

Red Suit Gazette

Unlock the World of Santa



The Brotherhood of the Direct Descendents of Santa

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Santa seen in skies over Gatlinburg

Father Christmas makes vacation visit to Great Smoky Mountains, popping-in for visit with helpers, St. Patrick, elves, for a feast of friends

Check your list, check it twice before arrival in the Smokies

By Kris Kringle

You have less than 2 weeks before the activities begin in Gatlinburg, Tenn. What do you need to do to make sure you are ready to have a good time? Read on, and I will share some thoughts ideas, and checklists which should make your trip more enjoyable.

Of course you are going to pack enough Santa clothes. Aren't you? This includes both casual and



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BILL MCKEE

In this photo illustration, Santa and the reindeer 'arrive' in the sky over Gatlinburg, Tenn. Background image courtesy Gatlinburg Department of Tourism.

comfortable clothes, along with the Santa Suit you plan to wear for the parade.

And, it can get very cold in March in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. Bring some

warm clothes, and at least a warm jacket. And spring-like temperatures are not unknown in March, so be prepared.

What about the formal ball? You could wear your finest Santa Suit or a nice coat and tie. Casual clothes should be comfortable, yet presentable. You never know when you might be singled out for an interview with the media. Do you have any idea what you would, or might say? If you are not prepared, you may say something that you really did not want to. Rehearse some ideas, thoughts and questions in your head. Know them well enough to bring to your memory if approached. *See editor's note below

You will also need (All) of your hair and beard products. Make sure you have everything. And enough to last a week. What if

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From the Heart of Santa Claus 'Simply say "Thank you"'

By Bill McKee
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A number of years ago I learned one of the most valuable lessons of my life, so far. I was introduced to this little lady of native descent, who lived in Bat Cave, N.C.

Before my visit I had been informed that she was a friend to all, especially the animals. Someone said she leaves her back door open when the weather is not too cold and birds drop in just to visit.

Patsy and I were running a little late and our directions to Kindiwa's were scant. Arriving in Bat Cave via back roads, which offered interesting stops along the journey, a sign above the front of the storefront/home proclaimed; 'Kindiwa's.' This must be it.

We entered the store front, making our way to a screened window, where we were greeted by a gruff guardian, and friend. His name was Bear, and that made perfect sense when you saw him in person.

See HEART pg9

CHECKLIST

cont. from pg 1

you happen to get snowed in? Remember you want to look your best at all times. This is certainly one of those times. If the media is not photographing you, others there for the St. Patrick Day celebrations certainly will be. No one knows how many spectators there may be, but keep in mind that Gatlinburg is the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains, the most visited national park in America. There are over 9 million visitors to the area each year. And, 2009 is the park's 75th anniversary. Someone, somewhere, sometime during your stay, will be taking your photograph.

There are a few things you will want to bring with you in large quantities. Handouts. If you have business cards, this would be the perfect place to share and 'network.' The more cards you share, offer the possibility of more opportunities being presented to you. You never know what is around the corner. Or who you may meet. Always be prepared. You may want to bring larger handouts to pass out to the general public. Never pass up the opportunity to promote yourself. Have you decided what you will be doing while you are in Pigeon Forge?

Take a look at the classes being offered. Then there is the sales area on the main convention floor. That should take you about an hour unless you stop and visit with everyone there. Do you have any idea what the Irish do around St. Patrick's Day? Or what it means to



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Al Horton

them? I plan on getting out and meeting a lot of folks not normally associated with Santa. This should create some fun especially if you have a good casual Santa look. I understand that guests who arrive on Sunday can sign up as you register at one of the approved hotels. If you have found a less expensive one, then you will need to go to one of those approved hotels to see if you can check in for your convention credentials. I don't know if that is possible, but you could try. Otherwise, you can sign in for the convention on Monday like lots of us will be doing.

Check out the web site for Celebrate Santa. Check out everything they offer. Establish a plan so that you can get the most from this visit. If you just show up and go with the flow, you will surely miss a lot. Don't forget the parade. March as a group. You can join the Brotherhood and march with their banner or join the North Georgia group and march with them. Or with whichever group/region of the country or world you desire. Get a group together and

make your own banner to march behind. Bring a State Flag to carry. Make it a group event. I have always been one to be in a group. I like having fun with new and old friends.

I do plan on attending one or two classes offered. I am mostly interested in the reindeer information. A breeder from the Nashville area will be giving it. I do have other activities planned with friends and groups. We have outside interests and plan to enjoy each others company. Hope we will see you there and we can meet.

Now, what is the next thing you need to think about for this trip? How about a few hints. You are going on a vacation. You are going to learn something new to enhance your Santa persona. You are going to impress other Santas. You are going to meet others and hopefully learn something they do that you might want to do. You might be going to learn where to go to be a Santa or earn more money. Does this bring to mind anything important that you might want to keep and review later? I suggest you carry three things with you. First a camera to assist you in remembering everyone, second a pocket recorder to record those important moments.

