



*Santa*  
*America*



Courtesy Elizabeth Graham, Lasting Memories Photography

## VOLUNTEER SLEIGH KIT

October 2007

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©2007 Santa-America Inc. This volunteers “sleigh-kit” was printed in August 2007 and will be periodically revised and upgraded as our data bases grow. Future updates will be available at [www.santa-america.org](http://www.santa-america.org) under the “Resources” tab.



## A WORD OF THANKS

Thank you for joining the very special work of Santa-America (SA)! Your decision to bring **Love, Hope and Joy** to our special children and their families is an indication of your giving heart. We are pleased to have you driving our sleigh in your community.

As a volunteer, you are part of a team working to bring **Love, Hope and Joy** throughout the year. Because of your commitment and support, the mission of Santa-America is circling the globe!

This volunteer sleigh-kit provides background information about Santa-America's beginnings and mission. It includes formal policies and special hints for building the Santa-America network in your community.

Please contact the Santa-America offices with questions or concerns.

Santa-America, Inc.  
308 Belrose Avenue  
Suite 200-East  
Daphne, Alabama 36526  
(251) 379-0462  
info@santa-america.org

## OUR SPECIAL DONORS

The work of Santa-America can not be accomplished without the support of our volunteers and special donors. We would like to acknowledge the following donors for their national support of Santa-America.



**JEWELERS FOR CHILDREN**  
A GIFT OF LOVE FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

**The Elf Group, LLC.**

**Monte L. Moorer Foundation**



*You help our special children and their communities to feel  
the Magic of Santa and His Elves.*



## OUR VISION

Santa-America is an international, intergenerational, value-rich, year-round community based service organization. The act of bringing **Love, Hope and Joy** to our special children and their families is a life changing experience to all who touch our mission.



## OUR MISSION

Santa-America brings symbolic gifts representing **Love, Hope and Joy** to special children and their families in hospice, long-term pediatric care or suffering from post-traumatic stress.

## OUR BEGINNINGS

Every organization has a beginning. Santa-America began in 1999 when my wife Darcy lay dying of pancreatic cancer in an Atlanta hospice. I spent the last days of Darcy's life sleeping next to her bed.

When I left the room to meet with the doctor and nurses, I met another patient; a little baby girl. She was just a few months old and dying from a brain tumor. Everyone at the hospital adopted her and with the nurses, I held her in my arms and rocked her to sleep. She died two days before my wife.

The hospice tenderly supported our families as we grieved. We were two families in very different stages of life. A young mother and father lost their only child, and my family lost a daughter, sister, wife, mother, and grandmother. However, both families faced the same gut wrenching agony of grief and bereavement.

The hospice staff checked in as we slowly began to move on. Grief and bereavement are deeply personal and do not move to a time schedule. For many, healing takes longer... much longer.

I wanted to do something to recognize the hospice for the kindness they showed my family. Some families donate equipment, furnishings, books and magazines after losing their loved one. I wanted to do more.

The answer came in the summer of 2003. My wife and the little infant girl had been on my mind. I awoke, put my feet on the floor, and declared to no one in particular, that I was going to grow my beard, don my trusty Santa suit, and become a hospice volunteer for Southwest Alabama hospices near Mobile... that is, if there was such a thing as a Santa hospice volunteer! So Santa Ernest set out to visit hospice patients in hospitals, hospices, and homes. There were no rules and few procedures. Previously, the typical Santa visit had always been a quick walk through the facility during the holidays, simple gifts like candy canes and a jolly "Ho! Ho! Ho!" A minute or





## OUR VISITS

Santa-America tenderly serves three groups of very special children and their families. **We are referred by hospices and hospital staff, social workers, and special needs educators. Santa America does not take referrals from the immediate family, churches, civic groups, or the public without contacting the hospice or hospital staff caring for the child.** Santa works as part of a team to bring support to:

- Children in hospice or children with parents or grandparents in hospice
- Children under chronic pediatric or palliative care
- Children suffering from post traumatic stress

Santa is love, hope and joybringing together 3 or even 4 generations! Santa-America is a grandparents' generation tenderly loving and supporting young families in crisis during the heightened emotions of the holiday season and 365 days of the year. A mother or grandmother can bring Santa to their dying child, knowing there so few special things they can do as end-of-life approaches. For a child, Santa's visit IS a very special event.



Santa's visit is built around over 30 specific data points about the child, siblings, parents, best friends, pets, favorite toys, TV and PC programs and games, past adventures and experiences, medical condition and treatment protocols where a supporting word from Santa can make the difficult a bit easier to bear. Santa's visit builds on family memories and traditions while creating new memories and traditions for the future.

