

# WEEBLE WORDS

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## SANTA BOB SHARES

I am a volunteer with **Lifepath Hospice**, and I was asked if I would join one of their “care teams” singing Christmas Carols to the residents of their various Hospice Homes in the Sun City Center Florida area. All of these residents are elderly, most have no local family, no visitors and the average “stay” is less than a week.

The team was a dozen people comprised of both nurses and volunteers. We started out our caroling one afternoon in late November. The patients were mostly unresponsive, sorta staring at the TV but moreso into space. The team would proceed in first, clapping and singing “Here Comes Santa Claus.” I would enter, greet each person and hand each of the patients a little gold jingle bell tied with a red ribbon. We would all sing a chorus or two of “Jingle Bells”, and then as we started to exit, we would sing “We wish you a Merry Christmas”!

The staff could not believe what was happening; these almost comatose patients were clapping, singing and ringing their jingle bells! We went on and on, into private rooms, wherever we could find one or more gathered together. When we finished the first Hospice Home, we caravanned in cars to the next, and to the next. For over three hours we traveled around Sun City, bringing laughter and smiles to a lot of patients.

I remember one gentleman in particular, his nurse told us all, "Now Mr. Smith\* will probably just tell us to get the \_\_\_ out. He hasn't had a kind word to anybody since he got here!" Well, the team entered his room singing “Here Comes Santa Claus”, by the time I entered he was kind of nodding his head in time with the song, I handed him his jingle bell, and he started singing “Jingle Bells” with us! I glanced at his nurse, she had tears in her eyes, and I had tears in my eyes and Mr. Smith was laughing and singing with us as we exited his room. Mr. Smith passed two days later.

Later that evening, I thought about how we probably gave a lot of these folks their last laugh, their last smile and left them singing their last song. What a blessing God had allowed us, to share a few minutes of these folks last days on this earth. I believe we sent most of them home to their God with a smile!

Read more about Santa Bob Elkin on page 3.

\* name changed for privacy.

We need help reaching our children of military families. Please call Santa-America if you can help!

Santa's visit to children come from referrals by the medical community and hospice as well as from special needs educators and social workers.

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photo by Elizabeth McGonagle Graham

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS...WITHIN YOUR COMMUNITY

## Santa Ernest



It's May and most places are deeply into spring... a time for renewal. It's the time of the year when our children's visits seem to taper off a bit, and all the regional meetings and national Santa planning accelerates. This year, it also seems to be a time of healing and reflection for many Santas, and a time to think about who we are, and what we really stand for, when we put on the red suit. Santa-America keeps focus on bringing Love, Hope and Joy to our children and families with special needs. "It's Elf before self" on this team..... always was... always will be.

As Santas pause, reflect on their purpose and seek affiliations, Santa-America's growth is really accelerating! We now average 3 Santa candidates a month. Even with the highest standards for background investigation and a required commitment for local hospice training and volunteering, 98% of our new applicants are welcomed to the Santa-America team..... and they are raring to go!

We are honored to be the national charity for the March 2009 Celebrate Santa Convention in Gatlinburg, TN. Santa Ernest, Elf Cathy and Elf Nita will be there with the official Santa-America motorcycle and sidecar for the big parade, and we encourage other biker Santas to join us! We will bring our traveling art show: "Believe 365" to the convention for all to see, enjoy and be inspired.

This Spring, take time to reflect upon and renew your commitment to our great cause.... Love, Hope and Joy wrapped in a big warm Santa hug for every child with a special need.

## HELP THE ELF!-Elf NITA

Well Hello, again Santa's and Mrs. Santa's and Elves. Here we are at the end of April, moving into May. I just wish the weather "down here" in South Alabama would make up its mind. One day it's 85 and beautiful and the next is 70 and that "north wind" is blowing like crazy. Those poor little flowers out in my yard don't quite know what to do!!! (But the weeds certainly do!!)



I'm well into my round of second emails to Santa's who haven't answered my first email and the response has been very good. Thanks to all of you who have emailed or called. Progress is definitely being made. I have had the occasion to speak with many of you and what a pleasure. It's so nice to have a conversation with Santa's whom I have only met through email. Always feel free to call me when I can answer a question or be of help in any way. Please let me reiterate, getting your application is so important. We really need to complete a file on each Santa, no matter how long you may have been visiting children as a Santa-America Santa. We will be called to task in the future to be accountable for each person representing our organization and we need to be ready. Those files also promote, in my opinion, better communication between Daphne and each Santa; they help me get to know each of you. If you have a website, I copy as much of it as I can and put in your file and that's another connection with you. I love seeing all those great pictures on your websites. In the last couple months, I have started folders for 14!new Santa's who want to join our Sleigh. Isn't that wonderful!!!

Thanks again for all you do for the children we serve through Santa-America. YOU ARE TERRIFIC!!! Take care.

