

## Have beard and red suit, will travel

By KAREN KOPEKIN BERRY

M.J. Wade bears little resemblance to the jolly man in the white beard and red suit who is so popular this time of year.

He dresses like any dapper, rising young businessman in his navy wool blazer and color-coordinated suit.

Only an infectious smile, twinkling eyes and the spring in his step give him away. M.J. Wade, a manufacturer's representative for college bookstores, moonlights each holiday season.

He is a Santa Claus for hire. For the past six years, the West Bloomfield resident has donned the red fur suit, black boots, and white hair and beard of St. Nick for children's parties, parades, hospital pediatric wards and adult office parties.

"Playing Santa for adult parties is fun," said the 31-year-old father of two. "But, it's not as satisfying as doing it for kids."

"The kids really believe I'm Santa Claus. It isn't a put on. I really feel great when a little one comes up to me and whispers, 'I know you're the real Santa.'"

IT ALL BEGAN six years ago, when Wade tried, unsuccessfully, to hire a Santa to visit his home on Christmas Eve.

He never found one, so he rented a suit and entertained his first child and several other youngsters on his block.

"Then I really got hooked," he said. "Beaumont Hospital had taken good care of my wife, who had been very ill. So, to thank the staff, I volunteered to play Santa for the children in the pediatric ward."

"I saw one little girl who was very sick," he said. "The nurses

told me she hadn't even sat up in months. Well, when I walked near her bed to talk to her she sat up and laughed and cried."

"And I've playing Santa every year since."

Wade, who said he has fooled many of his close friends while dressed as St. Nick, claims he has "never not been able to get a child up in my lap."

Most parties he plays are places he has been before, which helps him remember children's names and what they asked for and received the year before.

"Working with kids is really a lesson in psychology," he said. "The little ones look at Santa's boots. They seem to know instinctively that if he wears rubber boots he is the real Santa."

"I've gotten so I can just walk into a home and know if it is a happy or sad home," he said.

"When the parents are warm and treat their children well, the little ones are usually open and trustful of Santa."

THOSE YOUNGSTERS four and five are the best age, he said.

"When they are six, they are right at the breaking away age," Wade said.

"They don't want to believe in Santa because their friends have told them there is no Santa Claus. But, they are afraid to not believe because if they don't, they won't get any presents."

He handles disbelievers with the ease of a professional psychologist. "One little girl was a disbeliever," he said. "So I said fine. I passed out all the gifts in my bag except for one which belonged to her."

"I said, 'Well, I have one gift here for Susie. But, she doesn't believe in me so I can't really give her this present.'"



When finished dressing for parties where he plays Santa, M.J. Wade looks much older than his 31 years.

"As I put it back in the bag and turned to leave, she came running up to me and said 'I believe in you Santa.'"

Wade believes it is important to spend time with each child and listen carefully to what he or she has to say.

"Kids know if you are putting them on," he said. "So I listen very carefully to each one and promise to do my best. But, I remind them that I have many children to care for. And they all shake their heads wisely and understand."

HE INSISTS that most of the children are not selfish when they ask for gifts.

"So many ask me to give gifts to children who never get any," he said. "And others ask for a gift for their brother or sister or mom and dad."

"As a matter of fact, some of the children have almost seen old Santa

cry because of the touching things they have said."

The father of a six- and three-year-old, Wade enjoys telling about one Christmas Eve several years ago when there was a heavy snowstorm.

"I was driving a little yellow Volkswagen at the time," he said. "And I got it stuck in the snow. So, here I was in my Santa costume trying to get someone to stop and help me out."

"It was a riot," he laughed. "When I explained to the people who stopped that I had several other homes to visit that night they pushed me out in no time."

On Christmas eve he will attend an average of one party each hour and charges from \$35 to \$50.

"But, I don't work at all on Christmas morning," he said. "I have a family, and that is the day I spend with them."



M.J. Wade (above) sells college textbooks, but at Christmas time he also sells the jolly companionship of St. Nick (left) at \$35-\$50 a visit.

Several times he was stopped at a red light on his way to a party while dressed in his Santa duds.

