

# Helping to brighten the holiday season

**Paramedic Carol Loe calls it, 'Making Christmas what Christmas is all about.'**

By Loraine McClish  
staff writer

CAROL AND David Loe began their annual round of Christmas visits Monday morning and will continue on their 12-hour-per-day schedule for as long as it takes to see every one on the list.

Those on the list are in hospitals, hospices, rehabilitation centers and nursing homes.

For the visits, David Loe, a Farmington Hills police officer, turns into Santa Claus. He has a sack full of goodies in one hand and sleigh bells in the other to announce his arrival.

His wife, Carol, and another of Santa's elves, paramedic Kathy Johnson, both wear bright red coats and their made-for-the-occasion white fur hats. Paramedic ambulance attendants take shifts doing the driving.

Some of the visits are a greeting, a wave, a gift of a candy cane. Some are prolonged if a youngster wants to chat. Some visits are poignant. Most are emotional.

The visits are a surprise for some. The visits for others are long-awaited. These are the patients who Santa and his helpers will be taking home to their families for whatever time period is allowed.

Carol Loe calls it "Making Christmas what Christmas is all about."

THE VISITS are sponsored by Bloomfield Township-based Paramed Inc., which own and operate several ambulance companies. Paramed furnishes ambulance transportation for patients allowed to travel home during the holiday season. The drivers, all paramedics, are volunteers.

The Loes, Farmington Hills residents, have given their pre-Christmas time as volunteers for as long as Carol Loe has worked for Paramed.

The patients go home, some with IVs, some on machines, many in wheelchairs. A great many of them are children. Many haven't been home for months. Many know this will be their last Christmas at home.

The Loes' children assume the responsibility for their family celebration while their parents are away from dawn to dusk.

"It is very, very special for all of us," their mother said.

One of the incidents that make it very special occurred immediately after Santa and his helpers left the pediatric ward at Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills Monday morning.

Staff photos  
by  
Randy Borst



Christopher Biggs was relieved to know Santa Claus would know where to find him come Christmas morning. The 4-year-old, shown with Santa at Botsford General Hospital, is the son of Kimberly and Jerry Biggs of Redford Township.



AT LEFT: Lupita Parker comforts her 9-month-old grandson, Anthony Parker, as Santa makes his rounds in Botsford General Hospital. The youngster's family was on a tour of the pediatric ward Monday morning to learn what they could expect when Anthony was admitted for surgery later in the week.



Matthew Chatlin stops his game of cards for a visit with Santa at Botsford General Hospital Monday morning. Doing well after a car accident last week, the 4-year-old's parents, Elaine and Paul Chatlin, expect him to be back home in Farmington Hills in time for Christmas.

## Filling a void

### Trivia book credits Poles

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

There's more to Poland and the Polish people than Pope John Paul II, kielbasa and pierogi.

Just ask John Vranlak. For instance, as the Farmington Hills resident characteristically says: "Did you know that . . . ?"

• A Polish man invented the bagel?

• There's a big difference between Polish canned ham and American canned ham?

• Despite her French name, Madame Marie Curie, the famous chemist, was Polish?

• The nation known as Poland didn't exist between the years 1795 and 1918?

"There is nothing out there that gives credit to the Poles," said Vranlak, a statistical methods engineer with Ford Motor Co.

Vranlak's interest in cultures and history prompted him to become an author. Questions and answers to anything that might be asked about Poland and the Polish people will soon be available in "The Polish Trivia Book."

VRANLAK'S FIRST book is due out any day through a Hamtramck-based publishing company. "It's a fast-food approach to learn about Poland and the Polish-American experience," said Vranlak, president of the Kendallwood Homeowners Association in Farmington Hills.

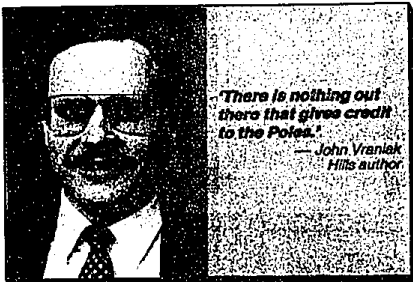
The book will give readers a glimpse into Polish history, sports, art, food, entertainment and tradition. Yes, the pope is mentioned, but not too much: "I think people are popped out."

A lot of things prompted Vranlak to devote his first book to the Polish people. His cultural background is Slovak and Lithuanian, but his family roots stem from the region that today is Poland. And many of his friends are Polish.

Most important however, Vranlak felt that "there's nothing out there that gives credit to the Poles. Polish is probably the biggest background to put up with jokes. And throughout school, you never read about the Poles."

For example, Vranlak asks, is anyone aware that Polish people played a significant role in the American Revolutionary War or that there are 800,000 Poles in Michigan

## cultural collage



*"There is nothing out there that gives credit to the Poles."*

— John Vranlak  
Hills author

— the largest ethnic group in the state?

"I tried to make the book as broad as possible," he said. "I tried to give something for everyone. It's not real deep on any one topic. I tried to come up with that blend of trivia and history."

THE BOOK'S format includes questions on one page and the answers directly across, on the next page. Vranlak chose that style because he felt having to continually turn to the back of the book for answers was nerve-wracking and irritating.

In addition to the blend of history and trivia, Vranlak has included basic pronunciations of Polish words and names. And he explained the background behind Polish names, such as the "ski" at the end of many surnames.

"I never saw myself being the author of a book," Vranlak said.

But he's already considering other projects, perhaps a similar book on Italians.

"I'd like to graduate from trivia at some time. I can see myself doing general interest books. I'd have to discover what gaps or voids there

are (for books) in the market place."

Becoming a novelist? That's probably something Vranlak won't do. "That's a hard field to break into."

Not that writing a trivia book was a piece of cake. It took some long hours and a lot of reading, research and organizing.

"I had to be persistent. It took a lot of organization. I travel 20 percent of the time. So while I waited at airports, I did some work. I always had a book in my brief case. I always tried to make use of that half-hour or so."

BOTH BEFORE and during his research, he had to establish a focal point for the book. Instead of relying on his perceptions of what people would like to read about, he asked potential readers for their opinions.

"I knew it would be a lot of work. And it was fun," he said. "But I had to tear myself away from doing it, especially at home. I became so caught up in this. I was always looking for something Polish-related."

Vranlak is sure the book will be successful. "I think this will change people's perceptions of Polish-Americans. There is tremendous potential for this book."



HAPPY HOLIDAYS

"Ah! when shall all men's good  
Be each man's rule, and universal peace  
Lie like a shaft of light across the land,  
And like a lane of beams athwart the sea,  
Through all the circle of the golden year?"

*The Golden Year, 1842  
Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

**Jacobson's**

WE WILL BE CLOSED CHRISTMAS DAY  
OPEN SATURDAY UNTIL 6:00