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ISSUE

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Are You Ready? CHRISTMAS IS KNOCKING At The Door!



A huffin' and a puffin', try as it might, Christmas has yet to enter, but are you ready to open the door and let it into your life? Ready or not, Christmas is here!

It's been an exciting year so far for IBRBS, and taking measure of my own experiences, the calendar looks fuller than ever before, and with a healthy dose of respect by our clients for the time, talent, and costs of our wardrobe and accessories, allowing for great opportunities to recover some of the lost revenue from 2020 and 2021. We found 2022 a year for rebuilding and IBRBS measured those results with the largest percentage and largest ever number of members. We thought it unlikely that we'd see continuing growth in our membership at record paces for 2023, but we were mistaken.

IBRBS just finished the 2022-23 membership year with the best results in net membership ever, and the meager treasury stands as a solid buffer to any future threats as well. Our Chapters have continued to grow both in size and in number, providing Santas around the world with more opportunities to have local mentors, sharing experiences, scheduling local instruction, and providing a place for all to congregate for camaraderie with fellow Christmas Performers in a welcoming environment. IBRBS's costs to support local chapters' members with personal liability insurance for official Chapter events has been a great incentive to affiliate with IBRBS and save Chapters hundreds of dollars each because of the economies of scale and because we remain the largest organization with Philadelphia Insurance to offer coverage to members, providing more

leverage. This year we also added an equipment coverage rider, protecting up to \$10k in wardrobes and accessories from fire, theft, and incidental damages, all for a small, additional fee.

The Board of IBRBS wishes to thank each and every one of you for your continued membership in our organization, comprised of a plethora of Santas, Mrs Clauses, Spouses, and Associates, each one with much to give and share with our fellow entertainers. We look forward to what portends to be the largest gathering ever of Clauses of all kinds at the April ISC2024 Memphis event. The support we are receiving from local, national, and international business, both large and small, is overwhelming and the community is excited to being host to a gaggle of Clauses. You won't want to miss this event and too, we hope to be able to raise a substantial amount for our prime charity, Memphis-based St Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Again, thank you. I have thoroughly enjoyed serving our members on the IBRBS Board and as an officer of the organization for 8.5 years, and I pray that you and God will allow me to continue, with a terrific team, guide us to even bigger things.

Bless you all and have a safe and prosperous Christmas Season!

Santa Stephen Arnold
IBRBS President/CEO



Editor In Claus

Genma Holmes, Ms. Santa

Christmastime is here! The excitement in the Christmas Community is only surpassed by the anticipation of children and families who are eagerly waiting to meet Santas, Mrs. Clauses, Elves, performers, and helpers from around the world. Since our summer issue debuted, performers, merchants, marketeers, and lovers of all things Christmas have reached out. Who knew that the *Christmas Connections* would be cheered for and welcomed with open arms? "Where has this been?" asked a well-known branding leader. They loved what they saw and encouraged IBRBS to keep the momentum going. "I am sure it will become a staple for all of you," said one CFO of a major retailer at a recent convention. "How can we support this organization and the upcoming event in Memphis," asked another. There was an outpouring of story suggestions from members and non-members of IBRBS. To non-members, the magazine has become an Ambassador of Goodwill. And for members, it highlighted what IBRBS members are yearning for ongoing deeper engagement.

There is something special about being able to promote goodwill and gladness. The world needs good news right now! The Summer issue exceeded everyone's expectations and my wildest dreams in the first few weeks alone. The magazine was shared online, in Christmas retail associations e-blasts, merchant group pages, non-profit associations that serve children and youth, with talent agencies, and emailed to various communication organizations. How beautiful is that? Folks read about the work being done by our Christmas Community collectively and many found ways to support the non-profits that were profiled. Yes, the spirit of Christmas Is Here!

Members of IBRBS have been working since January perfecting their art form by attending Santa schools, performance workshops, training to become better actors, auditioning for coveted holiday commercials, attending chapter meetings to network and fellowship, and looking for the perfect suit or dress to dazzle audiences!

With visibility and praise comes internal reflection! How do we ascend to the next level? Are we open to receiving critique? Are we seeking opportunities to engage with each other in our Christmas community? Are willing to have meaningful dialogue that improves understanding? Are we willing to hear that perceptions may not be reality? Just food for thought.

As we don our Christmas attire to meet the public, many are coming to us out of Christmas traditions. A visit with Santa has been passed down for generations. But so many in the world, children and adults alike, may want to see Santa because of the need to find joy that our characters represent. The overwhelming need to touch, feel, and see joy in the flesh is more in demand than toys. Many in the Christmas community have invested time and treasure traveling to schools, attending webinars, and researching ideas for suits and Christmas attire. Those investments pale in comparison to the ongoing work of being a kind, gentle, loving individual who pledges "to create happiness and spread love" as Santa or Mrs. Claus.



The relationships that I have built during my nearly 30 years portraying Ms. Santa are enduring. The babies of yesteryear are now bringing their children to meet me! The babies from decades old Christmases show me the impact of bonding with smiles and hugs for Christmas photos! I am pretty sure many of you have history with families and can go back years with your cherished stories.

Stories are filled with memories. I thought I knew everyone until I started compiling stories for *Christmas Connections* issues. I realized after creating outlines and scheduling photo shoots for Santas, Mrs. Clauses, and Elves, there are gazillions of incredible storytelling being shared about not only being a Christmas Performer but the power of overcoming, healing, serving, and giving back to children and adults. Being a Christmas Performer is transformational for the individuals who dare to care unconditionally for others.

When you flip the pages of the Winter issue, I hope you see the global community of men and women with hearts of gold. They have finetuned their businesses to be the best they can be, in and out of the suit. They reflect a year of hard work, the passion to be healthy and fit, sharpening interpersonal skills, marketing tips, good use of social media, and the willingness to be vulnerable. I am thankful to be able to share with you the incredible lives of those who are being their incredible selves at Christmastime and throughout the year!

The Party of the Year

is less than six months Away!

Every two years, the International Santa Celebration (ISC) brings together members of the Christmas Community from around the world for learning, networking, and camaraderie. Hosted in large part by IBRBS, the world's largest organization of professional Santas, Mrs Clauses, spouses and associates, ISC events are open to all types of Christmas performers, whether members of IBRBS or not.

ISC2024 Memphis will be a 3-Day event held April 25-28, 2024 with a full schedule of workshops, entertainment, meals, and ending with a parade on historic Beale Street! In prior years, ISC events were only 2-days.

ISC2024's Welcome Day will offer a unique Riverboat tour and dinner.

Almost our entire event will be housed within the newly renovated, expansive Renasant Convention Center, directly across Main Street from the Sheraton Memphis Downtown Hotel, the host hotel. There is an ADA-accessible sky bridge to move from one facility more easily to the other. You can reserve your hotel room at our substantially discounted attendee pricing by visiting the Sheraton Memphis Downtown Booking Link. If you need an ADA-accessible room and cannot seem to find one on the Sheraton's website, please make a reservation for a room and then email ISC.INFO@IBRBS.org so we can have it switched. (Please do not take one of these limited rooms unless you really can't attend otherwise.)

With your paid registration, each attendee will have access to 3-days of instructional workshop sessions, our extensive (over 16,000 sf) Vendor and Christmas School Showcase area, seven included meals featuring two gourmet dinners, two lunches, and three breakfasts, terrific entertainment, inspiring speakers, and trainers, and much more!

You will not want to miss this unique opportunity to learn more about our

Christmas Performer Community and our passion to serve and give back as we gather to improve our creative and artistic talents. We will also connect with old friends, meet new ones, and have opportunities to network.

We encourage early arrivals so attendees and family can take advantage of touring some of Memphis' exciting venues, including Graceland and the Elvis Presley Museum, historic Beale Street, AutoZone Park, visit the ducks at the world-famous Peabody Hotel, Mud Island, the unique Bass Pro Pyramid, and many other venues shown throughout the Winter Issue of Christmas Connections.

At ISC2024, Vendors/Schools will be housed together in one large ballroom with approximately 16,000sf of available space. The Vendor Showcase will open for sales on Thursday, April 25, at 8: AM and is conveniently located on the same floor and across a hall from the Sponsor Area and Dining Room in the Renasant Convention Center, directly across Main Street from the host Sheraton Memphis Downtown hotel.

All Workshop sessions are 45 minutes long with 15-minute interludes between each. All workshops are conveniently located within eyesight of one another, and bathroom facilities are close by. We have tried to design all aspects of this event to be ADA-accessible with wide aisles and special seating areas. Yes, we heard you in Atlanta!

More updates will be forthcoming in the next few weeks! I look forward to seeing you in Memphis in 2024!

Merry Christmas,

Howie Graham

Events Officer, IBRBS Chairman of the Board, and IBRBS Elected Director

Stephen P. Arnold

IBRBS President/CEO, IBRBS Elected

Director

ISC2024 Committee



Santa on Beale Street/Memphis Tourism



Santa Family Reunion



Save the Date!