And finally, you need a paper and pencil so that you can write down those important thoughts and ideas.

That may sound kind of trivial to you, but to me it is important. I have received more ideas from those I speak to than you can imagine. These past 5 years I have learned more than the first 25

years I have been doing this. I credit this to meeting more Santas the past few years.

Now for the very last item; Ensure you pack an open mind and a strong drive to get the most out of this trip. If you don't, you will have no one to blame but yourself. The old adage 'you get out of something only what you put into it, holds true.'

I plan to enjoy every minute of my vacation at Celebrate Santa. As for a post script for the article, if you have been to my Santa class, then you should know to save your receipts. Keep all documents and receipts from this trip for the tax man for next year.

Remember this is also during Saint Patrick's Day and we are sharing the celebrations with the Irish and the associated traditions. Study up.

Hope to see you there, or soon.

Kris Kringle
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* Editor's note, see the column, From the Heart of Santa, for more information on working with the media.

YOU SHOULD KNOW

Celebrate Santa 2009

<http://celebratesanta.com>
<http://celebratesanta.blogspot.com>

Great Smoky Mountains

<http://www.nps.gov/grsm>
<http://www.smokymountains.org>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Smoky_Mountains

I really love this job

I was invited to participate at a parent teacher "Christmas with Santa" function one Saturday morning before Christmas. I worked the gymnasium where all of the parents and kids were having breakfast and then went to my assigned area to visit with the children one on one. They had made a version of Santa's sleigh that I sat in and the children lined up to meet me.

One boy (about 7) came up and sat on my lap and we had the typical Santa dialogue. We took a picture and then I asked him what he wanted for Christmas. A smile and a laugh came from me when he responded "a yellow Transformer - and you can get them at Target on sale!". His mother and I had a good laugh and she said he was a very good boy who was also helping me shop!

I really love this job.

Santa Dave Cardiff
Vancouver, Wash.
www.jolly247.com



Reflections on Christmas Past

A Time for Renewal

by Lou Knezevich

The Christmas tree has been picked up to be recycled, while the colorful lights and ornaments are tucked away for another seasons display. With all the memories of holidays past, the house looks pale and barren.

Every year when the season ends and the costumes come back from the cleaners, a feeling of melancholy washes over me.

All the preparations for Santa's visits, parties and festive occasions are suddenly over. It is as if the curtain has come down on a play in which you were totally immersed. Now the bright lights of the theater shock you to another reality. I don't know if you have had these feelings, but I counter them by thinking of the things which happened this Christmas and I also begin planning for the new season upcoming.

Many people think being Santa is easy. For those of us who take it seriously, we know differently.

An example; sitting for a photo shoot from 9:00 a.m., until 5:00 p.m., can make for a long day, especially when each snapping of the shutter means a Santa smile no matter how uncooperative the child is. One of my longest sessions was at a country club where I pose with children and families for their annual holiday photographs. My hat is off to all Santas who work in malls, for here I get a taste of what you do, day in and day out.

At the end of the session I asked the photographer how many pictures she had taken. She said over 1000. I couldn't believe it. When I went on the photographer's Web site, I was amazed how I had smiled in every one of those photographs. Maybe that accounted for me being so tired that night, and why my jaw was a bit sore the next morning. Fortunately on this photo shoot, the elf helpers kept the air conditioning on and the temperature low.

Whenever you have the opportunity to see a photographer's work of you, study each picture carefully. What I look for are my "flaws." Things like; my hat is way down on one side and a lot of forehead is showing, or my belt buckle is twisted to



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Lou Knezevich

one side and not centered. Do you stare at the camera or can you show some expressive faces to make a better photo? You will most certainly improve your photos by learning from your "flaws."

Taking care of your costumes is another dimension of being Santa which requires time and effort. If you don't hang up your costume, it will be wrinkled and it will not make for a neat appearance when you wear it again.

If your costume is wet from perspiration and you don't turn it inside out to dry, then spray it with Febreze, you're going to smell like a locker room. You may be dead tired, but taking care of your costumes and equipment comes first. Remember, for most of us the season is short and you have to be looking your very best every day. And looking your best every day during the rest of the year is a very good idea.

I was cleaning and polishing my boots and ready to store them when I noticed a small crease across the toes of one pair. Ah yes, now I remember. It happened when this young father brought his curly haired son, Charley over to admire the letter 'S' across the top of my instep. "Look at the 'S' Charley, it stands for Santa," he explained.

I guess Charley had another idea, as he lifted his foot and stomped on my toe with all his might. Seeing that his

father did not object, he did it again in such rapid succession that I took a few hits before I could move my foot. I know what I wanted to say to the boy isn't in the Santa Manual and probably should never be in print either. The father was not upset by any of this, so I turned my attention to other children, ignoring Charley for the rest of the evening.

