

HISTORY OF OPERATION SANTA CLAUSE

In July of 1948, Des Moines was besieged by an epidemic of Polio, which filled all the hospitals primarily with children. The Sister Kenny treatment was used involving hot water and wool blankets. The demand for blankets was so great it put them in short order, an appeal was made for donations of wool blankets of all kinds for hospital use.

This is when the members of DMRAA, under the leadership of the late Bob Evans, WØAUL, set out to make pickups from home contributions with their mobile units. These blankets were all taken to the hospitals in Des Moines and the shortage was taken of.

At this particular time amateur radio was in its infancy in mobile operation. Almost all mobile communications were commercial conducted by the police, fire, and taxi cabs. The amateurs did have rebuilt commercial units along with home built gear built by themselves. So the opportunity to be of service was very clear, and with the eager cooperation of our members it was obvious that we could be of help with our mobile communications in the city.

During November of 1948 as Bob Evans and myself were trying to think of some activities to keep the interest of mobile communications up, the idea came up, "how about a Christmas pickup and delivery of food and toys by our people for several unfortunate families".

Plans were made and donations were collected the Sunday before Christmas that year. These were taken to a point where late in the afternoon of December 24th, Earl Reynolds, WØBEE and myself with a large truck delivered the donations to three families, name given us by the Polk County Welfare. The first stop was an elderly couple much in need, the second was a family of four in the same condition. The last was a large family of a couple with twelve small children. Although Earl and myself were late getting home to our own families, about nine o'clock that Christmas eve night, it gave me a spirit of Christmas that I have never forgotten. The thought of those small children unloading the toys and food from that truck still remains on my mind. OPERATION SANTA CLAUSE WAS BORN THAT NIGHT.

In 1949 we expanded our operation and put out a greater call for donations and took care of more people, picking up and delivering all we received ourselves.

The next year all the donations we received went to the Polk County Welfare as we again were unable to do both services. We knew that it would take care of many families who would not be able to have a good Christmas, but we missed the actual seeing of the people receiving the benefits of our work.

The next year we lined up with the Bidwell Community which was located on the south east side to handle our distribution. But again we had grown so much they were unable to take care of all of it.

We then solicited the help of the Volunteers of America, a relief organization, and for the next few years until they ceased their operation in Des Moines we concentrated on picking up all the donations and they took over distribution to the needy. They really had all the facilities to get this done and even our antenna, equipment, and dispatching was handled from their warehouse, and they did a fine job. After Volunteers of America left Des Moines we contacted several radio stations in the city, finally tying up with then KRNT Radio. This continued for many year and we received and enjoyed great cooperation from KRNT and their people. In those days we would start Operation Santa Clause at nine in the morning and continuing on UNTIL eleven that night. Our mobiles being in the greater Des Moines area from fifteen to seventeen hours as the station continued to call

for donations all that time. We again attempted the redistribution by ourselves but were soon convinced that we could not do both so we asked St Vincent de Paul to take over the distribution of the food, toys, clothing, and money which they did and we were very grateful to them.

Little by little KRNT brought in the services of KRNT-TV which gave us added publicity before and during our operation. Finally with the sale of KRNT Radio we stayed with their TV facilities their call letters were changed to KCCI-TV and they gave us more on the air time the day of our operation, which continued to make us grow. We have also been joined by other fine companies and they along with the IOWA National Guard have assisted greatly. It has been my good fortune to be with Operation Santa Clause these thirty eight years since its start, and I served as General Chairman for twenty six years before present Chairman Carmi Smith took over. It has been a personal satisfaction for myself and Bob Evans, if he was still here to have established this operation and we are extremely greatfull to all the Radio Amateurs who have kept it going.

So on behalf of Bob Evans and myself we say* *****

THANKS -----YOU PEOPLE ARE THE GREATEST

John Moffet

WØSVD

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