

Red Suit Roundtable

ROUNDUP

Southeast Regional Division of A.O.R.B.S.

ISSUE 1

A Word From the Editor

Gary Casey, our SE Regional Director, promised this would be out by March 9. I apologize, as obviously we missed our first deadline by a day or two, and I accept full responsibility for its late arrival. Gary tried his best and it is not his fault. This is, indeed, new to me. Once we get the coordination down and the bugs worked out, we hope to be as regular as clockwork. Please notice I did use 'hope.'

Welcome to YOUR newsletter. This is for you, about you and intended to benefit everyone. With your help, we will strive to be a resource you can count on.

To do this we need your help. We need your input, your stories, your needs, your calendar of events, your questions, your ideas and anything you think would be of interest to the group. Please don't hesitate to write, call, ask questions, comment and certainly don't hesitate to write a column, story, or offer ideas and criticism. Volunteer.

You will find in this, the premier issue, a column by Al 'Santa' Horton. Following Gary's notice, he sent an email with this great idea for someone to do for a column - a great idea he had - and a great column, already, almost ready. Please, don't let Al loaf too much in his retirement. Send your offerings, questions, answers, comments to Al at: FuzzyTBear@bellsouth.net

I know all Santas have stories to tell. Write them down. Send them in. If you haven't been keeping notes each day, begin to do so. You will not regret it. I also hope you are keeping the letters children give you each year. I sure do. Valuable resources and what wonderful magic to share!

My job is to gather all these things together, check spelling, grammar, edit and organize it into some reasonable form and send it off to Santa Scott in Atlanta. Santa Scott designed the newsletter, coordinating it with the web site. We are also coordinating with Santa Jim Williams of Tampa who designed the AORBS Southeast Web Site. Please, if you haven't, go take a look. It can be found at: <http://www.RedSuitRoundtable.com>

By Santa Bill (McKee)

Send to : AORBSSEnews@earthdancer.org or call me at (276) 429-2181.

NORTH POLE NEWS

Anyone in the vicinity of Piedmont Park in downtown Atlanta, Ga., Sunday, 11 February, 2007, might have been a little confused. Many were delighted. Some even appeared amazed at what their eyes beheld!

In a sea of red and white, sporting mostly snow-white beards, gathered within a glassed-walled room overlooking the park, were no less than 150 brothers, cousins and descendants of a Holiday figure known by many names . . . Saint Nicholas, P re No l, Sinter Claus, Bobo Natale, Father Christmas, Grandfather Frost, Kris Kringle and most commonly . . . Santa Claus. The guest list included Santas, Mrs Santas, Santa's helpers, and Elves. All telling true stories and tall tales of seasons in the sleigh while enjoying good food, new friends and renewing old fellowships.

The occasion for this gathering, the 'Red Suit Roundtable,' a first-ever east coast, post-Christmas gathering of the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas. The organization was founded 13 years ago in California as the

brotherhood for serious, professional Santas. It is an international, educational and fraternal organization currently listing over 1,200 'real bearded' gentlemen dedicated to the 'Joy of being Santa.'

This event, organized by AORBS's Southeast Regional Director, Gary Casey, offered an opportunity for Santas to share information, ideas and sources for Santa's needs. But most of all, fun! From a "HO HO HO" contest, to Santa's favorite Christmas stories, anyone in the room, or the vicinity of this glassed-in, North Pole-come-to-Atlanta gala, could not help but feel the magic radiating from the hearts and spirits of those assembled. The guests arrived, coming all the way from California, Florida, Canada and one (Santa Fred) from Norway.

Some Santas were chosen to share stories. These stories, becoming classic Christmas tales in the telling, brought great guffaws and tears. At the heart of why this group of professional Santas gives so much of their time, money and gifts to donning the suit and taking on the persona of the Spirit of Christmas; are these stories and thousands more, which all Santas

Have You Seen the NEW Website?

Get a better look by clicking on the link here> <http://www.redsuitroundtable.com>.

Official site for the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas - South East Region

Kringle's Wisdom

By Santa Fuzzy

"You Want To Know 'What' From Santa"?

Yes, Santa gets questions year round. His phone still rings with the sounds of giggling voices (though not as much this time of year). He is stared at, tugged at, disrupted at meals and shopping is a riot (but only if you have a sense of humor). Yes, this Santa has already been besieged by requests. Bring me this, bring me that, do you really, where are, and more.