### Santa-America Directors

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# BEHIND THE RED SUIT

## Santa Bob Elkin

### Santa, tell us a little bit about yourself?

I was born in the bayous of Louisiana, raised and schooled in the hills of Arkansas, spending four years on the blue grass of Kentucky before moving to the fun and sun of the beaches of Florida in the late sixties.

My first career was with the Sherwin-Williams Co., but from that point on I pretty much worked for myself as a sole proprietor, or as a partner, or as an owner/officer of corporations. All were businesses in the investment banking, commercial real estate and insurance fields or a combination of any two or all three. I am only semi-retired, as I am still taking care of my existing clients in the insurance business.

I married my wife Jody in 1979, we each have two children by a previous marriage, so we now have four children, six grand children, one great grandson and another great grand child on the way! My hobbies are fishing, more fishing and carpentry work.

### What was your first experience as Santa Claus?

In 1993, my oldest son called me in a bit of a panic, the man who was supposed to play Santa at my granddaughter's day care had to cancel. Since I had been entertaining children for over ten years as a Shrine and as a professional clown, "Waki the Wizard" I immediately said I would, and set about finding a Red Suit and the accessories.

I had walked into a lot of day cares for birthday parties and other events **numerous** times as Waki (wacky) but, when I walked in as **Santa**, Wow, what a difference, the looks on those little faces, the awe, and the brightest of smiles! the reverence, it all really humbled me. I still get a bit of a chill up my spine when I remember that feeling!

### How did you decide to become Santa?

After that first visit at my granddaughter's day care, I was hooked! I started to contact the various booking agents who booked me as a clown and I began to get a few more Santa bookings each year. I really wanted to portray Santa as often as I could.

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

A good friend and fellow Shrine Clown, Tom Theriaque, first introduced me to Santa Ernest and Santa-America in the spring of 2005. I immediately signed up as I knew this was something I wanted to do. I, like many other Santa's was afraid I might be too emotional, but believe me, all of you Santa's can do it! God will give you the strength to make these Hospice visits, they mean so very much to the family and to the little ones! I attended Santa Tim's IUSC later in 2005, and began to learn the importance of being as authentic a Santa as you can possibly be.

### Anything else you would like to share?

I have heard so many Santa's say they could not be a Santa for Santa-America because they are too emotional. It is precisely because you are "too emotional" that you will never regret a decision to join Santa-America. **NEVER**, in your life will you ever feel so blessed by God to be **The Man Behind The Red Suit** as when you can bring a smile, share a little laughter, say a little prayer or sing a Christmas carol with someone who is ready to meet their God. I promise you, God will give you the strength! And God said, "when you made my children smile, you made me smile"!



*Santa Bob Elkin coordinates the Palm Tree Santas.*

## SANTAS SPREADING OUR MISSION

Please send in your stories and pictures of your special visits. We need to refresh our photos to better represent the diversity of our Santas and our coverage throughout the country.

Many thanks to **Santa Dave Jordan** of Rock Hill, SC for representing Santa-America at the North and South Carolina Jewelers Convention this April in Myrtle Beach, SC. Thanks to our special supporter **Jewelers for Children**, Santa Dave was given the opportunity to share our work with over 150 jewelers, vendors and friends. Many thanks also to **Mark Stokes** who had been awarded a "Globe Clock" earlier in the convention but after hearing about our special visits he donated the gift to Santa-America.



Executive Director Dave Rocha, Jewelers for Children and Santa Dave Jordan enjoy the NC/SC Jewelers Convention

Kudos are also owed to **Santa George Caso** (FL) and **Santa John Scheuch** (MO) for spending time making presentations to community civic groups. We encourage all Santas to share our work within your community. Santa-America worked with each Santa to develop catered presentations and handouts...Contact Elf Cathy or Elf Nita to create your catered flyer for Santa-America.

## REPORTING ON YOUR SPECIAL VISITS



This year, Santa-America would like to improve on our visit database. We do not want your special visits to go un-documented. Please take the time after your visit to download the visit report form from the Santa-America website. We are making changes to the website and promise to include an interactive form. When you include photos, remember to include the photo release form. If you need more direction or explanation, Elf Nita and Elf Cathy stand ready to serve.

## SANTA-AMERICA GIFTS & YOUR SUPPORT

Many of you know, Santa-America has moved to symbolic gifts that represent Love, Hope and Joy. Thanks to Santa **Steve and Mrs. Bobbie Whiting Claus**, the "Santa-America HUG" is under production. The "Santa-America HUG" is a polar fleece scarf with mittens attached on the ends designed to remind children that Santa's love and warmth is always with them.

Our first children's book "An Angel Comes to Visit" by **Sheila Booth-Alberstadt** is nearing publication thanks to the good work of **Santa Jim Pollard**...and a second book by Sheila is in the works!!