Santa explores the child's "Wish List" and may read a traditional holiday story or a special pediatric hospice specific book. Santa will spend about an hour with the child and family, and set aside time to visit siblings or best friends. Santa may be accompanied by Mrs. Claus or an "Elf Assistant", particularly for children under 3 years of age.

Santa respects the spiritual values and beliefs of each family, and can function in a spiritual or secular context as directed by the family. Over the years, Santa Claus has evolved into a magical friend who transcends religion, race, ethnicity, and gender. He IS unconditional love, hope, and joy wrapped in a big Santa hug which is the best medicine of all!

Santa-America believes that the Santa who makes an initial visit "adopts" the family and makes all follow-up visits for consistency and credibility. For hospice families, at least one bereavement period visit is recommended as part of ongoing support. Since Santa's visits are free, not restricted by health insurance or government reimbursements, co-pays etc., he can visit a family for as long as he's needed. One Santa is making his 5th visit to a family who lost their daughter. The surviving sibling will become one of Santa's volunteer elves and will join him in visiting other special children and their families.



Information on a child and family is confidential. Our Santas receive special training in compliance with HIPPA patient privacy regulations as part of their local hospice volunteer training.

## WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS DO?

Volunteers are people of all ages who want to support the Santa-America mission. Volunteers may serve in a variety of capacities as Santas, Mrs. Claus, Elves, and “In the Workshop”. All volunteers need to be selfless with a caring heart and compassion. Additionally, good social skills – being able to chat and actively listen with interest—and a sense of humor are beneficial.

### BEFORE YOU START AS A VOLUNTEER

All volunteers are required to fill out a volunteer application/ information form and provide two references that speak of your abilities to provide Love, Hope and Joy. All volunteers are required to volunteer with a local hospital or hospice as regular adult volunteers (not Santa-specific). This is required for several reasons:

1. It is the affiliation utilized so that your referrals come from the medical community.
2. It provides you with 18-30 hours of local volunteer training.
3. You will receive a NCQA compliant background check—the same as a doctor or nurse.
4. You will receive an annual TB test (some hospitals and hospices also provide a flu shot).
5. You will be visiting elderly hospice patients as well as children to gain experience.

### WHEN YOU START VOLUNTEERING

Once we have received satisfactory references and you have enrolled in a local hospice training program, you will be listed as a Santa-America volunteer. In the case of Santas, you will also be listed on the Map of America.

Santa-America encourages you to take advantage of all hospice training. Additionally, Santa-America will host a biennial training conference at our host campus at Bayside Academy in Daphne, Alabama. The next conference is planned for 2009. If you have specific training requests, please contact the Santa-America office. Training DVD’s will supplement the training conferences.

### YOUR COMMITMENT

Santa-America depends on you to inform us as to how your visits are going. You are the image of Santa-America in your local community. We ask that you complete the visit report form after each visit and return it to the Santa-America office. Your feedback is critical in building our databases and drives our recruiting, training, PR and fundraising efforts.

Contact Santa-America if you are unavailable for service at any period of 2 weeks or more. Also, contact your local hospice, so that another Santa may be assigned to temporarily cover your absence. If you will be unavailable for an extended period, example: personal illness, please contact us so we can begin replacement recruiting efforts.

If you have any concerns, questions, or comments, please contact Elf Nita at the Santa-America office at 251-923-7404 or [elfnita@santa-america.org](mailto:elfnita@santa-america.org).



## **YOUR RIGHTS**

Santa-America recognizes your right, as a volunteer, to discontinue service at any time and for any reason. Santa-America also reserves the right to discontinue our relationship with a volunteer when it is deemed to be in the best interest of the organization.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Santa-America is committed to ensuring EVERYONE receives our help regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, or disability. All volunteers are expected to work within this framework and can expect to be treated in accordance with this policy.

## **SANTA, MRS. SANTA AND ELVES**



Santa is the main focal point of the visiting team and will concentrate most of his attention on the special needs child. Santa will also spend time with siblings and guests. Mrs. Santa and Elves focus on the sibling and or guests of our special child. It is critical that you utilize your active listening skills to help Santa with information on the children you visit. Siblings and little friends are often feeling responsibility for the condition special needs child or are receiving less of the parents' attention. Your assessment of their feelings is valuable feedback for the hospice or hospital staff.

Mrs. Claus/Elves carry Santa's Tools (Gifts, Books, etc.) If there are ANY problems with the gifts of unfulfilled past holiday wishes, you need to be responsible, ...it's NEVER Santa's fault.