One thing I found is that parents only know two things to ask Santa so be ready. They are, do you really play Santa? And, what mall do you work at? It's questions like these that need the most considerate thoughts. It's a great opportunity for marketing, yet it is usually in front of children. What do you do? I have several tricks I use, but hopefully you can provide more to assist the year-round Santa.

Santa Gary and Santa McKee have asked me to write a monthly column, collecting all the questions that Santa has been asked and how they have been handled. This sounded like a good belly laugh so I agreed. But I need your assistance. Lets do the Art Linkletter here. (Sorry, for all those younger Santas out there, Art Linkletter had a television show segment that was titled, 'Kids Say the Darndest Things'. It was a riot because you never knew what would pop out.) I would like to do that with this column. Here are a few questions to start, and some responses I've provided.

The most typical questions during the season involve 'Where are your reindeer?' Well, being from the South, I borrowed a little from Alan Jackson and usually respond with "My reindeer prefer the snow. Since we are in the south, I use the next best mode of transportation. I drive a pick-up truck. That way, I will have plenty of room for all the toys in the back." The parents are usually tickled and the kids just accept this as natural. Sometimes they ask if it is red and I nod to the gleeful shrills of "I knew it!"

Here's another response ...

"They are quietly awaiting my return on the roof. They are quite invisible during the day and try to be very quiet so they wont attract any attention."

I try to inject some humor with some of my responses so the parents are delighted too. For instance, another question I am always asked is "what do the reindeer eat?" To which I respond: "They all love apples and carrots, but Donner is a little different and she likes pickles. But not too many, 'cause they really aren't good for her."



VIETNAM. DECEMBER 23, 1969

Sporting a Barbasol shaving cream beard, a young **Timothy Connaghan** makes his Santa Claus debut.

Returning to camp on December 20th for a three-day stand down, meant hot showers, clean uniforms, hot meals in the mess hall and much-anticipated Holiday Mail for his company! Connaghan and a friend checked with the mail clerk and discovered six or seven large canvas bags which looked like Santa's bags. This gave them an idea. Of course there was no suit, no red material and no beard of any kind for what they had in mind.

"With a simple folding chair and a Barbasol shaving cream beard, we celebrated the holidays and handed out the gifts and packages of love from home," Connaghan said. "It was a very memorable day for me and one I will treasure forever."

That simple act of kindness in bringing a little of home, smiles and Christmas cheer to fellow soldiers, set him off on a 40 year sleigh ride. In addition to his year-round Santa schedule, he also leads a world-wide organization of Santas undergoing phenomenal growth. The roster, listing 600 members less than 18 months ago, now contains more than 1,200.

The Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas (AORBS) began informally 13 years ago in California. In August, 1994, ten Santas were selected to appear in a commercial for the German mail order company, "OTTO." During filming they decided they should all meet for lunch later, choosing January as each would be busy during the holidays. The first luncheon was held, as planned, on the third Sunday in January, 1995.

On January 21, 2007 AORBS held their 13th annual gathering, now appropriately called the "Founders Luncheon." For the first time ever, a second luncheon was held on the east coast. It was called the "Red Suit Roundtable" and held in Atlanta, Ga.

Taken from an official statement on the web site, AORBS is described as, 'an international, educational and fraternal organization of real bearded gentlemen dedicated to the Joy of being Santa.' The purpose of AORBS is to bring together those special 'real bearded' and principled gentlemen who carry on the history and traditions of Santa Claus. It acts as a catalyst and gathering place where santa's

cont'd. North Pole News

know. For these gentlemen, gathered here on this spring-like February day, this is a life-long commitment, filled with joy, sometimes great sadness, and real magic.

This magic is illustrated in one Santa's story from his first year's sleigh ride.

After learning he needed hearing aids, Santa Curtis, with his doubts and fears growing, told of how careful he was to make sure they were hidden under his hair each time he got dressed, so the children wouldn't see. One day two little girls, escorted by their mother, came to see him, one sitting on each knee. The child on his left talked non-stop, a little magpie, chatting up a storm about all the usual things and anything else that popped into her head. Santa noticed how her sister sat, almost rag-doll like on his right knee, staring down, seemingly without interest at all. At some point, the little magpie happened to mention that 'my sister is very shy because she has to wear hearing aids.' Santa, upon hearing this, leaned down saying to the little girl on his right knee, "I have to wear hearing aids too" as he took his hand and moved his hair back so she could see. Warily looking up, this previously blank face began to transform into a growing, glowing smile, beaming as her fear and embarrassment evaporated. She then became the magpie, talking with Santa as if she no longer had a care in the world. Two were transformed that Christmas in this simple act of kindness and understanding. This is the real magic of Christmas.

