

WEEBLE WORDS

Volume 2, Issue 7, July 2008



We need help reaching our children of military families. Please call Santa-America if you can help!

Santa's visit to children come from referrals by the medical community and hospice as well as from special needs educators and social workers.

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SANTA'S HEARTFELT GIFT



Greetings! It's **Santa Matt Howe** of Flint, MI. I chose this story upon my daughter's recommendation...she thinks it is the greatest thing I have ever done as Santa.

Not far from our home lived a single mother of two small children, a girl eighteen months and a boy of four. During the holidays, the mother asked my wife for a ride to the UAW union hall. She had been told that they were giving away gifts for needy families. The family came over and while Mrs. Claus and her mom chatted, Shasta, the eighteen month old, spent all the time looking at our tree and one ornament in particular. My wife took the family to the union hall where she was given clothing and coats for her children, food coupons for Christmas dinner but sadly, no toys.

On Christmas Eve, after my appearance at the children's Mass, my family and I were discussing the family down the street...a family that had no Christmas tree or toys for the two children. We decided something must be done! It was early in my Santa career so I did not yet have a Santa bag but I had a green army laundry bag. We had extra toys, donated to me by my sister's company where I had made an appearance. All of the left over toys were sent home with Santa. Into the bag went presents for Jacob and Shasta. Toys, books, crayons and the extra things that Mrs. Claus always has on hand for children went into the bag. And finally the ornament that Shasta had enjoyed that first day, went into the bag.

Then, carefully lifting the bag onto my shoulder I walked down the street. Santa carrying his sack of toys, to the children's house. I knocked on the door. The mother answered and was astonished to see Santa standing there. She called her children who had already gone to bed, "Kids, come see who is here!" I opened the bag and pulled out toys and books and all of the things that we had put in the bag, including the ornament. The children were delighted, the mother cried and I left them to enjoy their Christmas. Mrs. Claus addsto this tale..Over time, the family moved away. But Jacob still visits kids in this neighborhood. He is now a young teen, but from time to time, he still talks about the night Santa came to their house.

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photo by Elizabeth
McGonagle Graham

SPIRIT OF SANTA-AMERICA

Santa Ernest



Christmas in July is in full swing. I visited (revisited) a very special group of in-patient children with very severe emotional challenges. I brought along some photos of the soon-to-be-assembled Santa-America motorcycle and sidecar that I'm building for Santa-America events. I asked the children to help me finish the design and color of the rig..... WOW!! Did they ever go to work and, yes, some of their suggestions are really well thought out! The counselors were impressed with both the length and intensity of their concentration. I have promised them a return visit in September for pictures and a ride in the sidecar.

More and more of our visits are being viewed as new and creative tools to help children with special needs. Our first ever pilot clinical trial with cystic-fibrosis children is the leading edge of our efforts. Your visits around the country continue to build our relationships... ..and credibility with the medical community. When I founded Santa-America over five years ago, I had a dream. Santa would demonstrate to understandably skeptical medical professionals that the Old Elf was a powerful yet tender presence who, by bringing gifts of Love, Hope and Joy wrapped in a huge Santa hug could make a real difference in shortening the healing and recovery time for children. You are making this dream a reality!

My sense is that Christmas in July is becoming a reality all across America AND a real link to follow-up pre-holiday season visits in September and early October. Our goal is to make a Santa visit a natural event for a child 12 months a year. Your creative summer dress (and I mean really creative!!) is a part of keeping Santa alive all year long. We must all look for opportunities to turn into relationships to make Santa a valuable addition to care givers. Bless you all and please pass the sweet tea and fan!!

HELP THE ELF!-ELF NITA

Hello, from the Southern North Pole, to all you Santa's, Mrs.'s and Elves...Man is it hot down here.....!!!! Oh, sorry, I was just staring at this beautiful two masted sailboat out my loft windows on Wolf Bay down here in Paradise, as we locals like to call it.. It looks like heaven. That's cruel, huh, or so I've been told by some of you in the northern realms of our workshop. But you guys should be enjoying some nice summer weather, just not as humid as we are!!!



Well, back to business. I really hope it's the summer doldrums that are slowing down replies from my emails for all your compliance documents. I know many of you are taking vacations, etc, but we really have to get back on track and get all your folders complete. I'll begin calling some of you that I haven't gotten any responses from. I'm hoping maybe that your email address has changed since our last correspondence. If you have been getting my missives, and you just haven't gotten to it... Well... ..chop, chop, let's "get 'er done" as one TV personality often says. On the positive note, I have been able to add a beautiful, sparkly green star to 10 Santa's files in the last month or so. I must tell you, though, most have been our Santa's who are new to our "Sleigh". I know if you have been a Santa-America Santa for a number of years, it's a task to sit down and fill out an application, but we have to get this done, so please take the time and do so, or else "the mean 'ole Elf Nita" will have to give you a call I love putting that green star next to your name on your file folders. Makes my file drawer look like "Christmas in July"!! Take care, all of you. With Love, Hope and Joy for our children.

