

A Jolly Good Time!
There Was Comfort and Joy the Day Santa Came to Town

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A SaskTel Elf (Lauren Butts) with one of the students at the Santa Face-to-Face with Children with Disabilities event.

It's almost that time.

As we speak, somewhere near the North Pole, Santa's elves are in the workshop frantically putting the finishing touches on this year's presents. On Christmas Eve, Santa will gather Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blixen (and the lead reindeer with the shiny red nose). He will then prepare his sleigh and deliver the presents to children all over the world.

Before all of that happens though, Santa gives his crew a breather. Thirty years ago, a tradition began that has lasted to this very day. Santa, along with Mrs. Claus and some of the elves make a very special trip to Regina for the Santa Face-to-Face with Children with Disabilities event.

"It's always such a special time," said Mrs. Claus (aka Phyllis Pearson).

Phyllis may have been retired from SaskTel for a long while, but she has been a part of every one of these events which are hosted by SaskTel and the SaskTel Pioneers. She began as the 'Storybook Lady', became a 'Fairy Godmother' and finally became Mrs. Claus.

"It always makes me feel good to take part in an event where we can do something for these kids," she said. "It's very exciting for the kids and the parents are always so appreciative. I will continue to be Mrs. Claus for as long as I can. I wouldn't miss it for anything!"



Mrs. Claus (aka Phyllis Pearson) chats with one of the children.

The same can be said for our jolly friend Santa.

Santa (aka Jim Goldy) has been retired from SaskTel for 16 years. But every year, you can find him at SaskTel's Christmas related events. Besides this event, he makes the trip for appearances at SaskTel's partner schools in Regina (Kitchener and Sacred Heart schools). He has amassed a sleigh full of great memories over the years.



Santa Claus (aka Jim Goldy).

"It's a great feeling to have the opportunity to brighten the day for hundreds of kids," he said. "I believe Christmas is for the kids. I keep coming back every year because if I can get even one kid to smile, it makes it all worthwhile."

There were lots of smiles to go around, something that was not lost on Raelynne Merkle, one of the teachers from Kitchener School, where some of the day's special guests go to school.

"These are all complex needs kids," she said. "I'm looking around the room and it's so amazing to see them so engaged and excited about everything that's happening today."

This year's event took place on 12 Dec 2018 at the Ramada Plaza Hotel which has been a strong supporter of the event for all 30 years. The day involved 37 volunteer elves, including first time elf Jill Mazurak.

"This morning has been so great, with a room full of kids playing, singing and having lots of fun," said Jill. "I love the idea of giving back any way I can, especially at this time of year. Interacting with these children has been a great way to get into the Christmas spirit."

Hope McCheyne, who coordinates the event every year, is always touched to see the joy the elves bring to the children.

“It’s great to see these employees volunteer their elf time,” she said. “The elves at this event are always those who care about children and have a love of Christmas that they want to share. They have the ability to share joy, warmth and the ability to tap into their inner child.”

The day included crafts, games, face painting, balloon making and lots of carol singing with a guitar playing singer named Burt.

"Very few projects will last 30 years," said Pioneer Manager Darrell Liebrecht. "For a project to last this long it has to be something that touches people and encourages them to volunteer. You also need a group of dedicated individuals to organize it year after year. This one definitely has both."

“The Pioneers are very pleased to support a project that assists people and helps give them a special moment in times that can be very difficult. Seeing the smiles on not only the kids’ faces but also the parents’ is something that you won’t forget. This is one important thing that the Pioneers try to accomplish both through volunteerism and financially."