My GPS acted up a few times, so, like wearing suspenders and a belt, I counted on double protection. I would 'Map Quest' my route in addition to programming the GPS. My GPS would tell me to turn right when I knew I should turn left. I became very leery of it in unknown territory. The nice lady with the provocative voice had some pronunciation problems also, which made me read street signs closely, like "Figum Parkway," which turned out to be "Freedom Parkway."

My worst experience came at the end of a long day, returning from a Santa visit in the country. The screen went dark. Ironically, this repeat visit was one of the reasons for the GPS. Two years ago, while relying on my instincts, I took a couple of wrong turns and ended up miles from home.

Although the screen was dark, the little lady was not silent. She would tell me to turn at every intersection I approached. I did feel lost so far out in the country, with darkness setting in, and thinking, again I would end up miles from home.

I have had some amazing experiences while in the "Red Suit." I felt something urging me, directing me to turn down a meandering road. At the end of that road was a major intersection. That inner voice again urged me to turn left, which eventually led me to a main road, from which I knew my route home.

The lady in the GPS was very quiet the rest of the way home, or maybe I didn't pay any attention, because I was so relieved that I was in familiar territory. By the way, no one I have spoken with, can figure out how I left that area, traversed those roads, ending up on the road home.

by Lou Knezevich
"Zivili" Celebrate Life"

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The Spirit of Christmas is Alive and Well



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Richard Farhat poses at an event with members of the local fire department and members of the U.S. Marine Corp., who are receiving toys for the Toys for Tots program.

By Santa Richard Farhat

Being Santa has encouraged me to look for, and rediscover the Spirit of Christmas.

It seems that with my maturing (aging) the Spirit of Christmas sort of faded until sometime in December of each year. Then it arrived on Dec. 25th and seemed to get lost faster than it came.

When I decided to be Santa after I retired in 2002, I started to see the 'Spirit' in so many places.

In the amazed and hopeful face of the child who believes they've met Santa. Or in the mother (or father) with a sparkle in their eye, who relates to their son or daughter that they think I'm Santa, or when I swell up to ask them who they think I am, and then thank them for recognizing me. Whether working a mall, private party, business or I'm just out grocery shopping, it tinkles me when I see someone's eyes lock on me and we exchange a smile - I know the 'Spirit' has passed between us, or made a connection with us.

I have had an opportunity to see the 'Spirit' displayed as the 'unconditional Love' of parents who brought their children to an event at which I was appearing. It was for the Autism Society of America, Atlanta Chapter. It was an 8 hour event which included a visit

with each child, photos with Santa, music, physical therapy activities and a vendor show.

At first I was quite intimidated with the idea that I would be at this event and had no idea at how to interact with these children. But I had been given this challenge and knew that I wanted the experience to be the best I could for the children and their families.

I started by talking with Cindy, the Autism Society coordinator, about the event and how it would be conducted. I shared with her my desire to make this a positive experience and would like to become more educated about autism in general. I asked if she could offer some resources which would allow me to meet volunteers, or professionals working with autistic children. It would provide me insight into how to communicate. She assured me that the event would be structured with volunteers and families assisting.

We were going to meet before the event, which might include a doctor at Emory University, where there is an autism clinic. Since I also belong to Santa-America and a volunteer at Hospice Atlanta, I was able to talk to the social worker and volunteer coordinator regarding my upcoming event.

Before I knew it the 'Spirit' showed itself, as referrals to a psychiatrist and a volunteer who both work with an orga-

nization supporting those with autism. Their generosity of time and information was invaluable. They directed me to a web site, www.autismspeaks.com, which has lots of information and videos. They also offered a clear insight into how they communicate.

Here are some suggestions offered to me;

"When I am working with kids who are nonverbal, I can't expect them to start talking, so I do most of the talking. Some kids will make vocalizations, but not words when they speak. Avoid asking questions. The only reason I say that is for your benefit because you are asking a question and are getting no response, so it could be awkward for you. If you are comfortable enough then you should ask questions, but understand you won't get an answer. I'm not sure what your interaction with the kids will be like, but I'm guessing it will be something like, "What would you like for Christmas?, or what kind of things do you want?" You should avoid these when interacting with nonverbal kids and make it more into a statement like "I'm sure you were a good boy/girl this year and you will be getting gifts," or "I bet you like sports and trucks, me too." It is like having a conversation with yourself, but some nonverbal children understand, and enjoy you talking to them, or just smiling at them. If you are comfortable with asking questions and receiving no answer, you should do that too. If you do this I would say, "What would you like for Christmas? I bet you would like" That way you are asking the question, but also making a statement.

Not all autistic kids are nonverbal, but it is good to know how to react.

