

# Downtown turns into Santaland for a day

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

Some 600 children, bundled in layers of winter clothing, braved a single-digit wind chill Saturday, all watching the sky for Santa's arrival in downtown Farmington.

Santa leaves his reindeer at home when he comes to Farmington, choosing instead to board a helicopter for his arrival.

"There he is," cried the youngsters as Santa's chopper rose into sight above the downtown buildings. Under their breaths, some adults whispered their concern, that the wind and the utility wires not impede Santa's landing.

The Bieri family — mom Barb, and Kevin, 6, Maria, 4, and Lauren, 3, were typical of most Farmington families at the event. The kids quickly answered "yes" when mom asked if they wanted to see Santa, when they woke in the morning.

"They say it's as cold here as it is in the North Pole," Barb Bieri said. But her family's spirits were warm. The Bieris just moved back from Chicago.

Santa's arrival heralded in both new and old activities. Events included a treasure hunt with "kids only" shopping, Christmas, Hanukkah and other events reflecting the community's cultural diversity were also featured.

"We wanted to make this a cultural event," said promoter Howard Gelman. "It's nice to learn what other cultures do."

Maureen Schiffman & Coco, a Farmington-area puppeteer presented a Hanukkah celebration in story and song under the tent.

"All the seats were full for her presentation," said Judy Downey, Downtown Development Authority director. "She was playing a mandolin and people were holding hands. It was excellent."

Carollers, dressed in Dickens-style garb led traditional carols for four hours as they strolled near the tent.

As in the past, the Farmington Civic Theater offered free movie presentations. "All I Want for Christmas", rated G, was this year's selection.

Classic Trolley, of Dearborn, ran a holiday trolley from the Village Mall area on the east end of downtown to the Warner home on the west. Twelve trolley stops were set up so participants could park and ride.

Joe Filbert, the trolley driver, expected about 52 runs at 15 minutes apiece. Filbert has driven the trolley in places like Battle Creek, Canada and Frankenmuth.

"I get to meet people from around the world," Filbert said. Farmington residents Myra and Tom Young, and their son, Ryan, 3, were among the trolley passengers. Events like these, commonplace in Farmington, influenced their move from Commerce Township, which Myra described as isolated.

"Here, I can walk everywhere," she said. Along the trolley route, Filbert lent a humorous tone.

"I used to be a Santa Claus, but I lost my reindeer license," he joked.

Passengers held on as he turned around at both ends of the route. "If you are going to fall on somebody, introduce yourself first," he said with a laugh.

Filbert told new passengers, anxious to get out of the cold: "Introduce yourself and snuggle up to somebody."

When Santa finally sat down to hear the scores of children's wish lists during the afternoon, some 50-to-60 people were lined up at a time, Downey said.

Kids created their their own holiday decorations at the downtown Farmington Community Library where adults received children's holiday book gift-giving suggestions.

Visitors who toured the Farmington Historical Museum, were admitted free, courtesy of Books Abound and Focal Point Studio,



Appeal for calm: Santa acknowledges his fans as he greets them after landing via helicopter.

two Farmington businesses who picked up the tab. Participating merchants pro-

vided special shopping areas for kids, with gifts available for under \$10 and activity sheets to take

home. Christmas and Hanukkah gift wrapping was also available un-

der the tent. Proceeds benefitted the Community Center of Farmington/Farmington Hills.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER

No parking: Santa complains about the parking ticket the helicopter received for illegal parking.



Festive music: Maureen Schiffman presented songs and stories of Hanukkah.



Watching: Larry Westcott and daughter Stephanie, 5, scan the horizon, waiting for Santa's arrival in downtown Farmington.

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