

Philadelphia Regional Limousine Association Brings Santa to St. Christopher's Hospital for Children

"Santa!" shouted the small boy as he tore down the hall way pulling his IV pole. "Santa can't come on the unit but you can talk to him and wave to him from the doorway," explained the nurse. The child walked all the way to the threshold of the doorway and Santa bent down to give him a large truck. In the back ground, other children called for Santa, one on her mother's hip while tubes and pipes kept her from moving any closer.

A nurse brought a doll back to her that Santa pulled from his bag of goodies. She waved happily to Santa. Another small boy approached the door eager to see what Santa had for him. He too was rewarded with a truck. Santa waved good-bye heading for the next ward where many of the children also could only wave through the doorway as they were in isolation. Nurses dressed in gowns, masks and gloves to bring toys to the children from Santa only to do the same at the next doorway. Visiting two floors of the hospital took three hours.

Along with the delight that Santa brought to the children came the smile on their parent's faces. One mother awoke from a much need cat nap and searched her purse for her camera to get a photo of her bedridden daughter with Santa. Santa crouched down careful not to disturb the instrumentation so mom could capture the delight of Santa's visit.

Unfortunately, many of the people who brought Santa to St. Christopher's Children's Hospital today did not get to see the delight on the faces of the children who received the visit and the gifts. They were the people behind the scenes. Donations of toys were collected at limousine companies throughout the Philadelphia area. Chauffeurs, dispatchers, reservationists and owners all generously gave from their hearts toys to be distributed to the sick children. Many of the children that Santa visited will not be home this year to see what treats Santa has left under their tree. Many of their parents will spend Christmas night sleeping in a chair beside their sick children. Having Santa come to them was a highlight in what is otherwise a dark period ahead.

This year, the hospital is also trying to control the spread of the H1N1 virus and is limiting the people who visit to the children to only those who are parents or care givers. Santa and his elves from the Philadelphia Regional Limousine Association were one of the few groups who were given access to the floors of the hospital.

Santa didn't only include the children on the floors. Any child who stopped to visit with him in the lobby while waiting for a parent who was visiting upstairs with a sibling was also treated to a toy.

The event almost didn't occur this year. As of Friday, only two companies had committed to the event. Philip Jagiela, president of the PRLA sent out a desperate plea to the members asking for them to participate. Two additional companies stepped up to the plate. The PRLA has hosted Limos by Santa for the past seven years. At its peak, over twenty companies participated bringing vehicles to the offices of the Philadelphia Parking Authority to parade through center city and on to the hospital. A police escort eased the way blocking streets to allow the vehicles to cross safely. This year only four vehicles carried bag loads of toys but the lack of limousines did not dampen the spirits of the participants or the joy that Santa's visit brought to the kids.

Chris Zubey, owner of Private Coach, was among the companies who participated in the limousine parade to the hospital. Chris heard the plea over the weekend and sent his son and wife shopping for toys while he was driving a client in New York City. He brought his son, Cameron, along to the event. Phil Spitzer, owner of Profile Limousine also had not committed but came to the aid of the association filling his limousine with toys. Global Limousine and Aries Limousine were the other two companies who paraded limousines.

"This has been a tough year for many in our association," said Philip Jagiela, owner of Aries and president of the PRLA. "To be able to continue this event says a lot about the people hearts of the people who participated." Jagiela has dressed as Santa for the event for the past seven years. "The hospital already asked us to return next year and has set the date of December 13th. We hope more people will get involved."