March 29 – April 1, 2025
Gatlinburg, TN

Registration Opens May 13, 2024!

SantaFamilyReunion.com



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TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

200th Anniversary Celebration

World Famous New York Poem - Twas The Night Before Christmas Bicentennial 1823-2023.

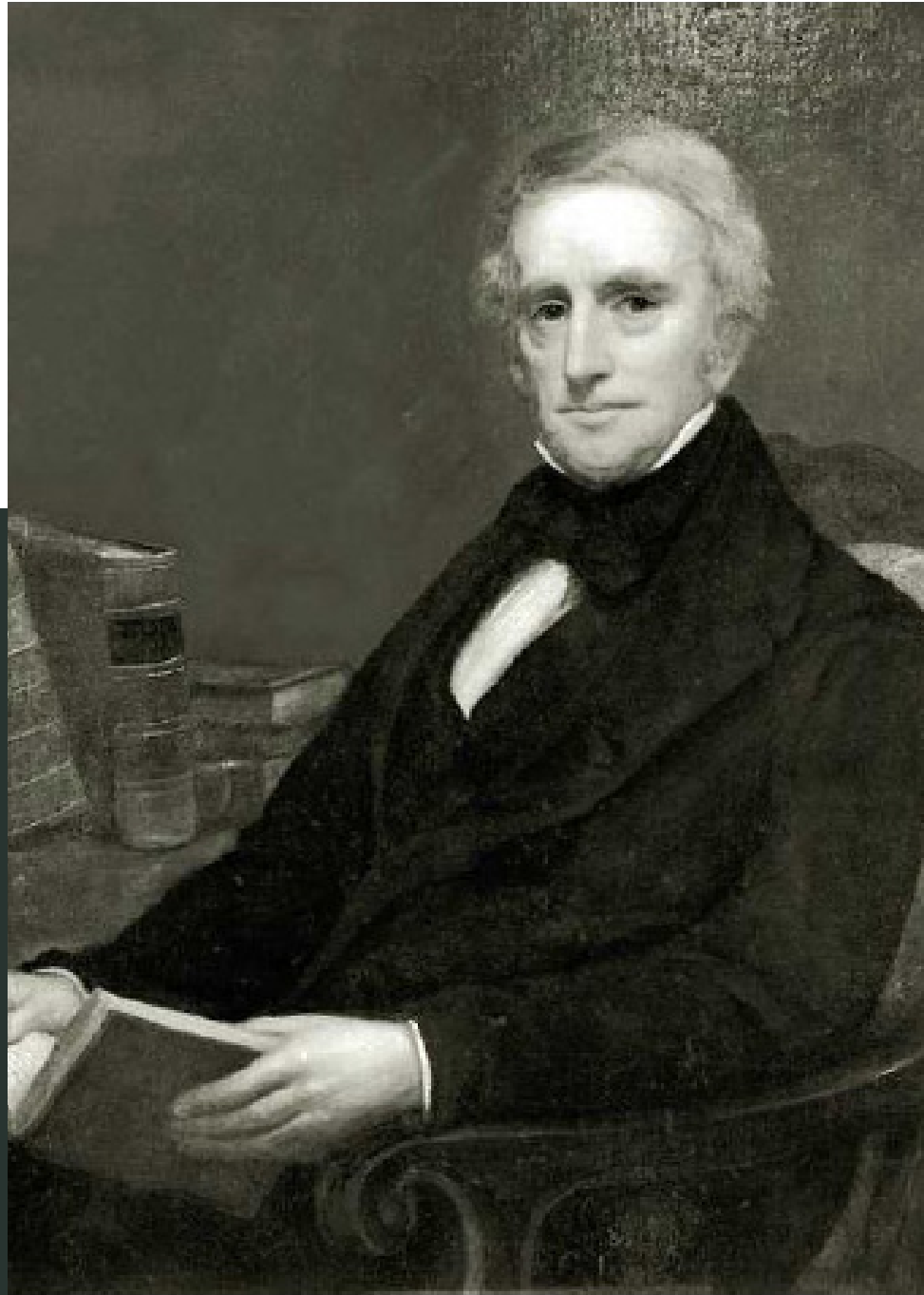
Clement Clarke Moore's iconic lines honored with events to celebrate 200 years in print.

Moore inducted into the New York Library Association Hall of Fame in Manhattan at festive event. Over 100 events planned nation-wide to honor the treasured poem.

Author/presenter Pamela McColl has mounted a multi-state celebration tour for the ever-popular poem *Twas The Night Before Christmas* - first published in Troy, NY on December 23, 1823. McColl is the author of *Twas The Night: The Art and History of the Classic Christmas Poem* (2022) and the publisher of *Twas The Night Before Christmas, The Keepsake Bicentennial Edition of the Classic Christmas Poem* (Grafton and Scratch Publishers).

The poem has been enjoyed by ten generations of children, republished and re-illustrated thousands of times, and is the most often-recited poem in the library of English literature. It has been translated into all major languages including Spanish, Mandarin, and Yiddish.

Clement Clarke Moore (1779 NY-1863 RI) will be inducted into the New York State Library Association/Writers Hall of Fame on December 19 at Hoffman Hall of The General Theological Seminary, NYC. Events will be held in the state of New York, Massachusetts,



Rhode Island, Delaware, Michigan, Ohio, DC., Maryland, and Washington, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, California, Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana.

“I accessed art collections and combed through archives across America in compiling the material for my publication on the life and times of Clement C. Moore and the poem's publishing

and art legacy. It was an amazing journey through American cultural history.” - McColl

“For the very first time, the poem’s own story is presented. It is a luscious, entertaining tome that took ten years to create.” David Paul Kirkpatrick, American film producer.

“A delightful and informative exploration of “A Visit From St. Nicholas” for the holiday season.” Kirkus Reviews.

“Whether a library is focused on art, history, popular culture, or Christmas, Twas the Night: The Art and History of the Classic Christmas Poem represents an outstanding work of literature and a compelling read the entire family can enjoy.” Midwest Book Review.

New York Events:

November 27 Columbia Alumni Event - Penn Club, Manhattan

November 5 Chelsea Christmas Tour - High Line Hotel. Book signing Barnes and Noble 5th. Avenue.


December 17 Santa and Elves Time Square with Pamela McColl

December 17 Chelsea Community Church - Reading of the poem, presentation Pamela McColl, candlelight service.

December 18 Grolier Club, Manhattan


December 19 General Theological Seminary induction of Clement Clarke Moore into the New York

Libraries Hall of Fame, Presentations, Moore family in attendance at reception 5:30-8.



Santa Nana's
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Be good, for goodness sake!

A different and unexpected point of view for holiday education for ALL!




Santa Nana

February 2-4, 2024: San Antonio, TX (at our collaborative event with SatBobS – North Pole Cornerstones)
May 2-4, 2024: Birch Run, MI


What Clauses are saying

- “This was a phenomenal class.”
- “I hope you know that the two of you are making history.”
- “As someone that believes in sharing knowledge, it was a pleasure to sit for two days and observe two people that are as inspirational as Deanna and Judith, watching the excitement they created as they shared information... I enjoyed myself immensely and learned much all at the same time. Deanna and Judith did an exceptional job in team teaching.”



Deanna Golden and Judi Broderick bring out the FABULOUS in you, built on the legacy and vision of Santa Nana. Education for ALL, from a lady's point of view.

SantaNana.com NPCornerstones.com Facebook.com/groups/SantaNana



DEAR SANTA



The most wonderful time of the year can double as the hardest time of the year economically for families. Many Santas, Mrs. Clauses, Elves, and Helpers are often asked where to help families in need during hardships and heartaches. Some Christmas Performers may encounter more children during the last two months of the year than some in public will see in a year!

Because of our unique experiences to connect organizations and schools because of the children, here is an opportunity for Christmas Performers to pass on valuable info to add to their community engagements and activities to help those in need.

USPS Operation Santa is accepting letters from people in need as the man up North gets a head start fulfilling this holiday season.

USPS Operation Santa allows people and organizations to adopt letters to Santa Claus and anonymously fulfill holiday wish lists from children and others who are less fortunate.

The USPS Operation Santa program is accepting letters from people in need as the man up North gets a head start fulfilling wishes this holiday season.

The 111-year-old program provides an online way people can safely and securely help children and families have a magical holiday when they otherwise might not have the means.

Employees, customers and others can adopt letters to Santa Claus and send gifts anonymously.

The Postal Service is hoping the extra time to send letters will result in more letters available to adopt on

Nov. 20 at the USPS Operation Santa website. Letters are opened and reviewed, and personal information is redacted, before they are uploaded for adoption.

There is no age limit for letter writers. Letters are accepted from everywhere in the country and can be adopted by anyone who has successfully registered for the program. Parents can write letters for their young children.

Letter writers must include a first and last name and a complete return address (street address; apartment number, if applicable; city; state; and ZIP Code). Envelopes must be regular or business-size and have a First-Class Mail postage stamp to travel through the Postal Service network.