Many children trust Santa Claus beyond most anything, and anyone, else. This sacred trust is first, foremost and paramount to these gentlemen who pride themselves on their commitment to the highest standards the suit represents.

Sharing their knowledge and sharing their stories, each has the opportunity to grow and learn, becoming both teacher and student, and most of all, growing into a better human being. And this growth is attracting others of like spirit.



Timothy Connaghan, **Santa Tim**, President of AORBS and profiled in the accompanying story, noted in the business portion of the meeting that the membership has more than doubled in less than 18 months, to over 1,200 members, keeping him almost constantly in the sleigh, moving from time zone to time zone.

cont'd. Kringle's Wisdom

Again, I would like to ask for your input. What questions are you asked and how do you handle it. One question caught me off guard when I first began do this.

I had a young family approach me in a store where I was Santa for the day. Mom and dad were bringing in their 4, or 5-year-old son and his sister of about 2 for only her 2nd sight of Santa, to get a photo. Mom was pleasantly surprised when the young boy came running up to me and jumped in my lap. She said that last year he was very afraid. It appeared that this year he had a mission and knew exactly what he wanted. I smiled as I positioned him on my knee where the photographer could get a terrific picture of us. Before I could ask him what he wanted for Christmas, he promptly stated. "I know what I want. I only want one thing." As he smiled and giggled, he stated proudly and very loudly, "I want a new baby sister!" I look at mom and dad. Both had a terrified look on their face. Dad was looking at mom, and mom was indicating that she was not pregnant. Now, I was very curious as to why the child made this request, and knew instinctively not to pursue the subject. Unfortunately, my curiosity got the best of me and I asked ... "Why do you want a new baby sister?" To which came a crystal clear and loud response ... "Cause I don't like the one I have!" The crowd in line roared with approval and delight, but I do believe that couple has never taken their children to another Santa since.

"How would you handle something like that? The bigger question is, how do you handle the children's questions the rest of the year? I found my niche. Never would I ignore a child that calls me Santa in the other 11 months of the year. Instead, I carry a few small fleeced bears in my pocket and give one to each child that recognizes me. I then talk with them a minute and end by explaining that they need to help keep my secret, and that I am out watching all the people and creating my Naughty and Nice list! This leaves each child with a good feeling and the parents are usually pleasantly surprised by their child's new found good behavior (thought usually temporary).

Now it's your turn. Below are some items I would like to address over the next few months. It will be a terrific start on this column, and it would also assist others who are just getting into the Santa life.

1. How do you handle a child that cannot be good and does everything to be naughty, loud, and obnoxious? With this, explain the situation and what prompted your actions and responses.
2. How do you handle a child that just won't talk to you? Did you learn sign language, a second language, etc.?
3. Where do you get things that make up your Santa wardrobe?
4. What confusing questions are you asked for which you just don't have answers. Send them to me and we will address them in this column.

cont'd. Vietnam

can share, educate, and perpetuate the spirit of love and giving. AORBS' goal is to provide its members with the necessary resources that allow them to further define and improve their individual presentations of Santa Claus. Santa Tim Connaghan (President of AORBS) is widely regarded as an expert on Christmas, Santa Claus and all things related. During an interview recently, from his home in California, he spoke in great detail and with great passion about the history of this powerful iconic figure, known now around the world as Santa Claus, and how he came to be. This intricate knowledge and understanding of what Santa represents is manifest in Santa Tim.

Connaghan also heads the International University of Santa Claus. A series of 1 and 2 day workshops that has trained thousands on how to wear the red suit. He confessed that one of his desires is to teach a college course on the subjects. With his credentials, I would think any institution would be grateful to have him on the roster.

You have seen him on the Today Show, Dr. Phil, the Tonight Show, and he has appeared on numerous television programs including 'Mad-TV,' 'The Magic of Christmas' and 'The District.' Santa Tim was the Holiday Santa for the Hallmark Channel along with commercials and advertising for such clients as Hallmark, Old Navy, Kraft, Nabisco, Planter's, Dannon and Cool Whip.

