

A ?de-briefing? with Santa



Santa and his elf Brooke Lakeman share a cup of hot chocolate after the last children's interview. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

Santa comes in many forms, and changes form on a regular basis. It's possible that Bancroft's Santa will have a new form next Christmas, so we interviewed the current edition on his experiences in this year's lead-up to Christmas.

So what's it like to be Santa Claus?

In a word, it's wonderful ? and a whole lot of fun. The children are fantastic. They give you a great sense of responsibility ? trying to make sure that their Christmas experience is warm and positive.

What's difficult about the task?

Sometimes very young children get frightened. Santa's house is a strange new location, and occasionally those under two will start to cry. You have to work with their parents to calm them down and reassure them that only good is meant.

How about the other end of the spectrum ? older kids?

When kids get to be nine or 10, many become investigative reporters. ?Are you really Santa Claus?? ?Is Santa really true?? Every now and then, one will tug your beard ? and get astonished that it doesn't move. I'm quick to tell them ?Of course it's real?.

So there's a ?golden age??

Children four, five, and six. They really believe. They have the innocence we'd all like to have at Christmas.

Are the children asking for tons of presents?

Very rarely. Most just ask for one or two presents, generally the annual trend. I had a lot of requests for Lego this year, and iPhones were definitely on many wishlists. The characters from Frozen remained popular.

However, there are children who don't want gifts for themselves, but for their parents or siblings ? bless them. ?Family happiness? is a regular request. One little girl just wanted ?peace.?

How do you deal with the greedy ones?

I tell them that Santa has to fill a lot of requests from all over the world, and that ?We'll do our best.?

How's the attendance been this year?

In my impression, we've had a bigger influx of kids. Mind you, there were a lot of children at Santa's parade this year; maybe it was the weather.

What's the parade like?

It's very heart-warming to wave from the sleigh at all the little faces, most smiling. I'm also gratified to see so many families sharing the experience.

I understand your wife also gets involved.

Yes, she answers the letters which are left at Santa House ? although most of them go to the post office, where it's more of a form reply. My wife writes a personal response to every letter she gets.

Rumour is that you'll be taking the form of a new person next year.

Yes, it's kind of like Doctor Who; Santa goes on, but has to change his outward form slightly every few years. I've been in the current form for three years now, and it's been a very happy time for me. If my current form holds up, I may have another year in me. But even if there's a shift, Santa will still be here next December.

I took a minute to speak with Santa's elf as well. Brooke Lakeman volunteered to help Santa this year. She's a Bancroft native who has just completed a B.A. in anthropology at Trent University, and is now in her first year (of two) in the education program, training to become a primary school teacher. She has already put in practice teaching time in Maynooth. She loves being an elf, since she finds the Santa House ?the happiest place on earth.? She termed her experience ?fabulous.?

The other person at Santa House was Scott McArthur, president of the Lions Club, which maintains the House and organizes both the Santa Claus parade and the Santa House visits. This year, Scott and other Lions have put additional work into the House, with a new deck, fresh paint trim, and a thorough cleaning and re-organization of the interior. Given the compliments received from both local and out-of-town visitors, he feels the work has proven worthwhile.