Multiple letters can be sent in the same envelope, but each letter must include a full name and address. The envelope might require additional postage.

Letters should be addressed to: Santa Claus, 123 Elf Road, North Pole 88888.

Letters received without last names and correct return addresses cannot be uploaded.

Letters should be legible and include specific gift details, including game and book titles, clothes, and shoe sizes (infant, toddler or teen), colors and styles. This information makes it easier for the letter adopter to know what to purchase.

USPS Operation Santa is not a guaranteed gift-giving program and relies solely on the generosity of others. Letters to Santa need to be postmarked by Dec. 11.

USPS
**OPERATION
Santa®**

**Make a
holiday wish
come true.**

Adopt letters at
USPSOperationSanta.com



Chapter Meetings



Great times and Great Fellowship







SANTA'S HELPERS, INC

For 55 years, Rita Swiener has been putting her energy into making sure thousands of kids in unfortunate situations have presents on Christmas and during Hanukkah. Rita Swiener started Santa's Helpers Inc. when she provided a family in need with holiday gifts. What started with one family has turned into Santa's Helpers providing gifts to more than 31,000 families in the St. Louis Metropolitan City, St. Louis County, and the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

Santa's Helpers practices taking care of each other's humanity. That was its beginnings in 1968. Then, Swiener was the President of University of Missouri-St. Louis Student Evening Council. An adjunct professor asked if they could help give gifts to an under-resourced family that had "fallen through the cracks". Rita agreed. The following year, the council decided not to participate so Rita and a few other council members picked up the campaign and helped the original family along with other families.



Rita heard of other families that needed help thanks to her friend Paul Civili who was teaching at Holy Trinity Catholic School in North St. Louis at the time. Paul still volunteers today!

Rita is from Steeler Country, Pittsburgh. And she is Jewish. She knows firsthand what it is like to go without and remembers vividly Hanukkahs with no gifts. "I was born in the slums of Pittsburgh. So, I know what it's like to not have anything. And I spent time in an orphanage," she said. When she did get a toy, it was A toy.

"I said I wanted a nurse's kit and a doll that will close its eyes," recalled Swiener. "They said, 'Pick one. Don't be greedy.' I couldn't pick one. It was really hard." It is a choice that Rita did not think other children should have to make just because they were less fortunate than others. She decided she would do whatever she needed to help others during the holidays.

Santa's Helper started in Rita's living room. Today, Santa's Helper is in a warehouse space donated by Cee Kay Supply on Manchester Ave. in St. Louis and the warehouse is stocked with toys and games where Rita helps give the jolly man at the North Pole a helping hand.

TRIVIA Night



& Silent Auction

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2023
6:30 PM (Doors Open at 5:30 PM)
IBEW Hall (on Hampton)
5850 Elizabeth Ave, 63110
 To reserve a table: lindaberk@earthlink.net

Yes, it's time for our annual Silent Auction to raise funds to purchase the toys for Christmas and the holidays to fulfill the wish lists of seriously ill and impoverished children. Over 3,500 children and adults whose names have been provided by local social service organizations receive gifts. The need is greater than ever this year!

DETAILS FOR TRIVIA NIGHT

- Beer, Soda and Water Provided Free of Charge. You may bring your own Spirits and Food.
- Sponsor a round for \$50.00.
- 8 People per table/\$25.00 per person/\$200.00 per table
- Credit cards, check or cash accepted as payment for Silent Auction.
- Ample fenced parking.
- No Players under the age of 21 years.



No one at Santa's Helpers is paid, not even Rita who is the Executive Director. Volunteers collect new toys through toy drives, sales and some hard-core negotiation skills thanks to Rita and other volunteers. A significant number of toys are purchased after the holidays when clearances are in abundance. There are Amazon, Target, and Walmart registries where anyone anywhere can order and have items delivered directly to the warehouse. Santa's Helpers also has a main fundraiser, Trivia Night and Silent Auction, to help raise money for toys.

Santa's Helpers not only give toys to children but coats, clothing, socks, underwear, and personal care items. Each year, social service agencies are invited to the warehouse so they can see behind the scenes prior to the start of the busy season. Agencies refer families to Santa's Helper.

"Santa's really busy. We're Santa's helpers," says Rita to a volunteer group visiting the warehouse.

The work she loves keeps her busy. Rita has been moving at this pace for more than five decades. She gets a workout going up and down the aisles of the warehouse. She logs 12K steps when she is in the warehouse. She selects, wraps, and packs gifts for the kids.

Nothing can slow her down. Not even breast cancer or a heart attack. Rita credits her Jewish faith for teaching her to be a strong giving person. Her adopted father set an example by being charitable and serving others. "Judaism is all about helping other, so it fits very well with my religion," she explained. Rita's compassion knows no religion.

In 2022, Rita estimated 60,000 toys passed through Santa's Helpers to children and families in need. This year, the number will likely increase. But even at the age 82, she refuses to allow the increasing numbers to get her down. She remains motivated to make the tough times a bit easier for the children.



FIT SANTA

Fit Santa is a closed group on Facebook (only members can see posts) for the Worldwide Santa Claus community to share and discuss issues pertaining to Santas, Mrs. Clauses, and even Elves about our health and wellbeing to help keep us going through the busy Christmas season and, quite frankly, all year long. The Fit Santa Facebook Group is about making GOOD CHOICES when it comes to what we eat and drink and getting proper daily movement and exercise as we age.

The character of Santa Claus as we know him today is a fictional fantasy being. But for those who portray this character, we are REAL HUMAN BEINGS who sometimes let the fiction of a Jolly Round Elf get the best of us in our real everyday lives. Portraying Santa Claus is not about boasting how big your cookie zone is. It is about staying healthy and physically active as we age for us to continue to do what we love to do as Christmas performers for many years to come.

Looking back, many may be unaware of why I started the Facebook group page. In 2016, after I returned home from the Santa Reunion Convention in Branson, MO, I spent time thinking about what I witnessed that concerned me greatly. Seeing the poor state of health of most of the Christmas performer community, I felt compelled to do something. Creating the Fit Santa Facebook page was the only thing I could think of at the time. Seven years later, it was the best thing I could have done. Fit Santa has over 900 members in the group and there are daily postings from Christmas Performers who believe their health is their wealth!

Fit Santa is a very influential and supportive online group! I find it a real blessing to see group members' lives being changed for the better when it comes to their health and wellbeing. We have all levels of health and fitness from people just trying to lose weight and make better choices to those



who are in the gym regularly lifting weights and bulking up. There is absolutely no judgment from members about where someone is on their journey. Members share tips and ideas with each other, and it has been a great source of information for many. One of the most popular topics is to “stuff or not stuff” with a belly pad for Santa after losing weight. And, “I need to have my suit taken in now after losing weight” posts always receive heavy engagement.

Personally, Fit Santa is about being healthy; physically and mentally. I want to continue to do what I have been blessed to portray Santa and to be a Christmas performer. I believe it is my mission! I love spreading happiness, magic and joy and I want to be able to decide for myself when my role of being Santa Claus is over. I do not want the physical restraints of poor health to pre-determine that for me. I absolutely love being Santa Claus and that is why I am committed to being a FIT SANTA!

If you are a member of the Christmas Performer community and you are ready to take your health and wellbeing serious with inspiration and ideas, you can find Fit Santa on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FitSanta

Trever J. Waltos

Creator of FIT SANTA



BECOMING THE CLAUSES

By Craig Hamilton (Santa Craig Cringle) and Aileen Hamilton (That Filipina Mrs. Claus – Aila Cringle)
Editor’s Note: Craig’s comments are denoted by a ‘C:’ at the front, and Aileen’s with an ‘A.’

Early Beginnings – an Idea and a Calling

A: When Craig and I were newly married, we purchased our first home. As we were nearing our first Christmas together, it didn’t take him long to see that he married a girl who really loved Christmas. Around September multiple packages began arriving on the doorstep, including, one day, a long, heavy box that I needed Craig’s help to carry in.

“Just wait ‘til you see what this is! You will be so impressed!” I exclaimed, as I excitedly tore the box open. A gigantic, pre-lit, fancy Christmas tree

that took only a few seconds to set up! Not only could you set it up with white lights, but also with colored lights, or – wait for it – BOTH white and colored lights – all with the convenient press of a button! But that wasn’t all. The lights could be still, or blink, or chase each other – and it even blinked accompanied by Christmas music! This tree was truly magical! In the next few days and weeks more packages would arrive, and he watched as his new bride opened each one revealing all sorts of Christmas treasures, one after another. Craig joked, “Well, I must’ve married Mrs. Claus!”

Who would’ve thought that becoming the Clauses today had already been foreshadowed many years ago, when we were just newlyweds celebrating our first Christmas together? Through the years, seeing how much I loved Christmas, our friends have gifted us trees and decorations for which they no longer had use, and even a beautiful collection of lighted Christmas Village pieces.