Let me thank you all for your contribution to the Spirit of Christmas. Merry Christmas to All and to All a Good night.

Santa Richard Farhat
richf95@bellsouth.net

YOU SHOULD KNOW
www.autismspeaks.com



The Gift Of Santa

It Will Never
Be Forgotten

By Santa Charlie Allen

The work of Santa is so important that many times we don't realize the power of Santas presence.

Earlier in the season, I asked one of my very good friends if he would like to give a special gift to anyone special to him.

I offered my services of Santa Claus and reminded him that I was an entertaining Santa and reiterated my approach of being one.

His first thought was of a young couple whom he loved like a brother and sister. Last year my friend Tony had beaten the presence of an unusual type cancer which made medical history. He also had both shoulders and hips replaced. He stated that this couple went to his place of business every day and worked along with his staff to keep his store functioning and they were at the hospital every day to visit him.

Tony contacted the husband of the young couple of 12 years, who had two children ages 3 and 7. They were having a family Christmas party for 40 persons and I was available on the date of the party.

He kept it a secret from his wife until the week before. When I arrived, I contacted them by my cellular phone and they met me at their garage. The wife was so excited she was jumping up and down with her hands folded in front of her in a prayer like fashion like a teenager. My presence was going to be a complete surprise to their family and friends.

I enter the party area with the customary Ho Ho Ho and high fives and handshakes to all.

Not able to bring in my throne-like Santa chair in advance, as it would have blown my cover, I had to use some Santa magic.

I took out my Magic Lamp puppet with the Genie inside and asked the Genie for a Santa chair. The Genie responded and said your wish is my command! In

came the very large Santa Chair decorated in red white and gold which 2 guests were carrying.

Now my routine begins with the children. I first have them yell, Merry Christmas Santa. Naturally I say I cant hear than and they shout it again. I then say, You can do better than that, as I slap my knee. After they raise the roof with their voices, I fall to my knees and say Santa needs a hug I get the worlds biggest hug ever.

I then give them a burst of bubbles which will break down any resistance from any of the shy ones. They just love breaking them as they float over their heads.

I have allowed them to be children by letting



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Cutline

them scream, break bubbles and receive the loving hugs from Santa. Now they are mine. I have captured their full attention.

The whole party is then engaged in singing Christmas Carols and the adults are furnished with song books in the event they don't remember all of the words. I play my 120 base accordion and accompany the selected songs.

I then recite the Night Before Christmas and you could hear a pin drop. I use the magic change bag to instill some life lessons of 'paying it forward,' doing for others before they do it for you.. My Golden Lamp puppet allows them to make a wish for someone else which I emphasize that the real spirit of Christmas is giving to others. That is why Santa is always so happy!

Children love to be validated on how good they have been; this is accomplished by information on each child present which the elves gathered and is placed in my Red Leather Good Book.

Each child is allowed to sit with Santa and tell what their wishes are for Christmas and photos are taken by their parents. Now the gifts are given from Santa for each excited child. The event is finished by more family photos. I completed my performance, said my good byes and then on I'm on my way to the next party.

My friend called me the next day and said, Charlie I don't know what you did but my friends have called me about 13 times to thank me for having Santa come to their house party. They were completely amazed and their family and friends couldn't believe what a joyful

presentation meant to them in celebrating their family event.

A number of weeks later the family took a winter vacation to the Berkshires in Mass. as they have done many times and went snowmobiling with their two children. Unfortunately the young mother of 39 lost control of the machine was killed in an accident.

I went to the wake. There were so many people waiting in line to offer their feelings of sorrow. When I met the husband, he took my hand and said that he could never thank me enough for the many wonderful happy memories that I had provided for them and their families.

They had so much going for them; the husband had his own business and she was a stay at home mom.

There were over 1,500 attending the wake, which went from 5 p.m to 8 p.m., and had to be extended to 11 p.m. The traffic had to rerouted and some never reached the funeral home to express their sorrow.

The presence of Santa has such power, we will never know its true depth of effect it has on others that will last for a life time! The celebrity status of Santa goes well beyond our imagination. It also reaches every age spectrum of life in different ways and provides a ray of sunshine making everyone happy in more different ways that we can ever imagine.

Santa Charlie Allen
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Destination Gatlinburg

Vacation in The Great Smoky Mountains a time for fellowship; a feast of friends

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION © BY BILL MCKEE

Image creation was begun in early 2007. The biggest challenge was tracking down just the right 'reindeer,' paying royalties for use, and spending many months and hours tediously working, creating and reworking the ensemble. Concept for use of time/space portal for Santa's speedy travels by PeSheWa. Execution by Bill McKee/Earth-dancer Imaging.

BY BILL MCKEE
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

GATLINBURG, Tenn. - Elves and reindeer and leprechauns. Oh My!

