

WEEBLE WORDS

Volume 2, Issue 9, October 2008



A GIFT FOR SANTA Santa Bill McKee

Hanging over the doorway of our kitchen (under which we pass uncounted times every day) is a tissue paper craft rainbow. When walking under this rainbow and acknowledging its presence, any troubles I think I have fade into near-nothingness. This gift of a rainbow given to Santa came from a very special young child.



I received it during my first full-scale visit to St. Jude Tri-Cities Affiliate Clinic. Even with my education, background, training and experience; I was nervous as I arrived. There were a number of children there that beautiful Spring day. Each and every child, from the youngest to the oldest, was an inspiration to me, and I soon felt right at home. I moved from room to room, taking whatever time required, or seemed appropriate with each child and family. I read or told stories, answered questions, and we played games. I listened closely as some of them told me stories. I had been informed there was one little boy who was 'very engaging.'

Marinda McConnell, Child Life Program Manager at The Children's Hospital at Johnson City Medical Center and St. Jude Tri-Cities Affiliate Clinic in Johnson City, Tn., announced through his nearly-closed door that he had a visitor on the way to his room. "Santa!" he exclaimed, hearing the sleigh bells on my boots as I walked up the hall. Entering his room, I saw his eyes were dancing as his smile and excitement filled the room. It may have seemed like Christmas morning all over again for him. He had been working on a paper mache rainbow and was awaiting lunch with his mother at his side. His laughter was like the sounds of happiness and joys from a Christmas morning, all wrapped into one special little boy.

Lunch, for him, came through a plastic tube which fed directly into his stomach. It has been this way almost his entire life. Lunch was also some small bites of his favorites, salted fries and a grilled burger. Not being able to swallow the tidbits, he took them in his mouth, wrestled them around his tongue, savoring every nuance and distinction of flavor, fair and foul. From each and every bite he extracted the essence of the flavors and juices and aromas, discarding the remnants, ready for another flavor filled treasure. Each bite he took in, savored and discarded once again. All the while we talked, laughed, played and he continued working on the paper mache rainbow. His hands twisted, he labored to finish as he labored also to guide food to his mouth. And he laughed at the simple joys of living and the

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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.

Santa-America, Inc.
308 Belrose Avenue
Daphne, AL 36526
Email: info@santa-america.org

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YOUR DONATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Santa Ernest

photo by Elizabeth McGonagle Graham



The 2008 Season is upon us with a world-wide financial crisis as a backdrop and the call for Santa to bring Love, Hope, and Joy to our special children has never been greater! Through the years Santa-America has built relationships with corporate donors and foundations that funded most of our growth and key projects like the pilot clinical trial, Santa Hugs, the Santa-America art show, “An Angel Comes to Visit,” Breast Cancer Awareness support and on and on.

One result of the current financial crisis is that large donors have slowed down or just plain stopped supporting charities, until they understand how their own investments were impacted. As we have grown to become the largest volunteer Santa service organization in America, we have all understood that Santa-America is and always will be the local Santa member visiting children and making an impact in his community... ..one child and family at a time. We now need to continue that local focus into our fund raising initiatives all across the USA.

We are asking EVERY Santa, Mrs. Claus or Elf who is a member or committed supporter of Santa-America to schedule at least one local fund raiser (two or three would be better). Here at national (now international) headquarters, your local funding, less a 20% contribution to our national efforts, will be specifically credited to the local Santa member to fund local travel, training ,hugs and other nationally developed presents. “The donations you raise locally will have a local impact.” Our goal is have 60% of our funding raised through local fund-raisers and 40% through our continuing relationships with regional and national (yes, and international) corporate and individual donors and foundations.

Warm up the griddle, mix up the pancake batter, and charge up the camera batteries! Love, Hope and Joy are in your local hands.

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HELP THE ELF!-ELF NITA

Well, HO, HO, HO everyone! It's just amazing that it's been one year since I joined Santa-America as Administrative Director, so I guess you could say that this is my SA birthday! I love birthdays!!! And the presents that go along with them. (You know where I'm going with this, don't you?) I would consider it an SA birthday present if I could complete all your folders real soon. So, if I haven't heard from you in a while, please call or email and let me know how you're doing and if you've gotten all your compliance points covered with your hospice. If you haven't gotten an email from me, it's because the email address/or phone # I have for you is wrong. I've been trying to contact those of you who have been on SA's Santa Map for quite a while and who haven't completed their files. So, if you haven't heard from me, I've tried, but guess I have the wrong info. Please, contact me at elfnita@santa-america.org. to give me your new information so we can get this done. I have been directed to remove Santa's from our map that I do not get any responses from my attempts at contact. We have to make sure that everyone who represents Santa-America meets our compliance requirements so that we are consistent and credible in the mission of organization. Anything less is unacceptable. We sure DO NOT want to remove anyone from our map, but to reach our goal of “a file for every Santa” we will have to remove those who don't respond to my emails or calls. The important thing is for you to contact me, any problems that are standing in your way can be dealt with between the two of us. I look



BEHIND THE RED SUIT

Santa Bill McKee

Santa, tell us a lit bit about yourself.