C: Aileen’s story on becoming the Clauses started with us as young newlyweds. We have enjoyed 17 years together being Santa and Mrs. Claus for our children every year, but I’d never even imagined putting on an actual red suit, until September 2022. It started on a sad note. When the news hit my Facebook feed one early September morning, my heart sank. Another friend lost, the second friend I’d lost since moving to Huntsville, Alabama in the autumn of 2020. Mike and I served together in our local Emmaus Walk community. He was about 9 years older than me, and I looked up to him, in every sense of the word. Not only was he physically imposing at about 6’5”, but he was a force of nature. His presence would change the atmosphere in a room. He carried not only the authority of his title as Judge, but also carried the presence of the Holy Spirit. He was a family man, who loved his wife and children. And he was God’s man, teaching Sunday school and serving his community as well.

One thing I did know about Mike was that he was Santa Claus. As my friend Dennis recounted in his online post, “He was probably better known as the Santa Claus who had a side job as a judge, which was fine with him.” As a young father I would sometimes encounter Mike with my young children in tow, and

he would interact with them. He just had a way with children. His smile was infectious, and even though his beard wasn't white, my children were charmed by his humor, laughter, and the fact that when he looked at them, he saw them. His passing impacted me because he was someone I wanted to be like – a mentor even if he didn't know it. What a legacy of generosity, kindness, and love he had left behind!

I started thinking about my legacy. I couldn't go back in time and start my career over as a judge, but a thought had begun to form in my mind, and slowly it became a calling. By late October, the words had coalesced: "I can't go back and be a judge, but I can be a Santa Claus."

"Ok, maybe I could be," I thought, "but that's for older guys." I was only 44 years old, so I put it in the back of my mind as one of those "maybe one day" ideas. Or at least I tried to. Shortly after Christmas, a few months later, I had to come clean with Aileen. I resolved that I was going to tell my wife and she would put it to rest. I thought for sure she would tell me that I had lost my mind.

A: The words that came rushing out of my mouth were, "I KNEW I didn't marry the Grinch! I was destined to be Mrs. Claus!"

C: Still, I wasn't completely sold. I warned Aileen, "Honey, you know me, if I do this, it won't be halfway. It will be 'go big or go home'."

One day, we noticed a book on display for sale at the library: "Being Santa Claus" by Sal Lizard. I purchased it and began reading it that night.

Going Big

C: I didn't share it with the rest of my family immediately, as I figured they might think I was half a bubble off plumb (I was right). Instead, I joined every Facebook group I could find on the subject, immersing myself into the topic late into the night for weeks. My eyes began to open over just how vast



the subject of being Santa Claus was. I also connected with Hall of Fame Santa, the late Gordon Bailey, who began mentoring me weekly. By the end of January, I had learned a lot already, but I told myself I was overthinking it.

My first opportunity would be close to home. Christmas Performer Workshops (CPW) with Santa True was coming to Alabama in February, and he was teaching the Fundamentals class. Perfect! I signed up, barely able to contain my excitement, convinced that, by the end of this class, I would be an expert at being Santa.

A: After the first CPW session he texted me in a panic, "What have I done? I'm not sure I can do this!" He was learning that being Santa was much more than sitting on a throne having his photo taken.

C: As an introverted engineer, I should have known better. I didn't know there was such a thing as a Christmas "performer". When I arrived at CPW,

surrounded by a hundred or so gregarious, loud, boisterous, jolly Santa Clauses and their Missuses (unfortunately, Aileen wasn't able to come), I knew I was out of my element. As lesson after lesson from the amazing Santa True flew by, I began to feel more and more like I'd made a mistake. While everyone else (most of them had been a Claus for at least a couple seasons) seemed perfectly comfortable, I was almost ready to bolt.

By the end of Day 1, I was ready to go home. But then that evening Santa True and Legendary Mrs. Claus, Rachel King, performed a "demo home visit", and I was spellbound for the next 30 minutes, and reinspired all over again. I went to bed encouraged and finished the weekend. Arriving home, I relayed what had transpired to Aileen.

The Importance of Mrs. Claus

C: I don't think Aileen really understood what being Mrs. Claus to my Santa would mean – certainly not what I was sharing from my training. I am grateful that Santa True's CPW was my first training of my Santa journey, because I immediately understood just how valuable my Mrs. Claus was going to be. After CPW, I realized I had a secret weapon who would probably be more popular than myself, even if I'd be more recognizable. I also knew that if I explained to her just how critical her role was going to be, it would be a hard sell. Being an introvert herself, and despite being much more capable at all of the soft skills involved, she would definitely protest at the idea of being up in front of people and performing herself. Her idea of Mrs. Claus was to decorate the house year-round, and to convince me to build more storage for decorations!

A: Yes, that's what I initially thought! And that's exactly what I did! We've been decorating all year! I have always been creative, so I began making goals and a plan. First, I needed a name. After thinking it through I chose to combine my first name and my maiden name to become Aila - Aila Cringle, and my formal title would be, "Mrs. Aila Claus." My vision began to take shape as I wrote out how to live out such a very important title.

C: She was coming around, but besides convincing Aileen to join me as a performer, we would also have the issue of tradition to deal with. We are a

mixed-race couple, and much younger than most of our peers. We do not fit the "mold" of Santa and Mrs. Claus. Yet, I knew from having a daughter in the film industry that now, in 2023, there's never been a better time for racial diversity in entertainment!

A: Craig and I also looked forward to networking with other Clauses! We hoped for mentorship and wanted to glean from their wisdom and years of being the Clauses. In addition to Alabama groups, we began connecting with Santa groups in neighboring states.

C: Since then, it has been a whirlwind of learning. I've spent 20-30 hours per week working on "Claus Enterprises, LLC" in addition to my full-time job. We joined the Worldwide Santa Claus Network with Ed Taylor and began to gain understanding on how to market ourselves, and how we would find gigs. Ed's weekly Zoom meetings have been invaluable in that aspect.

I called myself Santa Craig Cringle. To highlight the uniqueness of my wife, Aileen would be called That Filipina Mrs. Claus – Aila Cringle. We began to invest in our suits with the help of The Sewing Elves in Trinity, Alabama.

We also wanted this to be a family affair. As Our youngest daughter, age 14 and a professional actor herself, was a natural fit. Our son, 16, is a natural talker and relates well to young teens.

Atypical Clauses and Difficult Topics

C: As we attended other Claus functions in the region this year, it became apparent that we're an atypical Claus family. We are still raising our youth. We are still working full-time. We look different. There are four of us instead of one or two. While we certainly didn't intend it, we've raised eyebrows. We are new to the community and have the greatest respect for this community and all that it does. For example, I typically don't think about race much. I don't generally think about racism, either. People are just people, made in the image of God. I don't allow my mixed-race children to dwell on race either because I don't want them to develop a victim mentality. Together with Aileen, we teach them to rise above such thinking and to overcome racism by just proving

race is not a factor in accomplishing what they might set out to do – instead, we overcome. Same with gender. It works for us.

A: One of the first changes I made regarding being Mrs. Claus stems from within. I made a heart change. I wanted to improve and strive to become a better version of myself. I wanted to do things “extra”: for example, allowing someone in front of me in line, or when someone needed help finding something in a store; taking her there instead of pointing the way. It gave me an excuse to engage with them. I want to make others feel seen and heard. I felt this is what Mrs. Claus would do. She would acknowledge everyone she met and make them leave her side feeling loved.

I have met so many wonderful Clauses. I’m thankful to have been shown so much kindness. That’s why it’s difficult to open up and talk about some occasional not-so-kind experiences.

I recently met a ‘seasoned Mrs. Claus’ who advised me to be prepared for a ‘million questions’ that children will ask. She said, “For example, do you know what your name is?”

I was really excited because I already knew the answer! I confidently replied, “My name is Aila!” She corrected me, “No. Your name isn’t Aila. You are Jessica. I am Jessica, and you are Jessica.”

I thought about this for a moment and replied, “You might be Jessica, but I’m.”

I may be new to the community, but here’s my take: If you’re a Claus of any kind, seasoned or new, stick together. Lift one and encourage one another. Share your wisdom. Celebrate others’ successes. Promote and include one another. Love one another. Be Claus-like. Not Grinch-like.

C: To tie it up and put a bow on it, I personally believe it is Santa Claus who ought to be making Mrs. Claus look like a star! If anyone should be carrying this tradition forward in today’s culture, it should be Santa Claus! After all, we are modern day ambassadors of St. Nicholas and thus, Jesus Christ. Everywhere Jesus went, he elevated the status of women in the culture. Moreover, when Santa puts Mrs. Claus in the spotlight, it only makes our own star shine brighter. As for race, Santa Claus is known and travels worldwide!

‘Tis the Season

C: Recently we were blessed by a group of Aileen’s friends that donated several toys to us to pass along to underprivileged children. We are so thankful for their generosity and trust in us to get these gifts to those that need them. Additionally, folks we encounter often donate their Christmas treasures for us to use for props, backdrops, and more. These kindnesses are always a pleasant surprise.