Example: "Oops! Santa, I forgot to load the red bike in the sleigh last year!"

If for any reason you feel you become overwhelmed by emotion, quietly leave the room and re-enter once composed. You do not need "permission" to leave.

All volunteers are required to complete the volunteer application and receive formal local hospice training. In the case of teen elves, Santa-America will accept recommendations from the High



School. Santa-America encourages teen elves to take advantage of teen hospice training programs. Santa America is working with hospices to develop local teen training programs.

## VOLUNTEER APPEARANCE

As Santa, Mrs. Claus, or an Elf, your appearance is of the utmost importance. You are creating a very special memory for our special children and families, and your presentation is key to its success. Santa-America encourages real bearded Santas but will accept a Santa who has a “temporary beard.” We ask that you have a temporary beard of the highest quality in keeping with our high standards for overall appearance. We will be happy to connect you with “Santa mentors” to help you with hints on beard and costuming details.

Santa-America volunteers should have the best costuming as possible. It should be clean and odor free. We also recommend Santa be “smoke-free.” Children have a hard time understanding that Santa smokes!

Beginning in 2007, Santa-America is initiating a program to reduce the size of Santa by 25% in the next 15 years. Obesity is a national epidemic, and 19% of our children are suffering from extreme weight issues. As a Santa America volunteer, you ARE a unique person able to combine compassion and a huge heart with the highest level of commitment to portraying Santa. YOU are too precious to lose prematurely to weight related illnesses like diabetes, cardio-vascular, and bone joint related illnesses. A leaner, more fit Santa is a positive, healthier role model for our children.

## GIFTS



Santa-America is moving to symbolic gifts that represent Love, Hope and Joy. As such, we are unveiling for 2007 the “Santa-America Hug” and the “Sleigh Bells.” Ms. Amy Meek, a volunteer from Belt, MT, has created the “Santa-America Hug.” This hug is a polar fleece scarf with mittens attached on the ends. Please contact Elf Cathy for ways you can help implement this program in your community.

Santa-America is also working to distribute Sleigh Bells. These bells remind children to believe in the power of Santa and serve as a “clinically clean” reminder of their special visit.

Santa-America knows many of our Santas distribute gifts. We appreciate your willingness to provide these gifts. We strongly discourage the distribution of candy canes. We will continue to be a leading role model in a battle against pediatric obesity.



# SAMPLE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Introduce yourself as a Santa-America volunteer and provide background about our special mission. Let them know you are looking forward to your visit. Below are suggestions of pre-visit information on the child and family: Please forward us ideas that have been successful for you.

## From the hospice or hospital nursing staff and assigned social worker:

- Names and ages of siblings and parents.
- Family issues/dynamics to be aware of and sensitive to.
- What is the medical condition, issues of treatment, diet and exercise?
- Areas of child discomfort or pain? Areas of progress/improvement?
- Treatment compliance issues the staff wants Santa to reinforce?



## From the parent:

- What is the child's favorite toy? TV Show? Music? Movie? PC game?
- What is the child's favorite toy from last Christmas? Get details like color of the toy, etc.
- What toys were requested and not delivered to the child? *Blame the elf for failure to load the sleigh!*
- What is the child's favorite food? Least favorite food?
- What unique happening from a past holiday or family history will the child remember?
- What is family's religion and level of faith...request for Santa to be spiritual or secular.

## From Santa:

- Have the names of your team and introduce Mrs. Santa and the elves ( Elf Robert, Elf Jane)
- Provide detail on the activities at the North Pole.
- What input on reindeer do you want to share? Example: this year's fastest reindeer.
- Read a special book to the child.
- Provide gentle reinforcement in complying with treatment or care protocols.



## CODE OF CONDUCT

Santa-America supports and embraces the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Breaded Santas (AORBS) Code of Conduct. All volunteers should obtain and read a copy of the final code of conduct. Santa-America encourages its volunteers to join AORBS or its associated affiliates for Mrs. Claus and temporarily bearded Santas.

### Santa-America Pedophilia Prevention Committee

In 2003, Santa-America became the leader in background checks. The children are our utmost priority. Santa-America has a zero tolerance for pedophilia and all forms of child abuse. In June 2007, the Santa-America Board of Advisors formed a special committee to review procedures and create policies to take every practical step to ensure the utmost safety of our children and our volunteers.

