As applications are due by November 1st for Senior Royalty, we wanted to share this with you…

Two Crowns, One Amazing Adventure: Experiencing Senior Royalty as a Couple
What happens when you say yes to a year of the Saint Paul Winter Carnival together?
For Teri Theno-Erb and her husband John Erb, becoming Saint Paul Winter Carnival Senior Royalty for 2026 meant stepping into a tradition they had loved since childhood and discovering a new way to experience it together. It also meant trading John's painter pants for royal attire, collecting unforgettable memories and learning that a year of crowns, parades and community appearances could bring them even closer.

Together for 14 years and married for five, the couple met on Facebook through mutual friends. They had attended the same high school, although not at the same time. Both have spent 40 years in their careers- Teri as a hairstylist and John in the painting business. Each has three adult children, and together they have three grandchildren. Now, they have a year of royal adventures to share with their family.

A tradition with deep roots Both grew up in Saint Paul, where Winter Carnival was part of their childhood memories. For Teri, the connection reaches another generation: Her parents attended Winter Carnival together in 1948, when they were just 14 and 16. Teri has been a medallion hunter for 40 years, although she is still waiting for that winning discovery. In 2018, she was a Queen of Snows candidate and continued volunteering in many capacities afterward, often with John beside her, helping and supporting her efforts.

The idea of becoming Senior Royalty came after John was approached about serving as one of the Wind Brothers. He felt that role would require more commitment than he could make at the time. Teri suggested they consider Senior Royalty together. John thought it might be her best idea yet.

There was a little initial hesitation, but the opportunity to share something special and someday tell their children and grandchildren about it helped him say yes. They also offer a playful explanation for their decision: "We heard that there was going to be this great Prime Minister this year!" They knew the year would be busy. They also knew it could be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

More than wearing a crown For Teri, dressing up and wearing a crown felt familiar, after having been the Woodbury Senior Queen in 2025, and now representing Winter Carnival was an honor. For John, the wardrobe was a bigger adjustment. He enjoyed the reactions from people who thought he was a captain or a pilot. But the moments that mattered most went well beyond the clothes.

One of Teri's favorite appearances was visiting an elementary school to read a book about Winter Carnival. She wanted the students to understand that the people wearing crowns were volunteers portraying roles and giving back to their community. Her message was simple: Anyone, at any age, can volunteer and make a difference.

For John, a standout memory was a parade in Bradenton, with its massive floats and thousands of beads. For both, hometown parades brought a special feeling as they passed familiar places and spotted people they knew. Those were the moments when they looked at each other and thought: Can you believe we get to do this?

Along the way, there has been plenty of laughter, too. Their affection for Princess Kitty Ryan runs deep. At 89 years young, she has become an especially meaningful part of their experience. “We both hope to have her vigor for life as we get older,” they say.

Sharing the experience and discovering each other Even after years together, Teri and John have learned something new about one another. Teri discovered that John could be more flexible than she expected and was willing to show his softer side. John discovered that Teri was even more of a social butterfly than he had realized. Most of all, serving together gave John a deeper connection to something Teri had long enjoyed. Instead of supporting her from the sidelines while she did her thing, he became part of the experience himself.

For Teri, watching him embrace Winter Carnival has been one of the greatest rewards. He loves explaining who they are, describing what they do and handing out their buttons. Their year has included individual adventures as well, including Teri’s opportunity to travel to Winnipeg with the Royal Family. But the shared memories are what they treasure most.

They have also found warm welcomes in other festival communities, enjoyed meeting fellow seniors who share pride in their hometowns and gotten a kick out of Little Ambassadors asking them for buttons.

Making room for an extraordinary year For anyone looking at the appearance calendar and wondering how it could fit into everyday life, Teri and John understand the concern. Both are still working, and family and life commitments remain priorities. They try to attend as much as they can, recognizing that this is a special opportunity to experience together. Parade season can be busy. Their approach is to take it one day at a time. “We would say that it’s one year of your life, and life is short,” they explain. “You will have an amazing experience that not everyone gets to have.”

To someone worried about being too old, they would point to Kitty Ryan as inspiration. They also acknowledge that appearances can involve walking, including getting to parade lineups. And for someone who wonders whether they are outgoing enough? Their experience suggests that meeting people and participating can help that confidence grow. While they enthusiastically encourage couples to apply together, they are equally welcoming to someone considering the opportunity on their own. “No matter the situation, you are a team.”

Joy, belonging and a reason to keep saying yes As they look toward the end of their reign, Teri and John know they will miss the small, affectionate moments: children admiring Teri’s crown, people greeting them as royalty and the feeling of being part of a beloved tradition. John will especially miss seeing Teri in her crown.

Asked what Senior Royalty has given her, Teri describes immeasurable joy, belonging and purpose. For John, it has offered a sense of being part of something greater than himself and an essential part of the tradition. The experience has also reinforced their desire to keep volunteering, trying new things and making memories together.

Their advice to another couple sitting at home, thinking this sounds fun but wondering whether they could really do it? “Take the leap of faith and do it!” And if they could speak to themselves on the day they first considered applying, their message would be just as clear: “Hold on and enjoy the ride!”