Bavaria and Bavarian traditions and we want those traditions to continue.”

Tradition is one of the main forces that drives Bierbaumer's group. Though there are cheaper alternatives, *Sparifankerl-Pass* uses only wooden masks, hand-carved in Austria by Rupert Kreuzer and costing upwards of \$2,000 each. The shaggy costumes are crafted from goat skin, and the many varieties of horns are also from various species of goat, just as they have been for centuries.

“We say the horns have to find the mask,” Bierbaumer said, adding that some horns are passed from mask to mask. His first mask, which he still owns, sports 150 year old horns that have adorned various masks down through the decades.

After *Sparifankerl-Pass'* masks are carved, they are passed on to Gerhard Seer for painting and decoration with traditional materials. Bierbaumer said his group gets new masks every year, often selling the old ones.

“No one sees our masks until the first run, not even us,” said Bierbaumer. This year, his group will run a lottery for picking masks. With all the masks unseen in a room, the group will draw numbers then proceed into the room one at a time to pick their masks.

Clad in heavy furs and sporting masks that can weigh up to 22 pounds, the *Krampus* literally run through the village streets, often for hours on end. But this is no problem for Bierbaumer and his crew.

“When you have it on, you are so strong in the moment, you don't feel anything, you can go anywhere, it's crazy,” Bierbaumer laughed.

Krampus is not the only monster prowling the Alps in winter. The *Perchten* are separate creatures in mythology and date back to pagan times when they would accompany Frau Perchta as she hiked through the dark, desolate passes protecting the good people and punishing the wicked. Some people believe the tradition of young men dressing up like monsters began in an effort to frighten off Frau Perchta's horned companions, while others hold that the demons symbolize the driving out of winter.

Traditional *Perchten* celebrations generally occur after Christmas and on until January 6, but as city events grow larger in competition for tourist dollars, the runs and the costumes have begun to merge. Bierbaumer said traditionally, *Krampus* only sports two horns, while *Perchten* sprout four or more, but in reality, the two are becoming

