

# Salvation Army, Guard give Santa a ride to Kodiak

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

KODIAK — Everyone knows that Santa Claus can cover the rest of the world in only one night.

That's no problem.

But because Alaska is so big — and Alaskan children so special — Santa needs to get a little headstart and some help from his friends to be sure that no one in Alaska is missed.

For more than 25 years, the Salvation Army and the Alaska National Guard have teamed up to bring Santa and his bag of toys to children in rural villages across Alaska.

"It's a way for us to connect with the rest of the state," said Capt. Stephen Owen of the Salvation Army.

"Some of the children live in villages that are so remote, they would not be getting much if we didn't help out."

One of Santa's first stops this year was in McGrath Dec. 7 where a swarm of about 150 excited children chanting "Santa, Santa," cheered his arrival.

"Here in Anchorage the kids take Santa for granted — they see him

everywhere, in every shopping mall. But for the kids in McGrath it was really something special. They were so caught up in the excitement of seeing him."

Despite the bitter cold on the airstrip, Santa patiently took each child on his knee to hear Christmas requests and give out candy canes and gifts.

With a replenished supply of toys

and treats, Santa and his helpers flew to Kodiak the following day, visiting patients at the Kodiak Island Hospital and Care Center.

Four-month-old Sierra Panamarioff was too young to really appreciate the small stuffed animal given to her by her visitor in red.

continued on page nine

# • Santa catches a plane ride to Kodiak

continued from page three

But she was fascinated by his long white beard and got a grip on it with both tiny hands that nearly forced Santa to choose between staying in Kodiak or leaving his beard behind.

Cookies and punch waited for Santa as he visited with the older patients in the care center's dining room.

Olive Norell, 74, from Karluk, seemed just as pleased as the young children with her gift of a white teddy bear.

The patients talked about their Christmas memories, and Paris Muller, who was born in Ouzinkie, told about the fun she used to have going into Anchorage for her yearly Christmas shopping trip.

After talking with everyone, giving out gifts and enthusiastically sampling the cookies and punch ("Got to keep up my nice round figure"), Santa had to leave Kodiak for his next stop.

This year he and his helpers from the Salvation Army and National Guard plan to visit about 15 communities with more than 2,000 gifts.

In some of those communities, he is also leaving behind gifts for children in the smaller surrounding villages. Those toys will be delivered later by snow machine or dog team.

"Seeing the children's excited faces makes it all worthwhile," Owen said.



*Santa took time on his trip to Kodiak to wish a Merry Christmas to both children and adults. Above, Sierra Panamarioff is probably too young to fully appreciate the honor of sitting on Santa's lap, but Olive Norell, left, who is originally from Karluk, received a white teddy bear from him. The Salvation Army and the National Guard plan visits to about 15 communities this year, taking more than 2,000 gifts with them.*

photos by Barbara Crane