Mischief will be afoot as a unique gathering of characters converge on the town of Gatlinburg in the Tennessee foothills of the Smoky Mountains. Stories, fun, laughter, workshops and sharing old-fashioned goodwill will rekindle the Spirit of Christmas days before spring dawns.

Celebrate Santa 2009 will be held March 16-18, and is being hosted by Joe and Mary Moore. After visiting friends in the Northeast Tennessee area in 2000, the couple fell in love with the region and moved here from

California in 2007.

"The people are so warm and welcoming, and this is certainly God's country. We found a return to family and Christian values and knew we belonged here," said Joe Moore who has portrayed Santa for six years with Mary by his side as Mrs. Claus.

The Moores were involved in "Discover Santa," a large gathering of Santa's helpers in 2006 in Branson, Mo. More than 300 of the jolly gents in red attended the event.

"After touring the Gatlinburg Convention Center with the beautiful wood, stone work and the overall décor, we knew we had found 'Santa Central,'" said Joe Moore. "There are so many shows, attractions and shopping here, we knew all of Santa's helpers and

Mrs. Clauses would also really enjoy this area."

Although many Santa's helpers will be attending workshops hone their skills, the public is invited to Santa's Showcase, a large holiday market at the convention center and a resource for Santa supplies, is open March 16-18. It also includes live reindeer and a sleigh factory on convention center floor.

HOLLY & SHAMROCK PARADE

Speaking of mischief, there's a twist to this convention. The leprechauns and the elves have surprises in store during a parade led by Saint Nicholas and St. Patrick

In the middle of the gathering is St. Patrick's Day on March 17. The first Holly & Shamrock Parade, hosted by the city of Gatlinburg, will feature characters of all kinds walking and riding down the parade route. Large helium-filled balloons are planned with elaborate floats and any number of holiday delights to entice the senses.

Finding the real Santa Claus in this crowd could be a challenge, even for the keenest of senses. For a good view of the parade, stake a claim to a spot anywhere along the main Gatlinburg Parkway from traffic lights six through eight. The parade will begin at around 4 p.m., and is expected to last about an hour.

St. Patrick's Day will culminate that evening at the festive Holly & Shamrock Gala Ball for ticketed guests at the Tennessee Ballroom of the convention center at 6:30 p.m., on St. Patrick's Day.

THERE BE REINDEER!

Live reindeer will take center stage at "Santa Central." The Reindeer Owners and Breeders Association (ROBA) will be holding its annual convention in conjunction with "Celebrate Santa 2009."

According to Kyle Wilson, outgoing president of ROBA, and owner of Rocky Hill Reindeer farms in Knoxville, Tenn., the

See GATLINBURG pg7

Increase your customer base with additional characters



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Somerville Mike poses with Frosty and Rudolf.

By Santa Somerville Mike

Although last season was just my second year with RealSanta4U.com, I was able to increase my customer base by adding Rudolf and Frosty to our cast of characters.

They were introduced to the general public during the Somerville Christmas Parade.

They also performed in the annual Christmas Show I do in our town (Santa Presents Christmas in Somerville).

We did several charity events including Hope House.

I had several request for their services and they had one stand alone visit without Santa. The mother had a party with two year olds and her daughter was scared of Santa so she hired Frosty and Rudolf. I understand everyone had a ball.

We have the perfect married couple to don the suites. Ron and Beth Webb both work with the youth at their

local church. They are fun and energetic and well suited for the rolls. I found a company going out of business and bought both suites for \$300.

I am at present adding them to my web site and having literature made with them in it.

They are assets at charity or any event, and they are close friends.

Santa Somerville Mike
Somerville, Tennessee

GATLINBURG cont. from pg6

approximately 250-member organization will offer workshops for Santa's helpers in all things reindeer, along with other presentations specifically for ROBA members.

"There will be educational opportunities for the public," Wilson said. "I will have reindeer on display during the three-day convention," he said. "And with the reindeer being at convention floor center, they will be easy for the public to find," he said

All in all, the event promises to be a giant Christmas stocking filled with presents and goodies for participants and spectators alike. And late at night, when all is quiet, if you stop and listen, you might just hear sleigh bells passing somewhere overhead.

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Santa@TheSantaClaus.com

YOU SHOULD KNOW

Santa's Showcase: Gatlinburg Convention Center, open to the public March 16, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and March 17-18: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. \$3 per person and under 15 and under admitted free.

<http://www.gatlinburg-tn.com>
<http://www.gatlinburg.com>
<http://www.eventsgatlinburg.com>

Gatlinburg Convention Center
Gatlinburg Department of Tourism
<http://www.gatlinburg-tennessee.com/conventions/center.html>

Gatlinburg Events
<http://www.gatlinburg-tennessee.com/events/list.html>

Celebrate Santa 2009
<http://celebratesanta.com>
<http://www.HollyandShamrock.com>
Celebrate Santa Blog
<http://celebratesanta.blogspot.com>

Reindeer Owners and Breeders Association
<http://www.reindeer.ws>
Rocky Hill Reindeer
<http://www.reindeerman.com>



Troops bring holiday cheer to Iraqi scouts



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Joseph M. (Mike) Lord poses in Iraq with soldiers and Iraqi boy and girl scouts during Christmas 2008.

Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO

BAGHDAD – Iraqi boy and girl scouts received a surprise visit from Santa Claus and presents during a holiday-themed scouting event Dec. 20 on Victory Base Complex.

The Victory Base Council military and civilian volunteers gather once a week with Iraqi children to participate in arts and crafts, team building events and other scout related activities, but this week had a special flavor. Children decorated paper Christmas trees, played kick ball and worked on their knot tying skills while waiting for Saint Nick.

When Santa, played by civilian

logistics contractor Joseph Lord arrived, the children flocked around him, pulling his beard and begging to hear his jolly cry of “Ho, ho, ho.”

Santa then posed for pictures with all the children and they received gift bags with school supplies, stuffed animals and treats.

Scout leaders were approached by Iraqi parents about introducing their children to the magic of Santa Claus, said Lt. Cdr. Vincent Garcia, force generation officer, Iraqi Assistance Group and volunteer with the Victory Base Scouts. The hope was not only to show the Iraqi children an important part of the culture of their American

counterparts, but to encourage holiday spirit. “We’re hoping to capture the feelings of the season; of giving, goodwill and friendship,” said Lt. Col. Carl Schwartz, economic analyst, C5 Corps Assessment Cell, Multi-National Corps – Iraq and the trip leader for the holiday event.

The Victory Base Council scouting program is working to jump-start scouting in Iraq, Garcia said. The hope is to create a self-sustaining, Iraqi-run program which can eventually be internationally recognized, he explained.

Working with the Council gives Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and contractors the chance to

interact first hand with the Iraqi youth and adds an additional dimension of humanity to their deployment. “We’re all ambassadors for our own countries and we can learn from each other,” Schwartz said. “They’re (the children) are excited to see different backgrounds from themselves,” said Staff Sgt. Lorina Cajayon, food service operations sergeant, 398th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion. “They’re happy and looking forward to meeting with someone different than themselves.”

“The kids get a lot out of it and it gives us a lot of joy and fulfillment as well,” Garcia said.

Not only does everyone have the opportunity to have fun and gain cultural diversity, programs that engage the youth of Iraq are vital to the mission of rebuilding this country. “These are the building blocks. One day they’ll be adults and running their country.”

For more information contact the multi-national corps – Iraq public affairs office by email At: Mncipaovictorymainjo@iraq.Cent.com.Mil

For this press release and others, visit <http://www.Bragg.Army.Mil/mnci/default.Htm>

For high resolution photos, please contact the digital video and imagery distribution system by calling (678) 421-6612, or access them on-line at www.Dvidshub.Net.

Multi-National Corps – Iraq Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory APO AE 09342
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
RELEASE No. 20081224-03
Dec. 24, 2008
Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO

“In putting on this suit and entering the sleigh, the wearer waives any and all rights to previous identity, real or implied, and fully accepts the duties and responsibilities of Santa Claus until such time that wearer becomes unable to do so either by accident or design.”

The “Santa Clause” from the movie *The Santa Clause*

HEART

cont. from pg 1

That evening, and the next afternoon. we spoke of family, friends, home and life. I had been told she was a seer of many things. And I watched in amazement as a bird, or a few, flew in through the open doorway, some just to chatter or sing a few notes, and flutter out, just having stopped to say 'hello' it appeared. And the ducks and geese came clattering and quacking and demanding why are you late with out food.

She spoke, to them and to me, and us, as she lived, observed and savored every moment which passed. She was full of love and life and joy. It radiated from within her. She was also tethered to an oxygen machine, only because of a frail body, certainly not a frail spirit.

Many years later (even though I work the late shift, sleeping until noon many days), I have trouble sleeping as Spring begins to arrive. What Kindiwa (young Eagle woman) told me that keeps me, so gratefully, from sleeping very late in Spring, was one very simple truth.

She said, simply, "Bill, if you don't do anything else in your life, I suggest that you do this one thing." "Every morning," she said, "without fail, before your feet even touch the floor, stop. Stop. Stop and simply say, 'thank you.'"

She told me that if I were to do this without fail every morning, even the mornings I was in too much of a hurry (Especially the mornings I was in a hurry), it would change my life.

She said stop and simply say 'thank you.' "You don't have to say thank you to anyone in particular," she said. "Just say 'Thank You.'" "Do this without fail every morning for one month, maybe two, who knows, but it will change your life."

I could not tell you how long, maybe one month, maybe two, but one morning, and mornings still, I can hear the birds as they awaken and begin their new day. I can hear them like I heard them when I was a child once again. They stir in me a Spirit of Life, of connections and harmony and of Love for All.