The Future

C: We hope to continue our training with CPW, improve our duo act and branding, develop a family act for the four of us, and I’ve made it my personal goal to establish That Filipina Mrs. Claus – Aila Cringle as a highly sought after solo act and brand!

Finally, I started a Facebook group, Claus for Christ – Santas on Mission, intended to be a ministry for Christmas performers. We’ve added 350+ members since April, and my goal is to turn that into a solid resource to minister to Christ-following Christmas Performers all year long.

We’re having so much fun, and we’re just getting started. I love learning, and I am learning something new every day. I just keep thinking that, if we’re lucky, we’ll get to do this for several decades to come! I am most excited to see how being Clauses will change us. I believe that by being Clauses, we will become a better Craig and Aileen, better spouses, better parents, and one day, better grandparents. What a privilege it is to don the red suit while being ambassadors for Jesus! We get to show the love of Christ in a unique, memorable way!

A: Happy Christmas, everyone!

C: Why do you always say “Happy Christmas”? “Merry” sounds so much better.

A: It’s “Happy”.

C: Yes, dear.

To follow our journey, please visit our website at <https://www.craigcringle.com> and all of our social media, which you can find linked at <https://www.linktr.ee/santacraigcringle>.



Bass Pro Pyramid/Memphis Tourism



Main Street/Memphis Tourism

REDEFINING SANTA:

THE JOURNEY OF NEW AGE SANTA

I was born in 1959. I was born into poverty, on the west side of Red Bank, NJ. We were on Welfare, as my single mother of 5 children (me and 4 sisters) struggled to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table. Christmas and family were very special times and the love we had for one another was intense.

Growing up in the 1960's the image of Santa was the traditional jolly, fat, white man with the red suit and white whiskers. As a child, the idea that the toys I receive at Christmas came from Santa (and not my mom) empowered me. All I had to do was "be good" and Santa would surely bring me my gifts. But as years passed and I did not always get the exact things I wanted for Christmas, I

remained hopeful that "Santa" would continue to come to my neighborhood, even though it was rare to see white people in that part of town.

As I grew up, I eventually realized Santa was "the spirit of Christmas" and that my mom was Santa. It explained a lot for me. It gave me some relief, as I was starting to think I did not get certain things for Christmas because I was not good enough or that Santa did not really come to my neighborhood since I never saw him there.

It was not until I was in my 20's when I saw a Santa Claus that did not look like the traditional, white Santa I had always seen in the mall as a child. The Santa I saw I could not sit with because you



had to pay for pictures with him and we could not afford it. Growing up in Red Bank, there were many things for black people and for white people. But they were separate but equal. There was (and still is to this day) separate Christmas Tree lightings in Red Bank. And, there were two Elks Lodges. The Elks Lodge on the east side of town was called "The White Elks" and the Elks on the west side of town was called "The Black Elks." My family was heavily involved in the Black Elks.

My Grandfather was a Grand Exalted Ruler of the Elks. My mother, aunts and uncles were also all members. But it was my uncle, Bernard Daniels, who was the first Santa I ever saw who was not White! He had on an old, cheap Santa suit from a local department store. He had a terribly fake beard that he ironically used to cover his entire face (nose included) - where all you could see were his eyes looking out from all the obviously fake facial hair, long white wig, and big red and white hat. He was obviously NOT the real Santa. He was THE Santa at the Elks for many years until he retired from doing it in the early 1990's.

I was a fat child all my life. I remember my mom taking me to the doctor and he talked about my weight and how unhealthy it was. He attempted to have me follow varied diets, all to no avail because for my mom - food meant love, and if she could not give you material things; she sure could give you delicious, high fat, high caloric and inexpensive meals to show her love. I hated being a fat kid; I always had difficulty finding clothes to fit. But I loved my mom's cooking, and I felt her love as she prepared my favorites. I was obese until I finally left for Fisk University in Nashville, TN at age 18. I lost 62 pounds, dropping from 235 pounds when I went to college in September - down to 172 pounds when I returned to NJ in the Spring of 1979. For the first time in my life, I was not overweight.

I was a former power weightlifter but shifted my focus to bodybuilding. I entered several bodybuilding competitions during the 1980's. I developed confidence I never had before and found my first girlfriend in the summer of 1979. I transferred to Montclair State College as well that year and eventually met, got engaged to and

married my college sweetheart. All was good with the world; until it was not.

During the early 1990's, I was going through a rough time in my life. I was struggling with my career unsure of what to do with my future. My 7-year marriage was coming to an end and my soon to be ex-wife and I had separated. I was depressed for years, and I gained back all the weight I had lost, losing myself in food and substance abuse. Once again, I was obese and miserable.

It was during this time that my Uncle Bernard retired as the Santa of the Black Elks, and they went a year or two without a Santa. At some point in the mid-1990's, I went to retrieve my personal belongings from the basement where my ex and I lived. Among my belongings was a brand new, still in the package, complete Santa Claus suit with wig and whiskers. I inquired of my ex if it belonged to her or maybe someone new in her life and she insisted it did not. I inquired of my neighbor, who we shared the space with, and she assured me it did not belong to her. She said, "I guess you just became Santa!" I still believe it was a divine gift.

Standing 5'6" at a weight of about 260 pounds, at age 34 I was not in very good shape. However, I was in perfect "Santa shape." I put on the suit, which fit very well and let the Elks know, "There can be a new Santa in town." They gladly took me up on the offer and my Santa career was born!

During my Santa journey, I have learned a great deal. I saw the wonder in the eyes of children as they look into Santa's eyes and I realized the absolute importance of portraying Santa Claus, the epitome of love and giving, during the Christmas season - and for me; I was giving that magic to children who looked like me when I grew up. I grasped the responsibility to nurture the love, kindness, and authenticity of Santa Claus for children of color. I needed to "be Santa" for these children - not just play at being a nice man in a costume for them.

Years passed and I remarried. Together we got a home, and eventually a child. I was Santa in the winter and becoming comfortable in my Santa/



Dad bod. My weight continued to escalate up past 300 pounds by the time I was 40 and hitting a maximum of 365 pounds at age 42. I was prediabetic, hypertensive and had dangerous sleep apnea. Years of physicals had my doctors warning that I would not live much longer if I could not get a handle on my weight. Things looked bleak.

Ironically at 365 pounds, I was visiting a local restaurant owned by a friend, dressed as Santa and one of the intoxicated, adult patrons said to me, “Whoa Santa, you’ve gotten really fat. Time to cut back on those milk and cookies I think!” Even as Santa, I felt embarrassed.

In 2002, I had a heartfelt conversation with my wife regarding a radical new procedure – gastric bypass surgery; a surgery designed to save the lives of morbidly obese people such as myself. I needed something. I felt, “If I can only get a handle on this, a head start, I can transform as I did when I went to college.” But now I had closer to 200 pounds to lose; not 60.

I had my second divine intervention. I had gastric bypass surgery in the winter of 2002. I dropped from 365 pounds to 176 pounds by the spring of 2004. I did it by embracing a healthy lifestyle of proper eating and exercise. I did not want to go back, so embraced a healthy lifestyle and made it work.

Christmas 2003 found Santa reevaluating being the traditional Santa. My suit was hanging off me. I was still wearing my artificial whiskers but looked like someone “let the air out of Santa!” It was at this point that I decided I needed to reexamine being Santa because being Santa was very important to me.

I was making a difference to many young people. Inclusion of all people has always been important to

me. My wife is Caucasian, and my son is biracial, so I am not about exclusion, but INCLUSION. I wanted my Santa mission to take on a new challenge. First, I needed to “become Santa!” For me, that meant LOSING THE ARTIFICIAL WHISKERS! So, I tossed my wig and whiskers and grew my beard and mustache. I was determined to BE SANTA for my children who want and need to believe in the magic and love of Santa Claus.

The first year, I was a “real bearded Santa” was extremely liberating. I was now also meeting other professional Santas, but very few who looked like ME!

Santa Larry Jefferson and the Mall of America in Minneapolis, MN during winter of 2016 rocked the Santa world as well as the nation. While I was making my own small inroads changing the image of Santa from a traditional, jolly, overweight white man to a trimmer, short-bearded man of color; Santa Larry rocked America after being “discovered” in a national Santa search for diverse Santas. He received national headlines, but he faced hate, racism, death threats. He shattered the glass ceiling and made it possible for me to climb higher heights in my journey.

My journey now has a new mission. Not only did the traditional image of Santa need to be changed along racial lines, but today why not include health. Childhood obesity is at an all-time high. I remember what a miserable feeling it was to be a fat kid. No matter how much people tell you that you are valued, that you are just as good, that you should be proud of the way you look, I knew in my own heart that being fat ISN'T GOOD for me! As a grown man, I know it leads to a lifetime of health issues and self-esteem issues. Embracing a fat lifestyle is NOT the answer, learning to be fit is the answer for me.

