



Correction Officers Bearing Gifts

Many children in the New York City area will be delighted this season when correction officers and a personal friend—Santa Claus—come knocking at their doors. They will be bearing gifts donated by the staff and local businesses.

The children may be lying in the pediatric wards of city hospitals, waiting for adoptions, living in homeless shelters or sleeping overnight in child welfare agencies. The officers, who have identified these needy children, are determined to see that they will not be ignored this Christmas.

The Correction Guardian Association for years has given toys and gifts to children in the pediatric wards of area hospitals. Funds are raised for this project at the association's annual Christmas and Kwanzaa party. It will be held Sunday, December 18 from 7 P.M. to 1 A.M. at the Pyramid Entertainment Complex, 89-25 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica, Queens.

"We've been giving toys to children in hospitals for 33 years," said Deputy Warden Ali al-Rahman, president of the association. "In fact we're doing something a little different this year. We're taking toys to the Bureau of Child Welfare in the Bronx."

Hundreds of toys will be given to children who spend their nights in the bureau's offices. "If they [the bureau] can't find a bed for them in the city, they come back and spend the night [in the office]," said Dep. al-Rahman, who works at the Manhattan House of Detention for Men. "They're not bad kids. They're just caught up in the system."

The Guardians also plan to visit Harlem and Bellevue Hospitals in Manhattan, Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, Elmhurst Hospital in Queens and Bronx Lebanon Hospital.

Two borough commands and a Rikers Island facility plan similar projects for the city's children.

The Adolescent Reception Detention Center plans to give toys to homeless children. Officers from the Brooklyn House of Detention for Men will accompany Santa Claus on some rounds again this year. They have done so at Kings County Hospital for the past two years. The Brooklyn Correctional Facility will join them. "We're not just locking people up," said Officer Jerry Greene of Brooklyn House. "We do care."

In 1986 several officers organized the hospital visit: John Evans (captain), Miguel Rodriguez (captain at the Brooklyn Correctional Facility); Jerry Greene, Gabriel Anotella, Harry Sanchez (who videotaped the event), Thomas Vitola (alias Santa Claus, a captain on Rikers Island), Edward Vinales, Evelyn Chevalier (on temporary duty assignment in the Inspector General's office, 60 Hudson Street), Marvin Fisher (warden at BCF), and the Rev. Walter Keiller.

In 1987, Officer Salvatore Macchia was Santa Claus. This year the officers stopped by other areas of the Kings County Hospital. "We had so many toys that we gave to families visiting sick children," said Officer Greene, "and we went to the pediatric emergency ward." About three hundred of officers each had given a new toy.

"Their visit in the rehabilitation center, however, was the most gratifying," Officer Greene said. "They were really surprised. The joy they showed. The response to Santa Claus. Whereas in the pediatric ward the kids expressed some doubt, to them this really was Santa Claus."



Officers Audrey Campbell and Salvatore Macchia as Santa Claus.