I am married to a wonderful friend and partner named Patsy. We have 2 children, 3 grandchildren and one very incredible great-grandchild. What an added perspective that child gives me on life, opening doorways, allowing me to see from my grandfather all the way into the life of my great-grandson. Six generations and counting.

We live on one acre of land in a small farm community in the rural foothills of Appalachia. This property was part of my grandfather's farm where I ran and played as a child. Ancient lands where I learned to shoot and hunt, and till the soil, and lie in the warm grass of a cool summer breeze, allowing my mind to drift out into the universe.

I am a life-long, self-taught photographer, having picked up a camera around the age of 12. Shooting and learning how to develop my own film as a young teenager, then watching my prints come to life under the red glow of a darkroom safe light, set me on a boundless journey. This path has taken me from the depths of the earth, deep in coal mines in Appalachia, to the heavens and beyond, as I was strapped in the back seat of Blue Angel No. 7.

Lifting off, building up speed as we stayed merely 30 feet off the runway, then a hard near-7G pull straight up, with clearance from the tower to 12,000 feet over the end of the runway. Thus began an hour-long, beyond-ultimate roller coaster ride of hard aerobatics and cruising upside down, just over the cloud tops, in a supersonic jet traveling just under the speed of sound! Sometimes it is a tough job, but somebody has to do it. (Sorry I could not resist)

I am a professional journalist/photojournalist with nearly 30 years of experience and a closet full of awards. Those awards, along with a dollar or two, might get me a decent cup of coffee. Several years ago I made the decision to come in off the street and sit down at an editor's desk. Learning and evolving with the digital age, I have witnessed the transformation of photography and journalism. Some of that change is very good, some not.

Using my knowledge and experience in helping produce a daily newspaper, has given me the opportunity to put those skills to work, teaming up with some wonderful Santas and authors to produce a publication for Santas everywhere. This year we began offering the Red Suit Gazette online in PDF format.

What was your first experience as Santa Claus and how did you decide to become Santa?

Christmas 2007 was my tenth year as Santa. I donned the suit for the first time after being asked to fill in by an aging Santa, Vernon Waters, who had worn the red suit for 44 years. He, along with father Christmas, Dr. PeShewa, have been my guides since I began wearing the suit (gifted to me the following year by Vernon) in 1998. Their mentoring is a life-long process, as each year I learn more, and each year realizing more and more how little I really do know. Patsy, not having any interest in being in the public eye, stays behind the scenes. She has helped me in ways she probably doesn't even know. I doubt there is a better Mrs. Claus around.

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

I first became aware of Santa-America when I attended the Red Suit Roundtable in Atlanta, Ga., during February 2007. I was very intrigued by what I heard and asked Cathy Barnette for some additional information. Later that Spring I began the process of becoming a full-time Santa volunteer. It took a number of months to complete applications, introductions,



Santa Bill McKee in his workshop.

*the inspiration of
the children I
visit at the clinic
t r a n s c e n d s
words...*

--Santa Bill

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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.



It seems very difficult to believe it is already November! With only FIVE months remaining to Celebrate Santa time! We decided that Celebrate Santa should have an overall theme that reflects what it is we hope to achieve. The 2009 Celebrate Santa theme is REACH HIGHER GROUND. It is also the City of Gatlinburg's theme and they have allowed us to use their theme and logos for C.S. We want all Santas and Mrs. Clauses to take pride in sharing the love and hopes of being Santa figures 24/7/365.

We had **Santa Jack & Sharon Arthur** (our Parade Chair) here for a few days and he met with the Gatlinburg Special Events Department and hammered out most of the logistical details for the **Holly & Shamrock Parade**. We also had **Santa Richard & Annette Falkevitz** (our Transportation Chairs) here and we had many discussions concerning the buses and other transportation needs. Anyone considering the bus needs to contact Richard **now**. Mary and I have been traveling to many local gatherings and met with some wonderful Santas and Mrs. Clauses in Illinois, Ohio and Virginia to name just a few.

We have an incredible number of surprises awaiting you at Celebrate Santa. Did we mention that Black Bear Jamboree and the Dixie Stampede are doing very different shows than their usual faire? And did we mention that an international podcast shall be released on October 28th from Down Under, and that the interviewer will be doing a very special class for Celebrate Santa? Yes, she is coming from Melbourne, Australia and her website is <http://www.hohohochristmas.com>.

On behalf of Mary, all our chairs, and me, we wish every one of you a joyous and fulfilling Christmas season. As soon as you are able, give yourself a Christmas present and send in your registration so you do not miss the Santa event of a lifetime. Remember to visit www.celebratesanta.com.