In these dark days of uncertainty, we have strayed from the path, it appears. The ancient ones, and their decedents who walk these lands still (The Great Smoky Mountains, this area known in the Cherokee language as Sha-co-na-ge, which means "place of blue smoke"), have much to teach us.

Society appears to neither see, nor acknowledge wisdom of the elders. Many in our world have the words, but have lost the eyes to see and ears to hear. Their hearts are turned in other directions, as if their eyes are veiled.

As you enter the land of the Cherokee, the hills of Tennessee known as "The Great Smoky Mountains," STOP.



Sunset Prayer, Trade, Tenn.

PHOTO BY BILL MCKEE

Stop and say, "Thank you."

You are walking on the earth where the ancient and wise ones have walked. They walk here still, being born, living, loving, working and passing on from this world every day.

Please see this wisdom passing you by on the streets. Take time to pay attention to the where that you "are."

Say 'thank you' for your opportunity to wear the red suit.

Say 'thank you' to the ancient culture alive here, where the children hold the highest honor. Children are protected, nurtured and regarded above all else.

When you wear the suit, and when you don't, is it for the children? Or is it for other ideas or pleasures? Does your ego swell with pride, the peacock in full display, or are you humbled and grateful?

As you enter these lands, and walk the streets of Gatlinburg and the surrounding region, be mindful always of those who know the true Heart of Santa Claus.

Simply say 'thank you' to those with wisdom who know the Sacredness of the children (life itself).

Bill McKee
Santa@theSantaClaus.com
<http://www.theSantaClaus.com>

I cannot take credit for the followings 'rules' and do not know whom to credit with the words, but words which lie at the Heart of Santa Claus, and words which guide my life.

Rule No. 1 - It's all about the children.

Rule No. 2 - If you have any questions, see Rule No. 1.

Have fun in the land of the Cherokee and the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains. Stop and say, "Thank you."

***Editors note** on working with the media, as added information to Al Horton's 'print and refer to' article (a very thoughtful and well-guided checklist) on preparing for Celebrate Santa 2009.

There is one very important thing to remember. And I am erring on the side of ultra caution. Be aware, in every approach to the following; 'off the record.' If you have never had any exposure to the media, I am offering this as informational only.

Ask the reporter a few questions before the interview begins, before you even agree to the interview. Let the reporter know that you have never spoken with the media and don't know how it works, or something like that.

Keep it simple. Perhaps something along the lines

of 'what if you ask me some difficult questions. You know, it has been a bad year for everyone with the economy and all, and I wouldn't want to answer any questions that the children might see Santa is not doing too well and might loose his house.' Can I say 'off the record.'

Once this ground rule is set, then you can agree to the interview, or not. Keep in mind, an assignment to cover an event like this is one of the bonus days for reporters. Sort of like a working vacation from the hard news. Most you encounter while in Gatlinburg will be looking for light features and feel-good stories. You should not have to worry at all about reporters lurking behind every corner waiting to entrap you, or get some juicy inside scoop. Plus, an interview with the media is good training for any Santa. You never know when you will be at an appearance which might be covered by the media. Of course, they will always want to talk with Santa. Relax, enjoy yourself and have fun.

Have a great time in Gatlinburg. And remember, you walk on the lands of the ancients, the Cherokee Nation who have been born, lived their lives and passed on throughout this region for centuries. Stop, give a thought, and thanks to them. We sure intend to.

Cherokee Nation, East
<http://www.nc-chokeee.com>
Cherokee from Wikipedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherokee>
Great Smoky Mountains from Wikipedia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Smoky_Mountains
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Smoky_Mountains_National_Park
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oconaluftee_\(Great_Smoky_Mountains\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oconaluftee_(Great_Smoky_Mountains))

Cherokee, N.C.
<http://www.cherokee-nc.com>



For nine months, the nine-year-old Hurricane Katrina survivor did not speak. He and his mother rode out the killer storm in the attic of their home. His next-door neighbors were not so lucky and the young boy heard their screams as Katrina took the lives of his best friend and his friend's mother. When the mother and son moved to Mobile, they sought help for the boy's post traumatic stress. Week after week, month after month, the boy was silent during therapy sessions. A professional in the medical community called Santa-America for help. When Santa Ernest walked into the counselor's office, the young boy jumped up, flew across the room and hurled himself into Santa Ernest's embrace shouting, "Santa, I thought you were dead." The boy's mother and counselor wept as the boy told Santa Ernest about his nightmare experiences.



Santa-America Changes Families' Lives!