He is the Official Santa for the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce and appeared in the 73rd, 74th and 75th Annual Hollywood Christmas Parades. He is busy preparing for the upcoming 76th.

What does he see as the future of this organization? "We (AORBS) intend to be proactive and lead the way, setting the industry standard worldwide. These standards include encouraging background checks, training, guidance and sharing knowledge among members."

Santa's are proud of this group which upholds the highest standards and finest traditions of Santa Claus and all he embodies and represents. With Santa Tim at the reins, the sleigh appears nearly packed, reindeer ready to enter light-speed, poised for the twenty-first century and beyond. The Santas are headed boldly into the unknown ready to reach children filled with fresh questions and magic wonder. After all, Santas are really just children at heart.

cont'd. Kringle's Wisdom

This column is the place to find answers to your questions. Not everyone can attend a workshop and workshops aren't frequent enough to help everyone getting started in a Santa career.

I will be collecting information for the rest of the year, so please email me your stories. I may not respond to you right away, but I will respond. You see, I am retired, and with that comes a responsibility to relax and enjoy the

cont'd. North Pole News

Flying into Atlanta from New York Sunday morning, he immediately caught another flight out following the luncheon, on his way to California.

Why do they do it?

That answer could be seen on the face, and beaming from the eyes of one child in Duluth, Ga. on Saturday prior to the official event. That evening many Santas made a stop at Fuddruckers for food, fun and greeting new members. At some point, this lone child, around the age of three or four, came strolling among the many tables packed with Santas, Mrs. Clauses and Elves. As he slowly walked through the crowd of white-bearded gentlemen dressed in red, he would stop and stare, turning his head this way and that, looking each Santa in the eye and grinning from ear to ear. On and on he went, smiling at Santa after Santa, beaming, almost glowing with joy and wonderment at what his eyes beheld. For you see, each one he looked at was the real Santa Claus, and he appeared not in the least disturbed seeing more than one. He had stumbled into Santa Claus heaven; an experience I am sure he will remember for the rest of his life. So will I.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus, and everywhere I look I see him. He will always live in the hearts of children everywhere (as all Santas know) whether I am here or not.

By Bill McKee

Photos by Patsy McKee

<http://www.Earthdancer.org/Santa.html>
santa@earthdancer.org

You Should Know...

Santa Timothy Connaghan
<http://www.santahollywood.com/>

International University of Santa Claus
<http://www.realsantas.com/iusc.htm>

Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas
<http://www.aorbsantas.com/>

Santa-America.org
<http://www.santa-america.org/>

Red Suit Roundtable
<http://www.RedSuitRoundtable.com>

AORBS Convention
<http://www.discoversanta.com>

For Santa Claus there is never any conflict wearing red because every day is Christmas

most out of life. I go where I like, when I like and do what I like. Well almost. I still have to keep that Santa image, but other than that ... You get the picture. I am out and about having fun. Keep your Santa smile wide.

Kris Kringle

Al "Santa" Horton

FuzzyTBear@bellsouth.net.

"It's Christmas All Year Round"

Mrs. Claus' Kitchen is now open!

A discussion group has been formed in conjunction with Santas Across the Globe and AORBS, specifically for the ladies that make the guys in the red suits look so good!

The discussion group is called "Mrs. Claus' Kitchen", and is linked from the SATG MSN website, or direct your browser to:
<http://groups.msn.com/MrsClausKitchen>

The group will provide a forum for discussing the formation of a formal organization for the ladies, as well as providing a place to chat about costuming, working with children, running a small business, cookie recipes, and more! Santas, please make sure the ladies that are your main support crew and cheering section get the word about this, whether they actually perform as your "Mrs. Claus" or not.

Mrs. Christy Claus (*Christine Seelye-King*) from Atlanta, Georgia will be heading up the group. She can be reached at:
kingstaste@comcast.net.

Upcoming Events Calendar

(Send in your events w/dates, place, and time)

We have spoken with Santa Tim regarding an IUSC class/workshop in the Tampa Bay area this summer. He will be sending out information on his workshops to all members in the next few weeks. I have offered to help co-ordinate this workshop, working with other Santas in the Tampa Bay and surrounding areas. Any interested Santas please contact me.