**Here's where you come in...**Given the current economic condition, we need you...Santa's... to build a local base of supporters to back the gifts, training and expenses that make your visit so valuable. Support can be varied and suit your Santa style. Ideas include Santa breakfasts, speaking to civic groups, requesting support from area foundations, charity motorcycle rides, etc. Contact Elf Cathy or Elf Nita for specific things you can do to build support.



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

## CELEBRATE SANTA NEWS



As the largest national volunteer Santa organization in the United States, there is always a list of needed resources to support the work of Santa-America. But, when you're Santa America the work is an act of love and support for others which always lightens the load considerably.

Enter Celebrate Santa, [www.celebratesanta.com](http://www.celebratesanta.com). As a very proud sponsor of Santa America we are doing everything we can to assist. And our sponsorship partners are helping as well. This list will grow like Santa America! All proceeds from the silent auction will go to benefit Celebrate Santa's

two special charities. Besides Santa America, the East Tennessee Children's Hospital will share in the total monies collected that night. We hope to have many wonderful items on auction that will truly benefit the charities and the lucky winning participants as well!

Additionally for the Santa's in attendance we will be offering a very special commemorative plaque with the newly posted Santa Claus Oath and the logos of Santa America and Celebrate Santa and the date of this very special gathering. These commemorative plaques will be sold with all profits going exclusively to Santa America.

Celebrate Santa is looking for more companies and products to entice our attendees at the Gala. We hope to have a vast array of choices and wonderful attractions to help us benefit this worthy cause. Celebrate Santa has three advisors on the Santa America board and we are excited to help the hard working staff of Santa America achieve their goals of bringing love, hope and joy wrapped in a warm Santa hug to every boy and girl who needs one! Contact Santa Joe Moore at [santajoe@celebratesanta.com](mailto:santajoe@celebratesanta.com) or 865.244.5230 to help out on this very worthy event.

## THE ELF EXPERIENCE

Santa, we want you to develop a teen elf program in your community. It's an excellent way to educate the community on our special work and build a network of support for our special children and their families. Worried about how it works?

**Elf Judy Davenport** has helped us further the program to include the adult Elf. The adult Elf serves as a liasion between the school and Santa. This is an excellent way for adults to participate in our special work. The experience is rewarding for the community, the school, the student, the Santa

but most importantly to our special child. Younger children may be utilized on fun, cameo type appearances. To learn more on building a program, contact Elf Cathy at [info@santa-america.org](mailto:info@santa-america.org).



## GET WELL SOON



Santa-America's focus is on our special children and their families. Yet, we want all members of our sleigh to know they have our love and support. We are thrilled to learn **Mary Moore** is doing well from her recent illness. We also send a warm Santa hug to **Pat Horgan**, SA Board Member, recovering from heart surgery.

## SANTA TO DO'S

Send Elf Nita your paperwork!!!

Submit your pictures and stories! We'll upload to the website.

Send the name and contact information of a local paper and reporter. We'll send them a note about your involvement with Santa-America.

Contact Santa-America for your e-copy of the Santa-America Volunteer Sleigh Kit.

Identify a venue for a Santa-America fundraiser. Contact Elf Cathy or Elf Nita for details.

Share with elected officials your special visits and the work of Santa-America. Elf Cathy and Elf Nita are ready to support you as needed.

Contact Elf Cathy to learn how you can team up with an area school to build



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# SANTA GATHERINGS

Santa-America is thrilled to see the emergence of Santa gatherings throughout the country. The regional meetings provide an exciting opportunity for Santa-America to strengthen our relationships with our Santas, as well as answer the detailed questions about our philosophy, activities and direction. These meetings also bring together Santas to support one another. It is that spirit of community and partnership that Santa-America wants to embrace.



We are tasked by our donors (and volunteers) to be wise stewards of our funds. Where we can, Santa-America wants to participate in all gatherings, whether they are get-togethers sponsored by an organization, or many of the emerging events that are inclusive to any Santa, Elf or Mrs. Claus. Many of these gatherings also support Santa-America by hosting raffles, etc. So, please make sure to keep us in mind as you become aware of area events.

We love and support all Santa associations. We remain focused on supporting our special needs children and their families by delivering our gifts of Love, Hope and Joy! Please contact the North Pole with questions.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**May 30-June 1-Palm Tree Santa gathering in St. Augustine, FL. Contact Santa Bob Elkin for more information or visit [www.palmtreesantas.com](http://www.palmtreesantas.com).**

March 2009- Celebrate Santa Convention. Visit [www.CelebrateSanta.com](http://www.CelebrateSanta.com) for details.

Summer 2009 Santa-America Training Conference...details to follow in upcoming issue.

Gathering not listed! Contact us so we can add it to the list!

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



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