"I'm sitting at the light when the wife looks over, who is usually sitting on the passenger side of the car," he said.

"The next thing I know her husband is waving at me and the kids are at the windows like magnets."

"I'll never know how mom and dad explain to their children that I'm not in my sleigh with the reindeer."

Wade said he has never missed a party appointment for six years, but admitted he has had some pretty close calls.

ONE YEAR, I had a party scheduled here at home and I was on a business trip in Chicago snowed in," he said.

"I explained to the woman at United Airlines that I had to play Santa for a very important group of children so she arranged for me to be flown out of Chicago on another airline."

"I called the party and told them Santa had run across a little bit of bad weather but that I'd soon be flying in from Chicago. They kids loved it."

## Fuel saving is goal of free 'audit'

Some 400,000 questionnaires will be mailed at random to single-family households during the next several months as the Michigan Department of Commerce kicks off a computerized home energy "audit."

Householders which return the questionnaire will receive a computerized analysis of the house's energy-conserving potential and a chart of the cost and energy savings which could result if suggested steps were taken, says State Commerce Director Keith Molin.

Another 100,000 questionnaires will be distributed through community organizations. Anyone who does not receive the audit form by mail can obtain one by calling 1-800-292-1586 toll-free.

The effort, called Project Conserve, is being conducted in cooperation with the Institute for Family and Child Study at Michigan State University and Michigan Technological University.

The initial mailing of questionnaires will be directed to residents of a seven-county area in the eastern Upper Peninsula and will continue throughout most of the state until February.

Project Conserve will enable residents to analyze the individual characteristics of their home. After the questionnaire is filled out and returned in a postage-paid envelope, a computer will analyze the data using local fuel, labor and material costs, and weather conditions.

The participant then receives a "homeowner report" which lists energy-saving steps he or she may wish to consider — such as caulking, weatherstripping, storm windows, insulation — and includes estimates of savings in both energy and dollars which would result if these steps were taken.

In addition, the "homeowner report" will list other individualized energy-saving steps. It gives information, for example, on how ventilation and humidity affect fuel costs; how fireplaces and decorative outdoor gas lamps increase costs; and how proper landscaping can save energy.

## ALL ABOUT ANIMALS...

Dear Doctor:

Can my six-week-old German Shepherd puppy get worms from milk?

K.S., Oak Park

Dear K.S.:

Milk does not give worms (intestinal parasites) to a puppy any more than it gives worms to people. It's still not a good idea, however, to give your puppy milk because it can cause digestive upsets — either nausea or diarrhea. Once a puppy has been weaned from its mother it needs a good, well-balanced puppy food and plenty of fresh water and that's all. No milk, no bones, no table scraps of any kind.

FOR KIDS:

If your dog stays outside all the time, you must be sure he has some place shady to rest. Also give him fresh, cold water two or three times every day. In the hot weather he will need a lot more to drink to keep him cool.

Dear Doctor:

Is there a vaccine to prevent feline leukemia? How is the disease transmitted?

J.H., Birmingham

Dear J.H.:

Leukemia in cats is caused by a virus. Intensive research on this disease is in progress and it has been proven that it is transmitted both by direct contact with an already infected cat and also from a mother cat to her kittens. At present, there is no vaccine available to prevent this awful disease.

FOR KIDS:

Never, never, give medicine to your cat unless your veterinarian has specifically prescribed it. Cats react very strangely to many common home medications. Aspirin, for example, can be fatal if used incorrectly.

The Southeastern Michigan Veterinary Medical Association welcomes questions from readers. While each one cannot be answered individually, questions of general interest will appear in this column. Write to: "All About Animals," S.E.M.V.M.A., P.O. Box 688, Plymouth, Michigan 48170.

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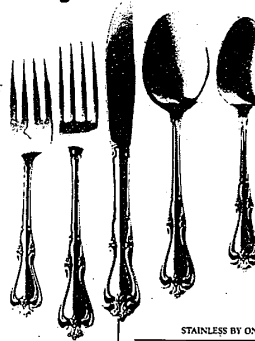
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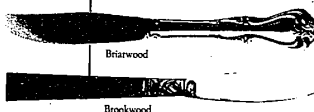
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