



THE SARATOGIAN WHO BECAME SANTA *FRED CLARK*

That is what I do. I bring a dream to life.
—Fred Clark

When you first see Fred Clark, it is hard to believe he is not Santa. The white hair, beard and even eyebrows are from a 1920s Christmas greeting card. His deep, rolling voice adds reassurance to the fantasy; his persona reflects tranquility at the same moment his presence creates excitement. He is perfect.

“I was born and raised in Saratoga Springs in a large family with eight girls and nine boys, all from the same mom and dad,” Fred proudly tells me as we sit in his home workshop. “Before Christmas, the whole gang would go out and pick princess pines to create wreaths and roping to sell to florists in Saratoga Springs and New York City. Christmas was important to us in more ways than the celebration: It helped us pay the bills.”

Fred completed school in Saratoga Springs, then continued on to a series of occupations, including semi-professional football player, Saratoga police officer,

barber, prison guard, and Saratoga Springs High School custodian, where he worked 30 years before retiring. For 10 years he was also a bouncer at a nightclub on Route 9. With his closely cropped beard and flashy wardrobe, he was promoted as a Kenny Rogers lookalike.

Then, in 1998, Fred’s wife, Carol (they have four grown children and several grandkids), noticed an advertisement for Hewitt Garden Center stating they were looking for a Santa Claus. At first Fred resisted the idea, but Carol can be very persuasive. Naturally, Fred was hired on the spot, but he had to buy a suit and a fake beard to cover the Kenny Rogers cut he had for the nightclub.

“I had to glue a fake mustache over my real mustache, and it was gross,” Fred recalls with disdain. “I hated it. The fake stuff ain’t me. The next year I had my own beard and mustache, and it has been that way ever since.”

Fred’s Santa can be seen at events, functions and locations throughout our area, and as far away as Vermont. He

works all year, even as “Summer Santa” for party events. Mohawk Honda created a special C-RV for him. The vehicle sports a Santa mural with reindeer and sleigh, disco lights on the cargo rack, and external speakers to play holiday music when he arrives at an event.

“Wherever I go, I am a magnet for people of all ages, types, backgrounds and ethnicity. I have met some of the most wonderful people on Earth, and it continues today. It seems everyone loves Santa. It makes no difference—Buddhist, Jewish, Catholics, Muslims, rich, poor, whatever. They all show love for Santa. The spirit is universal.”

Then, in reflection, Fred confides, “These last 20 years have been the best of my life. I am truly blessed.”

And Fred Clark’s portrayal of Santa has blessed the lives of so many others. **SL**

thesaratogasanta.com

Lawrence White is chief photographer for Saratoga Living.