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BEHIND THE RED SUIT

Santa Matt Howe

Santa, tell us a little bit about yourself?

I have been a real bearded Santa since 1997 and only do appearances for charities. I am 55 years old. I have been married to my wife Monica for 35 years. I have three children, James, Angela and Pamela. My whole family participates in what my daughters refer to as my “Santa gigs”. Angela made both of my Santa suits. Pamela made my Santa cane, takes most of my photos and creates my cards and artwork. When needed my daughters also double as elves. My son James taught me some rudimentary magic. And Mrs. Claus? What can I say about the woman that cleans my Santa suits, hauls me from place to place and is the reason Santa has a sparkle in his eye and a smile on his face? She is everything to me.



Santa Matt Howe hears a child's wish.

I work as a computer programmer for a company that makes accounting software for the alarm and security industry. My wife works as a non-medical in home caregiver. My son James is also a computer programmer. Angela is an insurance agent. Pamela is in her last semester of her master's program. My interests outside of Santa are Bible study, programming (I program for several obsolete computer platforms), watching movies on DVD and playing with my grandchildren. During the summer, I also do a lot of small construction projects for family and friends. I am also a fourth degree member of the Knights of Columbus.

What was your first experience as Santa Claus?

During the children's Mass at our church, Santa would always make an appearance. The youth minister was always Santa. As his sons aged he became afraid that they might recognize him and not believe in Santa. The organizer could not find anyone else to be Santa. Everyone was too shy. She came to me and asked me if I would do it. I said “Sure.” At the time, I worked for a company whose policy forbid having a beard but the church's costume came with a pretty nice beard. I used some black boots I owned rather than the spats provided with the suit. At the end of the service, I was to enter the back of the church with two baskets of religious ornaments for the children. I was to go forward, receive Communion, move to the nativity scene, kneel, say a prayer and leave. While I did this Father would read a prepared statement from “Santa”. When the time came I entered the back of church and waited for Father to nod that he was ready. As I stood there the children closest to me saw Santa and started whispering, “There's Santa.” As I began to move forward the whispers, big-eyed stares and little pointing fingers spread through the church like ripples on a pond. By the time I was half way up the aisle (we have a rather large church) every child in the church was looking at me with the love only a child at Christmas can have. It was euphoric, a physical force unlike anything I had ever felt, hundreds of children looking at me, Santa, with love. I was immediately hooked and I have been doing Santa ever since.

How did you decide to become Santa?

After my first Santa experience, one of the men I worked with at the alarm company, told me about how he dressed as Santa for his family and friends. He showed me his costume. It was then that I decided that I wanted more than the once a year children's Mass. For an early Christmas present in 1997, my daughter Angela surprised me with my own suit. That coupled with a change in management at work that allowed beards and I was on my way.

Every child was looking at me with the love only a child at Christmas can have. It was euphoric, a physical force unlike anything I had ever felt...

---Santa Matt

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Please send in your stories and pictures of your special visits. We need to refresh our photos to better represent the diversity of our Santas and our coverage throughout the country.



WHAT A RUSH!

Well, we now have over two hundred sixty registrants for Celebrate Santa with eight months left to go!! So what is happening now? Let us tell you! Over the next several weeks and months we will be spotlighting our seminars. We have some wonderful surprises for you and some very unusual seminars for both Santa and Mrs. Claus. With rare exception we will not be repeating classes found at IUSC, CWH or Santa Academy as they do a wonderful job with their own curriculum. Instead we will offer some very unusual classes. What you ask? Give you an example you say? Well I guess we can hint at a few – *Magical Santa* ; *Puppets & Ventriloquism*; *The History of Santa Claus I Myra to America*; *The History of Santa Claus II in America*; *Hair and Beard Care*. Also many really unique and great seminars like: *How to Sew a Santa Suit*, *Santa Can Sign*, *Working with Special Needs Children*, *Mrs. Claus Isn't Old!* and so much more!

We will have approximately 30 classes over the three days and you are going to have a tough time deciding. However, some of our more popular seminars will be repeated giving everyone a chance to attend and see their most desired. All of the classes will be presented by experts in their individual fields be they Santa, Mrs. Claus or neither.

Keep watching the blog www.celebratesanta.blogspot.com for discussions on upcoming workshops and presenters.

How did you find Santa-America and when did you join?

While vacationing in Kansas City MO, I met a man who asked me if I was a Santa. I replied that I was and he asked if I knew about the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas. I had not heard about them but upon returning home I found out about them and joined. Several of the Santas in that group talked about Santa America so I began to look into it. At about that time my father died of a very nasty condition. He spent his last two days in hospice. Several months later, as I thought about hospice and my father's stay there and about the mission of Santa America, it became clear to me what I had to do. I signed up for hospice training at the facility where my father had been. I completed my training and joined Santa America.

