

Santa Claus starts early in rural Alaska

Santa Claus begins his yearly trip around the state this week, bringing toys and holiday cheer to children in many rural Alaskan villages.

Instead of an open-air sled, Santa will be flying in warm, first-class comfort aboard U.S. Air Force and Alaska National Guard planes.

Santa will visit Kodiak and Dillingham on Tuesday and McGrath two days later thanks to a joint effort of the Salvation Army and the Alaska National Guard.

Salvation Army volunteers collected and wrapped thousands of gifts for boys and girls of all age groups, and the Alaska Guard is providing transportation to 24 villages.

In a separate program, the U.S. Air Force's 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron will make its 24th annual goodwill flight to Arctic Village Dec. 10.

After being greeted at the airstrip by the village's 125 residents, Santa and his helpers will travel by dog sled to the local school for a whitefish and caribou feast before handing out individually selected gifts to the children and presenting fresh produce and a new washing machine to the entire village.



Tamara Lymer, 8, helps her mother Maurita pack presents at the Salvation Army headquarters for rural children.