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## A magical time - local children get gifts from Santa and his 'helpers'



By T. Scott Batchelor  
The Daily Reflector

Monday, December 17, 2007

WINTERVILLE — Any question about how magical Santa Claus really is was answered for 185 children Sunday at the Boys and Girls Club on Fire Tower Road.

No sooner had they left his knee after reciting a Christmas wish list, Saint Nick made good in the form of a big bag of presents that filled the kids' orders.

"This is the best day ever," said Jonna Bacote, 7, her ear-to-ear smile triggered by a brand-new bicycle and a pile of pretty clothes. "I'm so excited," she said.

Around her sat other children eagerly unwrapping festive packages to reveal gifts that ranged from practical to flat-out fun.

Waves of children would pour through the building as children from all five units of the county's Boys and Girls Clubs took a turn on Santa's knee after enjoying pizza and Christmas carols.

For at least five years, the University City Kiwanis and the Kiwanis Club of Greater Greenville have teamed with the Boys and

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Jenni Farrow/The Daily Reflector  
(ENLARGE)

Chance Brown, 5, sits on Santa's lap Sunday afternoon at the Pitt County Boys and Girls Club.

Girls Clubs of Pitt County to provide Christmas for children whose celebration might be sparse otherwise.

Santa's "helpers" glean wish lists from identified children and then go out and shop for the items to make the jolly old elf look good for the kids.

The Kiwanis raised more than \$20,000 this year, equating to an expenditure of \$125 per child, with women of the Kiwanis clubs doing the shopping.

"I'm a slow shopper," said Hope Thompson of the Greater Greenville club as she sported a pair of red reindeer antlers on her head.

"But I really want to make it special for them."

David Monroe, a University City Kiwanian and co-chairman of the Santa Project, said the spirit of giving moves him and the other volunteers.

"Reaching out to other people that are less fortunate is really what it's all about," Monroe said.

Donna Harper, the mother of Jonna and two other children, praised the outpouring. A single mom who moved to Greenville from Connecticut about a year ago, Harper said it would be a struggle to provide the trappings of Christmas for her kids without the Santa Project.

"Seeing the excitement on their faces is priceless," she said.

Braving the holiday-shopping throngs to fill the children's wish lists was well worth the hassle, said Thompson with the reindeer antlers.

"When you see the smile on the child's face ... . Every child should have a special Christmas," she said.

Tony Reeves, 9, was having a fabulous pre-Noel as he tore wrapping from another present.

"Look! A remote-controlled jet plane!" he said as he unveiled a box bearing the image of an F-16 fighter aircraft. Nearby, his twin sister, Tiara, gathered multicolored bottles of nail polish Santa brought her, along with a couple of pairs of jeans.

Children get a minimum of seven gifts, said Dawn Broome, project chairwoman for the women of the Greater Greenville Kiwanis.

Before Santa began the knee-sitting ritual, Jay Faron, executive director of the Pitt County Boys and Girls Clubs, helped a harmonica-playing Santa lead the first group of kids in a round of "Jingle Bells."

The children started out a little quiet for Faron, who stopped them and offered some coaching.

"This is the same crowd that fills this place up with noise every day," he told them. "I believe we can sing 'Jingle Bells.'"

First in line to talk to Santa was Gregory Askew of Winterville.

He was most pleased with the gift of a comforter bearing the likeness of cartoon character Spongebob Squarepants.

"I like Spongebob," the 10-year-old explained, "and I don't have a comforter for my bed."

Organizers said that it would take three to four hours for all 185 children to visit Santa and receive their bags of presents.

T. Scott Batchelor can be contacted at sbatchelor@coxnc.com and 329-9567.

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