

Saratoga Santa brings Christmas spirit to Spa City



From private house visits to public events, the Saratoga Santa's goal is to spread the Christmas Spirit wherever he goes. (Emma Ralls — MediaNews Group)

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UPDATED: December 25, 2024 at 2:39 PM EST

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. — While he may not be the one shimmying down your chimney, the Saratoga Santa takes great pride in bringing the holiday spirit to the Spa City.

But how does one become Santa?

For Fred Clark, it was all thanks to his wife, who pushed him to respond to an ad from Hewitt's Garden Center in 1998 when they were looking for someone to dress up as Santa for the kids. After buying a suit and a fake beard, only for the first year — then he grew a beard that could rival that most jolly caricature, the Saratoga Santa was born.

"My wife knows that I love children," Clark shared with the Saratogian. "I'm from a large family, 17 children born in Saratoga to the same mom and dad, so she knew this would be good for me."

Clark's favorite thing about being the Saratoga Santa is seeing the impact he has on the people around him. Whether it's a private home visit or a big public event, getting to interact with members of the community and spread some holiday cheer.

"No matter which day it is, whether it's June 1 or December 1, wherever I go, wherever my wife and If people come over with their children, their grandchildren want to take pictures with me," Clark shared. "No matter what, I know when I talk to people, I make people happy, and it makes me happy because I know that I'm lifting spirits and making people's day."

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The Saratoga aspect of his name is just as important as the Santa bit. As someone born and raised in Saratoga Springs, who raised his kids in the Spa City and whose grandchildren call Saratoga home, there is absolutely no other place he could see himself.

“It’s just a beautiful little city. No matter where you live you’re going to have some people that aren’t so friendly, but basically, Saratoga Springs is a super place to live and the people are wonderful,” Clarke said. “School systems, wonderful. Saratoga Hospital is wonderful. Saratoga is just a wonderful place, not just at Christmas time, but summer time with the race track (Saratoga Race Course).

“We’ve been to a few places, We went to Canada a few times. We’ve been to North Carolina, Florida — but I’m happy to be back home. I don’t want to live anywhere else.”

A highlight from this holiday season for Clark was visiting Albany Medical Center’s Melodies Center for Childhood Cancer & Blood Disorders and delivering gifts to the children there in tandem with the Live Like Liv Foundation which donated \$900, raised by Sophie Allen through t-shirt sales at Saratoga High School in honor of her sister Olivia Allen who passed at 19 years old to leukemia.

“Olivia, while she was dying, went around to all the other rooms where there were little kids and talked to them,” Clark explained. “Trying to lift their spirits while this poor baby was dying herself. So her dad asked me if I would come, and I did. There were 10 to 12 kids, and I took all kinds of pictures. It was incredible.”

If there was one thing Saratoga Santa would want people to remember this holiday season and carry with them into the new year, it would be to be kind to each other and do their very best to spread some goodness wherever they go.

“I would like everyone to try their best to make the world a better place,” Clark said. “The things that are happening now — not just in America but all over the world, I would just wish that people would try their best to do the right things every day. I know sometimes it’s impossible to be a goody-goody guy every day, but just try to be a better person.”

“Be nice to your family. Be nice to your neighbors, and have a piece of fruitcake.”

For more information about the Saratoga Santa, visit <https://thesaratogasanta.com>.



For 26 years, Fred Clark has been spreading Christmas cheer as the Saratoga Santa. (Photo by Matt Ramos)

Originally Published: December 24, 2024 at 4:00 PM EST