



The Tradition of Santa Claus Returns After COVID

based on a story by Leanne Italie reported AP and adapted for by Gregory Stachel

Santa Claus is a character who brings gifts to children during the holiday of Christmas.

During the holiday season, many performers play Santa. ☐ This year, Santa performers are back after two years of COVID-19 _____. But there are a few changes.

Mitch Allen started a service that provides Santa performers called HireSanta.com. He has reported a 30 percent _____ in demand this Christmas season over the last year. The company lost about 15 percent of its performers _____ retirement or death during the pandemic.

Allen has a Santa database of several thousand performers. It includes events at Bloomindale's main store in New York and many events at Marriott hotels. ☐ They _____ COVID-19 infection in any major way, he said. But Santas can choose to wear a face covering.

Chris Landtroop is a spokesperson _____ another agency that provides Santa performers, Cherry Hill Programs. She said the business's 1,400 Santas _____ at more than 600 shopping centers this year.

"I can't even explain how excited we are to see everyone's smiles at all locations this season without anything _____ those beautiful faces," she said.

Cherry Hill Santas are also free to wear face coverings, Landtroop said.

Some Santas are still keeping their _____.

The Santa at Macy's main store in New York City will be seated behind a work station. So, there will be no lap visits there.

Some Santas who stayed home for the last two years _____ concern for their health have returned. But Allen said he is looking _____ new performers.

Inflation has also made it _____ for people to continue performing. Many are older, on fixed incomes, and travel _____ distances to perform. ☐ "We're _____ the clients slightly more and we're also paying our Santas slightly more," Allen said.

Bookings for many Santas were made months _____, and some work throughout the year. Allen's Santas will make from \$5,000 to \$12,000 for the season.

A few Santas told The Associated Press that the cost is not a problem. They are not in the Santa _____ to make money but do it because they enjoy it.

Allen and other agencies are seeing more _____ for Black, deaf, and Spanish-speaking Santa performers. Allen also knows a female Santa. Eric Elliott and his wife Moeisha Elliott became professional Santas this year after first taking on the part as _____ in 2007. Both are retired military members.

They spent weeks _____ Santa Claus training. They learned American Sign Language and other ways to work with and perform to people with _____. Their work has included going to disaster areas with the Texas-based nonprofit Lone Star Santas to spread happiness during the holidays.

The Elliotts said _____ into the professional world as Santas for the first time and being Black has not been easy. For some people, Eric said, "We understand that we're not the Santa for you."

1. Most of the Santa performers with Allen have moved back to the tradition of having kids sit on their laps.

2. The job of a Santa is not an easy one and often requires a lot of preparations which often include purchasing specific equipment.

3. They appear across the United States in stores, hotels, and other places to meet with children and ask them what Christmas gifts they want.

4. They spend hundreds of dollars on Santa clothing and other objects.

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