

Santa Claus helps dress up the holiday spirit

The holiday season is the time of year when we see those familiar, friendly faces that we haven't seen since — well, since the last holiday season. Of course, one of the most familiar faces is that jolly man in the red suit. No, not Richard Simmons (the red jogging suit comes *after* the holidays). This is the time of year for Santa Claus.

— James D. Wolf Jr.

1,954,800

The number of times that the mechanical Santa in the Arlington Heights holiday display will wave to visitors between Nov. 24 and Jan. 11.

The walk-through display — which includes mechanical spinning dreidels, light sculptures including a giant rocking horse and windmill and more — is located at North School Park by the Arlington Heights Park District Administration Center, 410 N. Arlington Heights Road.

20,000

The number of children who will sit on Santa's lap at Woodfield Shopping Center in Schaumburg between Nov. 11 and Dec. 24 this year, said Stephanie Hall, Woodfield's marketing director.

Of those children, 200 reserved time to meet Santa before the shopping center opened with the Santa Express program that ran from Nov. 13 to today.

Putting together the scene in the Grand Court where Santa receives took 400 man hours.

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The number of charitable agencies looking for Santas this year through the Volunteer Center of Northwest Suburban Chicago.

The Lutheran Home in Arlington Heights is looking for a Santa Claus Monday and Tuesday and Dec. 18 to 22 for the senior citizens who are in its programs.

Shelter Inc. is looking for a Santa Claus with costume for an upcoming party for the children and adolescents.

Anyone who wants to volunteer should contact the Volunteer Center of Northwest Suburban Chicago, 2121 S. Goebbert Road, Arlington Heights, (847) 228-1320.

6,000

The estimated number of letters

for Santa that post offices in northern Illinois will receive this year. The letters are all sent to the Consumer Affairs and Claims office in Carol Stream. The northern Illinois area extends from Chicago to Iowa and Wisconsin to Route 88, said Tim Ratliff, post office spokesman.

Last year, northern Illinois post offices received letters in English, Spanish and Chinese. Since 1995, letters have come from 17 states and Canada and Ireland.

200

The number of Santa suits ready for rental by Santa's helpers at Mar Ray Costume Shop, 154 N. Northwest Hwy., Palatine.

The shop began taking suit reservations Nov. 1, and the first suits went out the weekend after Thanksgiving. Outfits can include gloves, a beard, glasses and padding.

After Halloween, "Christmas is our second-biggest season," said owner Marge Olfzewski.

5 to 10

How many years the average Santa beard and wig lasts, although a good Santa suit can last forever, said Shirley Johnson, owner of P.J.'s Trick Shop, 1308 N. Rand Road, Arlington Heights.

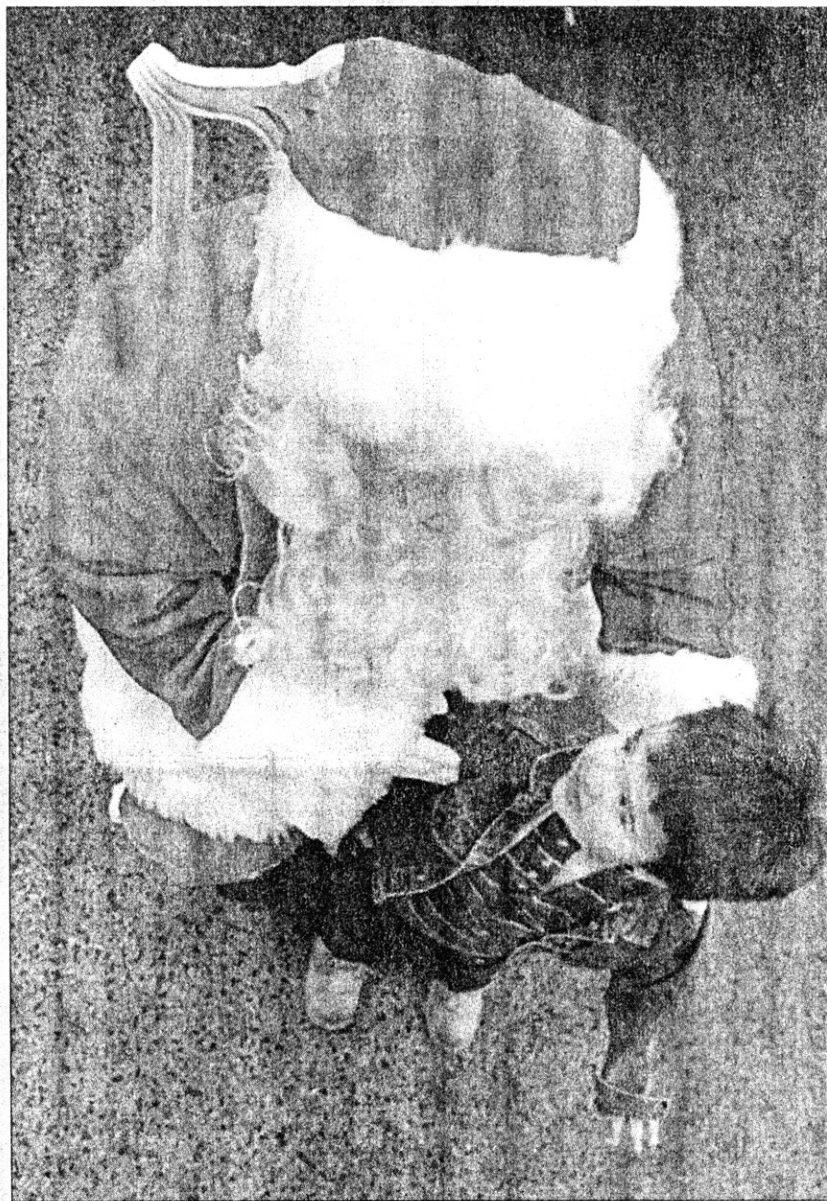
Her shop sells about 20 Santa suits a year, about two to four times the number they rent.

Many people buy a higher quality beard than costume "because children are looking at the face," she said.

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There's only one real Santa Claus, although he's also known as Father Christmas, Kriss Kringle and Saint Nicholas.

According to www.santa.com, in Japan, he's known as Santa Kuroshu; in Chile, he is Viejo Pascuero; in China, he is Dun Che Lao Ren (Old Man Christmas); and in the Netherlands, he is Sinterklaas.



Michael Bates, 3, of Palatine visits Santa Claus at the Palatine Jaycees Christmas tree sale Dec. 2. The bearded man is very popular in the area, and he has the numbers to prove it.

Daily Herald Photo/Daniel White