



Photo by Barbara Crane

*Five-month-old Hannah Stiver got her first visit with Santa Claus when he visited McGrath earlier this month, courtesy of the Alaska National Guard. He traveled to Arctic Village last week with the U.S. Air Force.*

## Santa's got a present for everyone

by Holly F. Reimer  
Tundra Times reporter

ARCTIC VILLAGE — All ears were listening and all eyes were watching Dec. 10 for an Air Force C-130 Hercules to arrive at the village. Aboard were Santa Claus and presents for every girl and boy in Arctic Village.

Santa Claus arrived bringing with him over 2,000 pounds of Christmas presents and food.

The Air Force 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron raises enough money each year by having fund-raisers. They also receive donations from other organizations and through community donations to buy each child a gift and still have leftover funds for one community

gift and food.

This was Santa's 24th annual trip to this remote village above the Arctic Circle. About 125 residents live in this Athabascan community of subsistence hunters.

Santa, followed by an entourage of newspaper, radio and television reporters and photographers arrived

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just about noon via the Air Force C-130 Hercules operated by the 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron.

Nearly every child went to the landing strip which is about a mile away from the village. The 30-below zero cold didn't deter the group either. They were bundled warmly and eager to greet Santa.

Parents and other residents watched as Santa kneeled to the children's height and then disappeared as the group surrounded him.

Months ago, Arctic Village residents sent a list to the squadron with names of each child and what each wanted for Christmas. And instead of each adult and person over 16 years of age receiving individual gifts, the squadron and villagers decided to buy one community gift to cut expenses. This year it was a brand-new clothes washer for a community laundry facility.

After almost a quarter of a century of visits, this has become almost like a tradition for the villagers. Besides Christmas presents, the Air Force brings turkeys, canned foods and fresh fruit.

Chief Trimble Gilbert said the people usually have a community feast the day before Christmas.

Gilbert said the sharing of food is a tradition that has been practiced among Athabaskan Indians for hundreds of years.

"During hard times everybody shares food and the chief makes sure everybody eats. This is how our elderly taught us how to live, and we still remember," he said.

It was a celebration. A potlatch was held for the guests. A massive feast was prepared featuring such delicacies as caribou stew, baked salmon, frybread, spaghetti, turkey sandwiches

and a variety of salads and desserts.

The children sang Christmas songs, a magician performed magic tricks and each of the children received a present.

Gilbert said the entire village has been waiting for this day.

Resident Rose Lee said the washing machine will be handy for the community.

"It's good because everybody can use it," she said.

Before Santa handed out presents, fourth-grader Annie James said she asked him for a keyboard and she said she thought he brought her one.

Five-year-old Rocky John wanted Ninja Turtles or Pac Man. Another 5-year-old, McGarret John, said he wanted Robocop.

As it turned out, Annie did get her keyboard from Santa, and she already knew how to play four songs.

The school has a sewing teacher, and the students made gifts for the guests. Beaded necklaces and hand-made mukluks were given to guests from their student makers.

Mabel Christen, a ninth-grader, was awarded a Certificate of Achievement for superior excellence in sewing. She made a pair of mukluks.

Christen and another student are the only ninth-graders at Arctic Village School. There is one 10th-grader and no 11th or 12th-graders.

Principal Chris Scranton said the school teaches pre-school to 12th grade, and the school currently has 36 students.

Christen said in her class it's fourth grade and up. She said she enjoys it because she gets to help teach her younger classmates.

The end of the day was drawing near so Santa and the group waved good-bye, loaded onto snowmachines and sleds and headed toward the aircraft.