I gained some weight back as I have aged. As I reached my 50's and now my 60's, my metabolism has changed, my lifestyle has changed. My gastric bypass from over 20 years ago is no longer a factor, it does not keep my weight down. I had gained back almost 90 pounds of the 190 I had lost. I needed to rededicate myself to my personal health, and to changing the image of Santa - not just racially, but physically.

In closing, I am not against fat people. I AM a fat person! I have been most of my life, and I despise anyone who fat shames individuals; we shame ourselves enough. I have spent the last year dropping my weight back down to under 200 pounds through intermittent fasting, exercise and living a consistent lifestyle. Nothing extreme; simply consistent. However, as stated, I am a fat man and can easily go back to my old behaviors. So, I am embracing my New Age Santa image. A Santa that includes all races, creeds, religions, and personal identifications. I am a Santa that holds old fashioned values, while creating a fresh and modern image. I respect traditional Santas of the Coke-a-Cola image and I empathize with overweight children. My mission is important to have Santa Claus represent love, giving, inclusion AND health! I invite all willing to join me on this mission.





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SANTA

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After Avett Otis was born, proud Dad took to social media and posted:

“Today, Emily and I met an old soul we shall from this moment going forward refer to as Avett Otis Beard. Despite having plenty of time to write and prepare the perfect speech to preach upon our first meeting, Emily and I were both happy and healthy beyond words and couldn’t quite articulate our thoughts between the two of us enough to say anything. Luckily, Avett Otis stared into our hearts and sang this song to us. Happy tears may or may not have been followed by everyone in the room.

Maybe this world isn’t so doomed after all. Me thinks that we three are gonna be good friends for a long, long time. This adventure is to be continued ...”

Avett Otis

Big Adventure

After years of heartache and uncertainty as to whether they would ever find themselves fortunate to have children, Emily and Chuck Beard were thrilled to welcome to the world their day-after-Christmas baby boy, Avett Otis, in 2015. Indeed, the long-awaited birth of their child was the best Christmas gift they could ever ask for, and their hearts were full.



And what a journey it has been following Avett Otis' adventures since that beautiful day. The Beards have built a loving and supportive community as young parents raising a child who has captured the hearts and minds of their families, friends, and followers on Instagram. The cute baby has become an all-around funny, compassionate kid growing up right in front of us with each photo shared online. Since day one, the Christmas baby was welcomed into the Christmas Community. Somewhere between birth and his first birthday, he was given an elf onesie, and he has been "AO the Elf" ever since. From magazine covers to campaign ads for national brands, AO's love of Christmas shines thru. And we are proud to know that one of IBRBS youngest members is a bright light serving and giving back already!



This year, the season of Christmas came a wee bit early for Avett Otis. In October, he and his teammates, the King Cobra Stars, were hosted by the Nashville Soccer Club Team at one of the matches. Time on the pitch, up close and personal with the Boys in Gold, VIP treatment from the minute they stepped into the stadium will be a night they will remember long after the holidays. Congratulations to the KCSs, and their families, who all enjoyed a fantastic soccer season!

We look forward to seeing Avett Otis in his annual Living To Give Social Media Campaign...stay tuned!





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THE BLACK SANTA HOUSTON



After becoming a first-time mother in 2017, Magan Butler-Coleman longed for a Santa Claus that represented her family. She loves holiday traditions, and annual pictures with Santa Claus were vivid memories from her childhood. Magan's birthdate is December 30th, so she naturally has a great affinity to Christmastime. After two years of searching for Santa, she launched The Black Santa Houston in 2019, with love for family and community. Some may consider visits with Santa and holiday pictures a luxury, however it is their goal to ensure family traditions are available to everyone in the expansive Houston, Texas community. No matter if a mother is out of work, or transitioning from homelessness, Magan wants to ensure that every child has the opportunity to create and experience a memorable winter season tradition. She identified a significant need for this level of positive Black representation in Houston. Magan understands how important it is for children to see reflections of themselves in all aspects of life, especially as children develop their racial and ethnic identities, and begin to make sense of the world around them. Now entering the 5th season, The Black Santa Houston is one of a kind! The magical experience of taking beautiful holiday photos with The Black Santa Houston has reclaimed its spot as the ultimate holiday tradition in Houston, Texas.

The Black Santa Houston is a full-service photography studio located in the heart of Houston, Texas. In addition to photography, her company provides Santa visits to community organizations that serve at-risk children, charitable



organizations, and corporations that host large community events. Their 2000+ customers represent diverse families seeking representation during wintertime.

The mission of the Black Santa Houston is to inspire and uplift children everywhere by providing positive representation through the iconic figure of Santa Claus. They are committed to creating an experience where black and brown children see themselves reflected in the magic and joy of the holiday season. Every child deserves to feel seen, heard, and loved, and her team is dedicated to making that a reality for all children on a global scale no matter their socio-economic status.

In 2021, Expanding the vision of The Black Santa Houston Magan also introduced the WYNTRY Collection, which is her holiday themed luxury sleepwear, gift wrap, and pet apparel thoughtfully crafted to elevate the winter holiday experience of Black, Brown, and People of Color - with an image of a Santa Claus who reflects their families. Magan designs the WYNTRY Collection products in house. Their pajamas are made from 100% organic cotton, and span sizes 0-3 months to 3XL. Their ethically-sourced and environmentally-safe custom cotton fabric is domestically sourced, printed in Reinholds, PA, and manufactured in Houston, Texas. The WYNTRY Collection gift wrap is also made with a love for our earth and uses environmentally conscious paper, printed with water-based inks, made locally, in the USA with Love.

In December, 2021 The Drew Barrymore Show invited Magan and Santa to share more about the amazing experience provided by The Black Santa Houston to her live audience in New York, New York. Her company has also been featured in the New York Times, The Houston Chronicle, several local and national news channels, and notably the last printed version of The Oprah Magazine in November 2020. Magan is a 2023 recipient of the Houston Equity Fund's Wells Fargo Open for Business Grant Program. This grant will allow her team of photographers and three Mr. & Mrs. Claus to continue to build traditions with more families throughout Houston and across the globe. To learn more about The Black Santa Houston visit www.blacksantahouston.com and their retail business wyntry.com.



PANCHO CLAUS

The character of Pancho Claus the Tex-Mex Santa grew out of the Chicano civil rights movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s and is sometimes referred to as Santa Claus' cousin from the South Pole.

The Pancho Claus legend that's often replicated in other barrios across the United States, but Reyes' version is the best known and he has held it down for Houston for 42 years beginning on December 25, 1981.

On November 5, 2023, Pancho Claus is celebrating his birthday by inviting the community to join him decorating Toy Collection Boxes. And we know from every story we have about Pancho Claus; it is going to be one giant celebration!

We wish him much success in all his endeavors and a huge Happy Birthday from your friends, old and new, in the Christmas Community!



Santa Claus Hall of Fame 2021 Inductee, Richard Reyes is a beloved Christmas Performer known as Pancho Claus. A Houstonian Santa unlike any other, dressed in a bright red and black zoot suit with a fedora, Pancho Claus has helped thousands of disadvantaged children to feel the joy of Christmas, bringing gifts and throwing colorful seasonal parties that their low-income parents could not afford.

He does not come the night before Christmas in a miniature sleigh with reindeer like St. Nick, but instead parades along city streets with an equally number of low-riders, often surrounded by a festive jazz band.

Reyes who plays the Latino St. Nick character coordinates toy drives and deliveries for Christmas all year long.

Pancho Claus' Birthday!

Join us decorating Toy Collection Boxes
for the PANCHO CLAUS 2023 Season!

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 5TH 12PM-5PM

• Entertainment • Food • Door Prizes • Pics With Pancho

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MEET HO HO HOLY LAND SANTA



Issa Kassissieh turned his centuries-old family home into a Christmas wonderland!

The soft ringing of bells approaches, and a red iron door opens in a stone facade in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City. In the hallway, next to a sled, stands Issa Kassissieh. He is tall and powerfully built—Kassissieh is a talented basketball player and was once recruited to play college ball in the United States—and he is Israel's only certified Santa Claus. When he gave me directions to his house at St. Peter's Street, he asked if he should answer the door as Santa. We agreed on "50/50." So, the 35-year-old's short, dark beard is viable, but is wearing a fuzzy red shirt and pants, and a pair of tall black boots. Oh, the boots. That's where the sound of the bells came from.

This is "Santa's House," a small space on the first floor of the Kassissieh family home. Issa has turned this room, adorned with an ancient tile floor and a vaulted ceiling, into a glittery fantasy that seems particularly out of place in the Middle East: Christmas trees, glinting snowflakes, reindeer, and polar bear

dolls. In this setting, Kassissieh looks like a giant. For a moment, it's not clear if he's going to do a slam dunk or take to the sky in a sled.