A GIFT FOR SANTA (CONT.)

excitement of the day. Before me was this child who savored life as he savored his lunch, tasting every moment, every flavor and even the sour notes. Witnessing this young man, full of energy and life, overcoming many physical challenges (most adults could not deal with) reinforced my understanding of the Sacredness of each and every child and of life itself. His spirit shined through so brightly as to make his physical impairments nearly vanish into nothingness. His boundless energy flowed through and beyond the walls of his room, spilling over and being felt through the entire clinic I have no doubt.

The simple joy of living life seemed to come so naturally to him. I barely saw his physical impairments at all. I just saw this bright, shining, little boy whose spirit could not be confined within his imperfect body. His joy of life filled the room and all who came near him.

I had gone to the clinic to try and spread a little Christmas Joy, perhaps brighten some child's day. As I left that day, it was with renewed vigor and a brightened Spirit, lifted up by this glowing little boy so full of energy and life, housed in that small fragile body.

So that's why above our doorway is a rainbow. And this little paper rainbow sheds a most incredible light that helps guide me on my path and my reindeer steer their sleigh.

"A Gift For Santa," was inspired by my visit to St. Jude Affiliate Clinic. Although it focuses on one child in particular, the inspiration of the children I visit at the clinic transcends words. And the specialists, nurses, doctors and caretakers there are some of the most dedicated and incredible people I have met. Almost making it appear effortless, they carry on their work, while feeling the sting and pain of every needle and treatment and tear, being careful not to let it show. Their love and dedication to the children is very evident in all they do. They, wherever they are, are the ones who deserve our thanks.

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

MAN IN THE RED SUIT (CONT.)

background checks, contacts to local hospices, along with contacting the local children's hospital. Then there was the associated paperwork, tests and face-to-face meetings. All necessary for the safety and protection of the children. I would expect nothing less for my own. The hospice training, in particular, is vital to anyone and everyone who is not completely comfortable with life, and death. Especially the passing from this world of a child. A child who has hardly begun to know life.

During December 2007 I became a volunteer Santa at The Children's Hospital at Johnson City Medical Center and St. Jude Tri-Cities Affiliate Clinic in Johnson City, Tn. I visit with the children and families there at least twice each month throughout the year now. This upcoming Christmas, we have several visits planned, along with a special visit on Christmas Eve. It IS the reason I am Santa.

Our volunteer time shared with the children, parents, siblings, guardians and staff can be good medicine, from, and for the Heart. The real hero's are the children, and those who work tirelessly, painstakingly, tearfully and joyfully for them and for their best welfare, daily.

My job, and my joy as a volunteer Santa, is easy. I simply show up occasionally to read or tell a story, play games, listen, or gently hold the hand of a fearful child.

The key, and the real gift, is in the giving. Giving without any need or want of anything in return.

HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

Hi Santa. Can you believe it is the start of the season! The retail stores have their Christmas decorations and music throughout the store. You read in Santa Ernest's article the need for you to help support Santa-America! You want to help but don't know how...Elf Nita and Elf Cathy are here to help and listed below are a number of ideas...

Build a relationship with your area medical society and medical alliances. Let them know about your affiliation with Santa-America and your ability to support medical charities.

Ask to be a speaker for a 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.

Partner with an area restaurant for Santa-America to receive a portion of the breakfast sales for the day or host a pancake breakfast.

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. **Santa Carl Burke** did this simple step and picked up \$1000 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 to continue delivering Love, Hope and Joy!

ELF NITA (CONT.)

forward to hearing from you. Remember, you don't need to have a problem to call and just say hello. I know that I'm asking this at the beginning of a very busy time, but many times, it takes only one phone call between the two of us and I can do a lot of the leg work for you. So... Happy SA Birthday to me and I hope to hear from you soon.

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.



NEW GUIDE FOR HOSPICE COORDINATORS

Santas, some of you are frustrated that your hospice is not putting you to use as Santa! As Elf Nita continues to talk with volunteer coordinators throughout the country, it became clear that a Santa-America guide for hospice coordinators needed to be created. So many folks do not understand that Santa-America is 365 days a year! Not only does the guide explain our mission and purpose, it provides direction for the coordinators and has a section of frequently asked questions. The guide can be downloaded via the web or by contacting Elf Nita at ElfNita@santa-america.org.

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.

Misconception about Santa-America Visits

In the last few months while contacting Santa's who still need to reach compliancy, Elf Nita has heard the phrase "Santa-America" never calls me for a visit" !! Well there's a good reason. Santa-America, won't be calling you for a visit. Those calls come from the medical community where you live, whether it's a hospice, Dr.'s office, or perhaps a Military Chaplin or Counseling office at a base near you. Down here, in the Southern North Pole, we have no way of knowing that there is a sick child that needs a visit, or a Military family who has lost a loved one, or a nursing home patient that needs to be cheered up. That's one of the reasons we have you register as an Adult Volunteer with a Hospice in your community. They will be the source of your referrals for visits. They have the patients that need a visit from a Santa. So if you haven't registered with a Hospice, you won't be getting any calls!!!! Please let us know if you are having trouble finding a hospice or getting them to understand our mission. Elf Nita will always be happy to make a call.

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



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