We are also planning a "Santa Luncheon of Central Florida Santas" in late March here in Tampa. The lunch will be an informal get-together for all AORBS members and Santa-America volunteers in Florida. Of course, any and all Mrs. Clauses are welcome. Santa Ernest Berger and Executive Director, Cathy Barnette, of Santa-America will be here to perform a special 'Elfing' ceremony for 8-year-old Zach (a charity guru) and possibly two other worthy elf recipients who work with Santa Dave of Spring Hill. There will be additional announcements of happenings in regards to the "Santa Luncheon of Central Florida Santas" which will enhance the festivities. We are planning on another fun-filled, informal Santa get-together.

I am very proud to have been appointed recently to the Board of Advisors for Santa-America. I would like to invite all Santas and Mrs's to join us in Tampa. If you wish, send me an email at, santa@santatb.com, if you think you may attend. I will keep you informed of the exact date and other details.

Please call me with any questions.

Santa Bob, Tampa
Workshop: 727-491-0533,
Sleigh: 813-230-9254.

ABC's of the Santa Biz



From the Workbench of Santa Gary,
Southeast Regional AORBS Director

Our organization AORBS, is modernizing and expanding operations, undergoing major changes in the way the organization functions.

This led to the creation of a board of directors appointed by Santa Tim. Tim Connaghan is President, Tom Kliner Internal Vice President, External Vice President is Joe Moore, Secretary is Tim Mack and the Treasurer is Tom Zimecki. These are your executive officers.

On the regional level are Gary Casey, Southeast, Tim Mack, Rocky Mountain, Christian Martens, Pacific, Tom Zimecki, Northeast, Carlucci Immediato, North Central and last, but not least, John Scheuch for South Central.

This re-organization will spread the workload and take some pressure off Tim who has been overseeing this phenomenal growth and trying to keep his head above water. As you all know, the Branson Convention, the first convention ever, was a grand success! However, the aftermath was this great influx of 700 - 800 new applications. As you might imagine, Santa Tim was not prepared for that onslaught. On top of that, he has to make a living, and his Christmas season was also just getting started when we left Branson!

So these changes will make a big difference in what is going on and how quickly the organization can respond to your needs. For you folks in the SE it also means you have to put up with me, and my burning desire to have

the biggest Region in the United States. Right now we are No.2 behind California, also known as the Pacific Region.

I am hoping each and every Santa in the Southeast region brings one more Santa into the fold. **That will add 100+ Santas!**

We will be offering a lot of information. For starters, the 6th Annual SantaAtlanta.com workshop is planned this year. With us and guiding us will be the Master of all Santas, Tim Connaghan leading us in the direction of becoming great Santas. The workshop last year had 145 folks in attendance, and we had a blast. That workshop was following 24-hours of workshops in Branson, and it turned out to be the Biggest, because of Branson. We had people from all over the US at the workshop. Knowledge was in abundance and we expect this year to be even better.

We will begin our two-day program at Fuddruckers Friday night, and finish at the Olive Garden on Saturday evening. Of course there will be 8 hours of classroom work, so come ready to learn and share.

I am sure some of the larger groups in different areas have ideas of their own. Please let me know what is on your mind and we will see what we can work out.

If you haven't already paid, dues are due this month, and you can get everything you need on the web site at: > <http://www.aorbsantas.com>. Please note, some major changes have taken place in the membership area. Read everything carefully and follow the directions. We hope to have everyone signed up by the end of April and add more than 100 folks to the Southeast Region.

"Keep the Home Fires Burning"

Gary Casey, RBS, BSC, MSC
aka. Santa Gary 8 (National Beard Registry #1246)

A.O.R.B.S.: Southeast AORBS Director
President: Santa Atlanta
Graduated: Internat'l University of Santa Claus
Advisor: <http://www.santa-america.org>.
Memberships: SantaAtlanta.com
A.O.R.B.S.
Santa-America. Org

Santa Atlanta: <http://www.SantaAtlanta.com>
2235 Mill Wood Ct., Duluth, GA 30096-4562
Sleigh: 404-386-5554 (Cell)
Workshop: 770-729-8336 Fax: 770-729-0309

Home of the "Red Suit Roundtable" Roundup
SE. region (FL, GA, SC, NC, VA, WV, KY, TN)
Next Roundup February 9/10, 2008
email: elfgary@SantaAtlanta.com/101
website: <http://www.redsuirroundtable.com>

— A CONTEST —

We need an 'Official' Coat of arms for the S.E.Region. I would like to see about 25 different design ideas sent in within the next two weeks. From the submissions we will pick a winner. The winner will receive a **FREE DINNER** at Fuddruckers in August during the workshop.