Seventeen years ago, Kassissieh found an old Santa Claus costume that had belonged to his father. He decided to amuse himself and tried it on. It fit so well that he went to the nearby Jaffa Gate, a historic portal in the Old City's wall, while wearing it. Children happily gathered around, and it had an effect on him. "I realized that as a child I didn't get to have this happiness, and that it's time to give it to the children of Jerusalem," he says. "While traveling the world during Christmas, I realized how deep Santa is embedded in Western cultures, while here, in the place where Christmas began, we only know Santa through television and movies." The following year, Kassissieh donned the costume again. The year after that, he hired a camel. Since then, around Christmas, he has ridden the camel around the Old City spreading cheer, and then receives visits from children and their families in Santa's House in the afternoon. At the height of the

season, the line in front of “Santa’s House” can be two hours long. Kassissieh funds most of the operation himself, but he does get candy donations from Christian individuals and organizations worldwide.

In 2016, Kassissieh took the next step in his development—he decided to train at the Professional Santa Claus School in Denver, Colorado. He studied for a week and learned how to build wooden toys, bake cookies, and say “Ho, ho, ho” the right way.

“You can’t just call ‘Ho, ho, ho,’” he says. “The sound needs to come from the abdomen. To be Santa, you have to do things from the heart, and the heart should hold hope, love, and peace.”

Kassissieh, who is Orthodox Christian, was the first Arab to attend the Santa school in Denver, they told him. In 2018, he enrolled for further training in the Charles W. Howard Santa Claus School in Michigan. “It’s a famous school founded in 1937, which trained more than 5,000 Santas,” he explains. “They told me, ‘You’re the first Santa from the Middle East and the Holy Land.’”

Today, Kassissieh earns his living as a basketball coach in West Jerusalem. “Santa’s House” has been his family’s home for 700 years; they were the first Orthodox Christian family in East Jerusalem. In the home, in which he currently resides with his parents, there are memories, mementos, and pictures that go back centuries.

“My family came to Jerusalem 900 years ago, but we don’t have any exact information on where we came from,” he says. “Some family members claim we came from Greece. Others think we came from the Palestinian city Lydda.” Some centuries back, the family founded a tile factory, and many of those tiles today adorn important churches in Israel/Palestine, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The back wall of the house carries a relatively new sign for the factory, with the name Issa Khalil Kassissieh, Issa’s great-grandfather. The belongings of those great-grandparents—a black telephone, masonry tools, a clock—are now hidden among Christmas

paraphernalia. Behind a Santa Claus doll there is a sewing machine that was used by his great-grandmother, Malika.

A yellowing photo of Malika and Issa Khalil Kassissieh shows a handsome pair in Western clothing during the family’s financial heyday. “They were well-off, pillars of the community, very religious,” Kassissieh says. A few years ago, his father found a 250-year-old prayer book, written in Arabic, which now stands on a bookshelf. In the back space of the house hangs a panoramic photo of Jerusalem, around 150 years old. The Dome of the Rock was not gilded then, and the cemetery on the Mount of Olives lies fallow. “My grandfather could travel to Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, just for a party and come back that same night. Can you imagine?!” he says. Today, few can.

Some of the Kassissiehs lived and worked in Katamon, on the other end of Jerusalem. In the war that Israeli Jews call the War of Independence and Palestinians call the Nakba, or the “catastrophe,” they fled from Katamon and took up residence in the Old City, leaving behind a house and a tile factory, which were confiscated by Israel. Kassissieh doesn’t dwell too much on this event. “The Kassissieh family lived with the Ottoman, British, Jordanian, and Israeli rule,” he says. “We always know how to recover from misfortunes and negotiate with everyone.”

Editor’s note:

Several weeks before October 7, 2023, Jerusalem Santa and I were in communication regarding a story for IBRBS. The day after October 7, 2023, I reached out to see if he was okay and his family. He assured me that he was. I have continued to reach out over the last few weeks. Both of us are fully aware of world events, but he is committed to sharing joy with the world. And peace. Everyone’s safety and welfare are at the top of the list. This story is about a Santa who lives in Jerusalem.

The brave author of this story covers the ongoing events in their county. She wanted us to use the story.

I personally thank them for the courage.

SANTA FOR ALL

Who celebrates Christmas with joy, love, faith, hope and peace in his heart? It is "Santa Larry!" He loves to bring smiles to all faces, young and old.





Known worldwide as “Santa Larry,” Larry Jefferson was born and raised in the small town of Nashville, Arkansas. He has dual residences in Duncanville, TX and in Arkansas. A Henderson State University graduate with a BA in Sociology, Santa Larry received his Army Commission through ROTC as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1986 and retired in 2015 after many years of Military Service Active and Reserves. He retired from the Texas Workforce Commission as a Program Manager/Area Office Manager in 2016. Currently, he is the Director at Equus Workforce Solutions Call Center in Dallas, Texas. Additionally, he runs the Santa Merry Foundation which provides educational scholarships to African American students around the country. The Santa Merry Foundation also trains Santas and Mrs. Clauses.

Since 1999, Santa Larry has been portraying Santa Claus. That year, he donned a Walmart 29.00 suit and surprised his nephews: Kris, Kameron & Kobie, at their home the week before Christmas. Their beloved uncle represented all the magic of the season! From

that moment forward, the family could not wait to see their Santa walk through the door each year. From family to friends to non-profits to business in his area, Santa Larry became synonymous with Christmas.

In 2016, he took a leap of faith and attended a Santa Claus convention in Branson, MO where he was discovered by a recruiter for Mall of America and CBS TV(NY). The trip to Branson landed Santa Larry an interview with Jane Paulie on CBS Sunday Morning News for a segment titled: What does Santa Do During the off Season? That same year, he was hired by The Santa Experience MN to be Santa Claus at the Mall of America, the largest mall in America. This was a pivotal moment for Santa Larry and the rest is history. Santa Larry destiny was sealed in the annuals of Christmas Memories. He became a beloved Santa Claus recognized around the country and worldwide!

Santa Larry sleigh pulls him from malls to museums and everywhere in between. He is in high demand during Christmastime! One of his many stops on his nationwide tour is being Santa in Residence at the



Chicago Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois.

Promoting the season of giving and serving others throughout the year is a full time job for Santa Larry! Santa Larry has been on numerous television and radio programs including Good Morning America; NPR News; BBC; CNN; ABC Live NY; Kare11 MN; WCCO MN; ABC 7 Chicago; WFAA 8 Dallas; NBC5 Dallas; CW33 Dallas; CBS11 Dallas; Tom Joyner Morning Show; Steve Harvey; Joy Reid MSNBC; Strahan, Sara and Keke; and Living Your Best Life Radio Show.

A lifelong member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Santa Larry believes in the power of education and uplifting underserved communities. He established the “Larry Jefferson Scholarship” at Henderson State University for African American Students.

Because of his steadfast devotion to youth and giving back, Santa Larry has been honored by many civic organizations and in the Christmas Community. The City of Hot Springs, AR deemed December 20, 2018 “Santa Larry Day” and honored him with the Key to The City. He has been featured in numerous print articles including Texas Monthly and Good Housekeeping!

His faithful work as Santa Larry has not gone unnoticed in the Christmas Community. He was inducted in the International Santa Claus Hall of Fame in December 2020. The International Santa Claus Hall of Fame is home of the celebration and study of Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus of the past and present. ISCHF recognizes men and women who have greatly contributed to the Legend of Santa Claus. Santa Larry’s history making endeavors in the Christmas

Community have been followed by millions and has helped many to believe that Santa Claus loves and cherishes every child and adult from all backgrounds and walks of life.



2023 continues to shine the spotlight on the heavy lifting Santa Larry does in the communities he serves. His Alma Mater, Henderson State University recognized their jolly alum as one of its Outstanding Black Alumni during recent homecoming activities. During the same month, the NAACP Image Awards honored him with the Benjamin Dennis President’s Award in Texarkana, TX on October 28, 2023. The award is given to individuals who work to improve their community, educate the masses, identify problems, and lead the revolution to find solutions. This was the first recognition of a Christmas Performer by the organization! Santa Larry receiving the award was a moving experience not only for him but the community and adults and children who trusts in the good he consistently represents, year after year.



SANTASCLAUSER.ORG

FINLAND'S VERY OWN MRS. SANTA CLAUS



A former teacher has slowly built an impressive Christmas brand on the island of Hailuoto in Finland. Ritva Rundgren is a 73-year-old businesswoman from Kempele who is determined to make the world a better place through telling children her very own story of Mrs. Santa Claus Finland.

Mrs. Santa Claus Finland is a quiet, friendly lady with a curious mind and a soft smile. She's based in a charming old log house in the middle of nowhere in Hailuoto.

It's a magical setting for a woman with a mission. Mrs. Santa Claus Finland wants every child in the

world to go to school and get an education. "With knowledge, every one of them can build a better future," she shared.

How it all started

Having retired after a 36-year teaching career at primary schools, Ritva decided to study education technology at the University of Oulu. She also enrolled at an innovation course at the Business School where fellow student Eeva Nikkola suggested that Ritva should consider creating a Mrs. Santa Claus brand.

Ritva liked the idea and she decided that she wanted to build a business to tell the fairy tale of Mrs. Santa. She developed a story of her own including a Christmas cat, a reindeer, a bird and an elf.