In most cases, Santa is accompanied by a member of the hospice or hospital staff. Under no circumstances should a Santa make a one-on-one visit with a child. In addition, Santa-America recommends that, unless related, Mrs. Claus and the Elves do not ride with Santa at any time. This removes any perception or possibility for inappropriate behavior.

### Administrative Leave

Any individual accused of inappropriate behavior of any kind will be placed on administrative leave until a final resolution is determined. The local medical community will be notified that the Santa is on leave. These individuals will be removed from the Santa-America website and will surrender all identification badges representing themselves as Santa-America volunteers until the issue is resolved.

Inappropriate behavior includes, but is not limited to, volunteering under the influence of alcohol or drugs, misrepresentation of Santa-America, misrepresentation of experience and/or background, spiritual or faith based visit content not expressly pre-approved by the parent, and any other behavior deemed detrimental to our children or Santa-America.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CREDENTIALS

Santa-America is a member of the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) and Children's Hospice International (CHI). Members of these organizations serve over 96% of all hospice patients in America. Our special pediatric training is based on their continuing education programs.

Santa, as an adult hospice volunteer, is subject to the toughest background check in the world of Santa--the same as a doctor, nurse or social worker. Santa receives special training in death, bereavement and post-traumatic stress.

Santa receives special training in federal and state patient privacy regulations. Santa-America is fully HIPPA compliant and respects patient and family privacy.



Santa-America is a national leader in advancing the highest standards for Santa.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY

Santa-America encourages all volunteers to build the presence of Santa-America in their community! Who else but Santa can unite folks from all generations to work together to provide a value-rich service to our children? Race, politics and religion are transcended by the gifts of Love, Hope and Joy!

Many of the models highlighted below have been tested, but they may need modification for your community. The Santa-America Team can help you develop successful programs within your community.

### Medical Community

Our Medical Community is our referral base. Individual visit referrals come exclusively from the medical and hospice community, social workers, and special needs educators. We are beginning a pilot clinical trial with children with cystic fibrosis. We already know spirituality helps adults heal, and this trial will provide objective data on the benefits of Santa.

#### *What can you do?*

Meet with your chapters of Medical Societies (and spousal support groups) to make them aware of Santa-America. Santa-America can provide a PowerPoint presentation at your request.

### Education Community

Our Special Elves: Students from across the county (student hospice and coordinated through schools) serve as supporters of Santa-America.



Our private high school model, developed in conjunction with Bayside Academy in Daphne, AL will be highlighted at the Southern Association of Independent Schools in Georgia this fall (2007). These remarkable young people accompany Santa during his visits. It is beautiful to see how these sick children look up to these high school students.

In parallel, we are working with Alonso High School in Tampa, FL to develop a public school model involving National Honor Society members. Students volunteering as elves receive substantial

recognition on their college applications. *Cornell University and "the Ivy's" have acknowledged this as a form of high value, compassionate community involvement.*



Our college model provides Springhill College students of Mobile, Alabama with the opportunity to spread the core values of Love, Hope and Joy in their community. *Seniors in the advanced marketing program are evaluating and developing a multi-level community marketing plan.*

*What can you do?*

Identify area schools that may want to support Santa-America by helping raise funds for Santa-America, and/or becoming teen elves. Contact Santa-America for details on how to structure the programs.

Note: Santa-America will be working to establish an Elf Academy for high school/college students serving as elves during the 2009 convention.

### Local and State Government

Santa-America has determined there is no political downside to support of Santa-America. As such, we encourage our local Santa's to meet with elected officials (local, state, and federal) to advise them of our special mission and their need for support. We recently highlighted this model in Washington, DC at the National League of Cities Conference.



*What can you do?*

Contact area municipalities and ask them to support Santa-America. Elf Cathy can provide copies of draft resolutions and sample service agreements upon request. Typically, the city asks Santa to lead area events and parades. Most communities relish in knowing that Santa-America Santa's have passed rigorous background checks and are the most professional and responsible Santa's.

### Traveling Art Exhibit:

Santa America is working to develop a traveling art exhibit that depicts the values of Love, Hope and Joy. The working title, "Believe", will feature classic poses of Santa with personal interpretations of Santa's gifts. The exhibit will preview in December 2007 in Fairhope, AL.

*What can you do?*

Identify potential sponsors to host the traveling exhibit in your community. We hope the show will be in each area between 2-4 months and would like coordinating student programs in the local community. For more information, contact Elf Cathy.

### Service/Outreach Model

For Santa-America to continue to grow, individuals, business, and local communities need to know of our special work...and that you are the local face! Santa-America encourages those who are comfortable speaking in front of groups to work with their local chamber of commerce to find avenues to "be the face of Santa-America." Santa-America can work with you to develop the proper presentation for the audience, etc.