Founded in 2003 by Daphne resident, Ernest Berger, Santa-America is a national non-profit volunteer service organization that offers Santa visits to children and families in crisis...365 days a year! Santa nurtures children and their families by giving compassion during an emotionally stressful time of their life. Following the initial visit, the same Santa will continue to visit the family year after year, helping in their grief and bereavement. Santa's visits with children come from the medical community, hospice, and special needs educators. We build relationships with medical societies and alliances. As one of our initiatives, Santa America is conducting a clinical pilot study to reveal the value of Santa's love on chronically ill children.



Caring For Our Children

Santa-America is the leader in advancing the highest standards for its volunteers. We conduct rigorous national background checks and intensive training ... the same background check as a doctor or nurse.

Love, Hope & Joy
 Wrapped in a Warm Santa Hug
 for Special Children & Their Families
365 Days A Year!

How We Build Community



Santa-America volunteers unite generations and work together to build community through service to our children. The gifts

of Love, Hope & Joy transcend politics, culture, race and religion. These gifts are treasured universal values.

Gifts for Our Children

When we visit our special children, Santa-America gives gifts that symbolize Love, Hope and Joy. Our signature Santa Hugs™, sleigh bells, and our special book, An Angel in the Sky, continue to remind children and their families of their special visit with Santa.



For more information about Santa-America, visit Santa-America online at www.Santa-America.org or contact our Executive Director Cathy Barnette at 251.379.0462 or info@santaamerica.org



Photos courtesy of Elizabeth McGonagle Graham, Lasting Memories Photography.

Classified and Posts

Couch for Claus

Room & strength for 3 adults and 2 children!



- Folds to 4" x 16" x 48" for easy transport and storage.
- Weighs 50 lbs.
- 2 minute set-up
- Economical you-finish or ready-to-use
- Two decorative finished styles: Candy Cane and Celebration Gold



Couch for Claus - the perfect photo-set Santa Chair!

Tampa Santa Jim Williams has designed a roomy 48" wide couch that will safely accommodate Santa plus 2 adults and 2 children for the perfect family portrait. It works equally as well for those children, teens or even adults who resist Santa's knee but are willing to sit beside him for their picture.

The Couch for Claus is the perfect Christmas or Easter photo-set prop. The professionally painted photo canvas back makes a perfect background to show off Santa's red suit as well as the skin tones of his visitors. The couch comes in two finish styles, Candy Cane with red and white accents, perfect for Christmas and Celebration Gold which features green and gold accents that works equally well for use at Christmas and Easter. The latter style is great for use by shopping malls and photography studios.

And here's the best part! The Couch for Claus folds up for easy transport and storage. It only weighs 50 pounds. Folds to 4" x 16" x 48" and has an optional rolling storage chest. It's available as a completely assembled raw wood unit ready for your decorating for \$350 or as a finished painted piece with upholstered 3" foam cushion and gold scone accent header for \$675. The optional wheeled transport/storage chest holds the complete chair and cushion and sells for \$150.

You can test out the Couch for Claus at Celebrate Santa vendor show in Gatlinburg in March where Santa Jim will have a booth with a limited number of couches available for purchase or to take your order for later delivery.

Tampa Santa Jim Williams
4228 Golf Club Lane
Tampa, FL 33618-2728
Phone: (813) 333-5252
Web site: www.TampaSanta.com

Video link

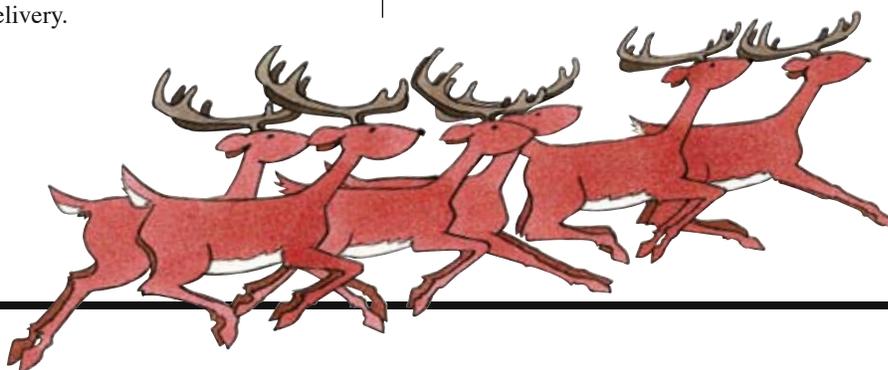


We had our best Christmas ever, culminating with our third win of 'Santas Favorite Helper' for our local newspaper, the *Fort Wayne NewsSentinel*. We received the most votes for the third year in a row! Thanks to all the other Santas who voted for me.

I am including a link to a short video produced by the newspaper.

View video here: http://fwnextweb1.fortwayne.com/ns/santa/winner_video/index.php

HoHoHo!!
Santa Kip Lackey
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bellythekid@verizon.net



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Masthead Artwork by Stephanie Suzanne Sentinella

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<http://theBrotherhoodDDS.com>