The business kicks off

Ritva drew on talent in her family to develop the idea: her daughter-in-law Mari Pohjanvesi drew beautiful pictures of her characters and made a



dress for her – and she even found a house for Mrs Santa in Hailuoto.

Over the past years, she’s been visiting schools to tell stories and teach children to draw. She’s equally happy to draw on classroom blackboards and to use the technique of fast drawing and fast coloring on her Ipad. Learning is a key to every child’s future success. Follow a stroke of charcoal and see how watercolor is spreading nicely of the drawing. Art makes us human and happy. It is also meditative.

The Christmas story is not set in stone: it takes on different twists and turns each time, and that is part of the magic.

“You never know what happens when you start to draw,” Ritva says enigmatically.

She’s piloting activities with small groups

of guests in her Hailuoto cottage, ranging from gingerbread decorating, handicrafts and playing in the snow: making snow angels and building snowmen. In summer, visitors will be able to enjoy picking berries and discovering mushrooms when joining Mrs Santa on her very own nature trail.

Hopes and dreams

During the early years of COVID, Rita switched most of her activities online. “My aim was always to create a business on my sofa. So now I’m using the Internet to tell the story of Mrs Santa,” she says.

And she does it in her own sophisticated style: her latest Instagram videos show her singing Jingle Bells, throwing snowballs and teaching a simple technique to draw a Christmas elf.

It is a beguiling mix of fun and easy learning that works remarkably well in a virtual world. With her social media presence steadily growing, Mrs Santa Claus and her team are doing their best to capture the imagination of the world’s children now and beyond.

Mrs Santa’s favorite food: rice porridge

Favorite drink: crystal clear water

Plans for expanding the business: “By 2025, I’d like to have more elves to help me.”

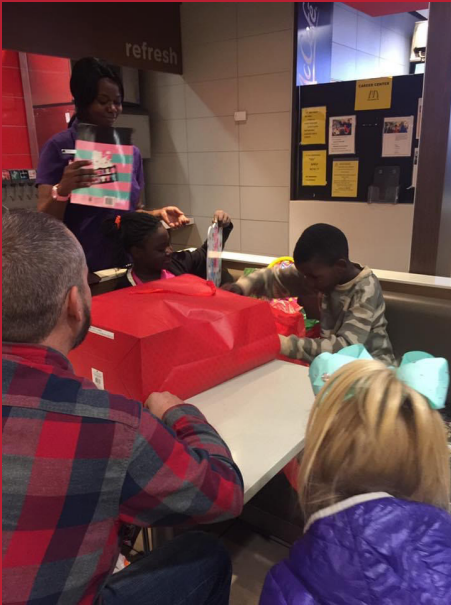


NOEL JONES'

Toy Paw Patrol

Christmastime is special to countless souls. But for Noel Jones, Christmas is not only meaningful, but it is her birthday! Noel, yes, her real name, being born on December 25 set in the stars her destiny to serve and help others. Growing up, her family gathered to celebrate Christmas and her birthday. She always felt special and loved.





But as an adult, she faced heartache. She found herself alone and longing for her big family gatherings. The sacredness of Christmas was shared with co-parenting duties for her daughter with her ex-husband. She had her daughter on Christmas Eve and her daughter spends Christmas Day with her father. This is not how she envisioned spending the holidays.

Enter Jeremy Jones who swept her off her feet. They fell in love and Noel decided to give love a try and she married her hero. Immediately, their hearts to give back were evident their first Christmas together. Jeremy Jones, a deputy sheriff with the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, began his nightly patrol shift much like all his past patrols. As he drove around, he witnessed children playing in the poverty-stricken areas where he answered calls for help from residents many times. Reaching for his cell phone, he called Noel, and they

began discussing the need to do something. Noel agreed and told Jeremy to go buy toys. After Jeremy answered a domestic violence call, Noel met Jeremy at a nearby McDonald's and sat on Christmas Day giving gifts to a family that had nothing. The year was 2014, and this was their first collaboration to make Christmas the most wonderful time of the year for families in need!

In that moment, their purpose and passions were sealed to serve at risk children on Christmas Day! Over a six-year period, Jeremy and Noel continued to purchase toys from their own funds to provide children with toys. Jeremy began approaching other deputies within the Greenville County Sheriff's Office who also took it upon themselves to participate. While Jeremy asked other deputies for donations, Noel set up a toy collection box to request donations at her salon. Instead of receiving tips, she asked her clients to donate toys. These simple loving gestures laid the foundation for what would become known throughout Greenville County as LEOSanta.

From the grass roots efforts of a few deputies, LEOSanta was formerly organized in 2020 as a non-profit. Today, LEOSanta has expanded to the participation of hundreds of law enforcement officers and volunteers. Building upon the success, LEOSanta has continued to expand its footprint each year to increase the number of children and families the organization is

able to provide joy, love, and compassion through its gifting of toys program. From the initial meal at McDonald's of the two founders providing gifts to one lonely child to the following year's growth serving 20 children to the steady exponential growth each year to 2022, when LEOSanta had a record-breaking year of serving approximately 2,000 children! LEOSanta's service goes beyond providing one gift to a child. LEOSanta ensures each child feels special and receives 3-5 toys each and helps build relationships with officers with the residents in the areas they patrol.

To accomplish such an enormous feat requires volunteers and law enforcement agencies' cooperation. In 2022, every law enforcement agency in Greenville County participated in the LEOSanta's operations. This included more than 175 law enforcement officers volunteering their time to be a part of special Christmas deliveries as well as hundreds of volunteers! Through stealth coordination, Christmas gifts were delivered throughout Greenville County as well as to the local children's hospital, shelters, and addiction rehabilitation centers in the area.

LEOSanta's goals and mission are built upon three themes. First, to always leave smiling faces on families and children who are not as fortunate as many others. Secondly, to provide a bridge of trust and



For her devotion to serving underserved children and to the surprise of Noel, she was honored with the Hometown Hero Award by the Hallmark Channel's Home and Family Show. LEOSanta's 'Toy Patrol' tireless work at improving community relations by delivering gifts from the back of officers' patrol cars received national attention and has become a role model for other law enforcement agencies around the country!

respect between the law enforcement community and areas of the community facing hardships. Third, to provide an avenue for community members, schools, and businesses to join LEOSanta initiatives to experience the warm feeling of giving and contributing to a better world.

While the founders and the board know LEOSanta is only an organization, they believe the organization's efforts touch the entire 360 spectrum of the needs of every human being. LEOSanta's determination to help meet the need for compassion, love, and the giving of time from individuals, groups, and at all organizational levels has helped unite all members of the community not only at Christmas but throughout the year.



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Upcoming Events in 2023

ISC2024 Registration is Open, click [HERE](#) for registration.

September 1- November 15 Accepting Applications for IBRBS Board of Directors

November 5, 2023 Pancho Claus Birthday Celebration

November 18, 2023 Santa's Helpers Trivia Night

December 23, 2023 200th Anniversary Twas The Night Before Christmas

February 2-4, 2024 North Pole Cornerstone

March 8-10, 2024 North Pole Radio

May 2-4, 2024 Santa Nana Holiday University

May 13, 2024 Registration Opens for Santa Family Reunion

June 6-7, 2024 CPW Advanced Performance Workshop

We are looking for compelling and captive stories of Santas, Mrs. Clauses, and Christmas Performers. Do you have a story of your IBRBS chapter in action in the community? Do you volunteer for a non-profit? Do you know of a Christmas Performer who embodies the tenets of IBRBS? Do you have input or comments? Email Newsletter@IBRBS.org! We love to hear from you.

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Next Issue: *Leading Ladies, Mrs. Clauses* March 2024





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SATURDAY 10/28
 Mystic Christmas

SUNDAY 10/29
 Joyeux Noel

FRIDAY 11/3
 Flipping for Christmas

SATURDAY 11/4
 Never Been Chris'd

SUNDAY 11/5
 The Santa Summit

FRIDAY 11/10
 Everything Christmas

SATURDAY 11/11
 Christmas Island


SUNDAY 11/12
 A Heidelberg Holiday

FRIDAY 11/17
 Navigating Christmas


SATURDAY 11/18
 A Merry Scottish Christmas

SUNDAY 11/19
 Holiday Hotline

THURSDAY 11/23
 Catch Me If You Claus

 **FRIDAY 11/24**
DOUBLE FEATURE 6/5c
 Letters to Santa
 Holiday Road

 **SATURDAY 11/25**
DOUBLE FEATURE 6/5c
 Christmas in Notting Hill
 Haul Out the Holly: Lit Up

 **SUNDAY 11/26**
DOUBLE FEATURE 6/5c
 Our Christmas Mural
 A Biltmore Christmas



FRIDAY 12/1
 My Norwegian Holiday

SATURDAY 12/2
 A Not So Royal Christmas

SUNDAY 12/3
 Christmas with a Kiss

FRIDAY 12/8
 Magic in Mistletoe

SATURDAY 12/9
 Christmas on Cherry Lane

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