*What can you do?*



Contact your local chamber of commerce and let them know about Santa-America. Identify local service clubs like the Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Lions Club, etc. and ask them to support Santa-America. For more information, contact Elf Cathy.

We also give back. We work with organizations like the Ronald McDonald House, Make a Wish Foundation and the Arthritis Foundation. Our Santa leads the Raleigh and Raylee Motorcycle Charity Angel Ride and visits with nearly 30 children and their families sponsored

and supported by the ride. This is a large regional charity ride supporting children suffering from chronic pediatric illness.

#### Special Events: Santa Breakfasts and Area Fundraisers

Area events are an effective way to let the community know about Santa-America and the role you play in the community. Special events are an effective method to help support Santa-America and raise awareness.

*What can you do?*

Several Santas hosted Breakfast's with Santa during 2006. Work with a local restaurant to create a Santa Breakfast. Contact Santa Tim Mack in Montana or Santa America Headquarters for more assistance.

Santa is cooperating with local Christmas tree farms to develop a Santa presence during the holiday season. Santa-America receives a donation (\$1-3.00) for every tree cut and sold.



## **FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

2006 was the first full budget year Santa-America operated with its IRS approval letter. A copy of IRS Form 990, as well as our operating budget, can be provided upon request.



## NORTH POLE CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact us to learn more about how you can become part of our nation-wide team of donors and volunteers.

**Santa-America, Inc.**  
**308 Belrose Avenue, Suite 200 East**  
**Daphne, AL 36526**

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**Elf Nita Mickwee**, Administrative Director  
Telephone: (251) 923-7404  
E-Mail: [ElfNita@Santa-America.org](mailto:ElfNita@Santa-America.org)

## VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

I commit to volunteer with Santa-America for a minimum of 6 months a year.

I will maintain a natural beard and dress in a clean, credible, and acceptable manner. (Note: Santas may be authorized to wear a “Temporary Beard” after review and approval on a case-by-case basis)

I will maintain my status as a formal volunteer with a local hospice in my home town/region, and will inform Santa-America immediately if and when my formal volunteer relationship is terminated.

Any and all information I receive about a patient, child, family or friends will be kept strictly confidential unless a signed Santa-America release form is obtained. I will comply with HIPPA regulations protecting patient confidentiality.

Santa-America is authorized to use my photo and Santa-related information on its website and as part of its public-media relations and fundraising programs.

I will complete post-visit documentation and reports in a timely and confidential manner.

I will represent Santa-America in a positive, wholesome, and committed manner including but not limited to participation in publicity events, fundraising, and press and media relations.

I understand I will not be compensated for my volunteer work with Santa-America. I understand I may receive per-diem payments from time to time to reimburse me for expenses related to my volunteer work with Santa-America.



I understand my volunteer work for Santa-America does not imply a future offer of employment. I understand my volunteer status may be terminated at any time.

I will never let my personal ego take precedence over bringing love, hope and joy wrapped in a Santa hug to our special needs children.

I understand that I should consult with the Santa-America at (251) 626.6609 if I have questions regarding anything covered in the *Volunteer Sleigh-kit* or other Santa-America volunteer policies or incentives.

Since the information and policies described in the *Santa-America Volunteer Sleigh-kit* are subject to change, I acknowledge that revisions may occur. Santa-America reserves the right to make changes in content or application as it deems appropriate, and these changes may be implemented even if they have not been communicated and may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies. I understand that Santa-America maintains a current electronic version of this information on the Santa-America Internet site [www.santa-america.org](http://www.santa-america.org).

Volunteer Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Please sign and return this copy to the Santa-America Office)*

## LIST OF OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

Santa Ernest L. Berger  
Founder and President, Santa-America

Aime E. Crassas  
Educator

Patrick J. Horgan  
Founder and Partner, Paladin Associates Inc. Business Consulting

Thomas F. Johnson  
Headmaster, Bayside Academy, Daphne, Alabama



## BOARD OF ADVISORS

Cathy S. Barnette

Jason Stewart

Nita Mickwee

Santa Carl Anderson

Santa Gary Casey

Santa Tim Connaghan

Santa John Degel

Santa Bob Elkin

Elizabeth Graham

Santa Jim Pollard

Santa Paul Raines

Santa John Scheuch

Santa Fr. David Shoemaker

Note: Advisory Board members do not have to be active hospice volunteers, although they are encouraged to do so. They assist Santa-America staff in program and policy development.

## APPENDIX

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