Anything else you'd like to share?

I was once doing a Santa gig for the Knights of Columbus. I was to have breakfast, pass out presents that the Knights had purchased and wrapped and have my picture taken with about 240 kids. My 80 year old mother was supposed to show up during the event and see me working and see the children. My mother always had a love of children. She never showed up. Afterwards I went to see her and find out if everything was Ok. I found her sick in bed. She had gotten something flu like the night before but did not want to call me for fear I would cancel Santa to care for her. Right before last Christmas I found my mother in bed partially paralyzed. She had suffered a massive stroke. Her condition was bad enough that after a couple of days in the hospital we took her to hospice. Now I had a dilemma. Should I continue with my Santa schedule or spend the time with my mother? Then I remembered the breakfast with Santa she had missed when she was sick and how she was afraid I would cancel to be with her and how she didn't want the children disappointed. I did my entire schedule last year including the hospice where I am a volunteer and my mother was a resident. My mother died this year on July 3rd at 6:26 AM. The very same hospice staff members that are my colleagues, my friends and my mother's friends were surrounding and comforting her. God bless them all.

Santa-America is member of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).

HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

Greetings Kris Kringle! Can you believe we are in the second half of 2008? The holiday season will be here before we know it but there is still time to set up events to support Santa-America.

In each issue of *Weeble Words* we talk about how you are the local face of Santa-America in your community. **Now is the time to be coordinating events!** Most people are not thinking about Santa Claus this time of year, so we encourage you to help them focus on events which happen in October through December.

A great relationship to build is with your area medical society and medical alliance. Let them know about your affiliation with Santa-America and your ability to support medical charities. For example, in October, we recommend you support breast cancer awareness events. Several Santas are even investing in pink santa suits.

It is also a great time to be placed on the agenda for an October, November or December civic or service group presentation. Many of these groups will give a donation to Santa-America that will help support your HUGS for the season. As you set up the presentation, the SA North Pole will help you develop the proper presentation as well as in individualized SA photo sheet.

Unsure about the ideas above? How about a Breakfast with Santa? Partner with an area restaurant for Santa-America to receive a portion of the breakfast sales for the day.

One last idea... contact your area Sam's Club and Wal-Mart and ask them to provide a grant to Santa-America to support your area children. If you read the June Weeble Words, you will see how **Santa Carl Burke** raised \$1000 from his local Wal-Mart for Santa-America.

Please contact Elf Nita or Elf Cathy for more information on these ideas or support to make them a reality. We need your help!



Don't forget about print and visual media. We would like to see every Santa have a press release in area newspapers about their involvement and support of Santa-America. Email your contacts to Elf Cathy at CathyBarnette@Santa-America.org or call with questions.

www.Santa-America.org/visit/

Earlier this year we highlighted the importance of Santa-America capturing your special visits through our visit report form. We know that it has been a number of steps to download from the web, complete and mail. So, as promised, we are thrilled to announce the visit report form has been converted to an interactive form on the Santa-America website. Now all you have to do is complete the form and email photos along with your photo release form. Please call Elf Nita or Elf Cathy if you need more direction or explanation.



SANTA TO DO'S

Elf Nita still needs your paperwork!

Submit your pictures and stories! We'll upload to the website.

Send the name and contact information of a local paper and reporter. We'll send them a note about your involvement with Santa-America.

Contact Santa-America for your e-copy of the Santa-America Volunteer Sleigh Kit.

Identify a venue for a Santa-America fundraiser. Contact Elf Cathy or Elf Nita for details.

Share with elected officials your special visits and the work of Santa-America. Elf Cathy and Elf Nita are ready to support you as needed.

Contact Elf Cathy to learn how you can team up with an area school to build an Elf Program.



July '08

photo by Elizabeth
McGonagle Graham

SA SYMBOLIC GIFTS



Many of you know, Santa-America has moved to symbolic gifts that represent Love, Hope and Joy. The “Santa-America HUG” is a polar fleece scarf with mittens attached on the ends designed to remind children that Santa’s love and warmth is always with them.

Thanks to the hard work of **Santa Steve and Mrs. Bobbie Whiting Claus**, the “Santa-America HUG” is under production. We received our first shipment of 250 hugs this week!

Elf Nita will be working with our Santas to determine HUG needs and shipping arrangements. Remember...We need you to help raise money in your community to support the cost of HUGS!

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

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 2009- Celebrate Santa Convention. Visit www.CelebrateSanta.com for details.

Summer 2009 Santa-America Training Conference...details to follow in upcoming issue.

Gathering not listed! Contact us so we can add it to the list!



Santa
America

Santa-America has grown to almost 300 dedicated Santas, Mrs. Claus and Elves in 44 states and 6 foreign countries.