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# 'Santa's Wonderland' offers gifts to 400 Elmont children

## Organizer says fourth annual event helps children 'benefit from the Christmas spirit'

Posted December 21, 2021



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Elizabeth Forbes greeted a girl at last year's Santa's Wonderland event at the Elmont firehouse.

MELISSA KOENIG/HERALD FILE PHOTO



By Robert Traverso (mailto:rtraverso@liherald.com)

Over 400 Elmont children were set to receive Christmas gifts at Santa's Wonderland, an annual event organized by Elmont resident Elizabeth Forbes, which was scheduled for Wednesday, after the Herald went to press, at the Clara H. Carlson School.

"We want to bring families together during Christmas time," Forbes said during the week before the 2021 event.

Children were looking forward to being greeted by Santa and his elves and helpers at this year's fourth annual event. At previous Santa's Wonderlands, tables were filled with a variety of gifts, from books and board games to scarves, hats and gloves.

Each child typically goes home with three or four gifts. Three hundred children took part in 2019, and 95 received gifts last year, when the coronavirus pandemic necessitated a drive-through event at the Elmont firehouse. This week, Forbes planned for a record number of children, and gifts.

Originally created to aid the hamlet's "underserved" children, the event has expanded to serve all children in the community, Forbes said.

Growing up in East Harlem with 10 siblings in a low-income family, Forbes received her first Christmas gifts from an aunt in 1994, when she was 13. That experience inspired her to create Santa's Wonderland. She spends the Saturday before the event wrapping gifts at her house in Elmont, which she calls "Santa's workshop."

The pandemic has been challenging for Forbes, 40, her husband and six sons. Her father, sister, and uncle died during the pandemic, and Forbes, formerly an auditor for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, couldn't find a job for 11 months.

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Three months ago, she was offered a job at the Elmont Board of Education as a teacher's aide for special education students. "I believe that the Lord wanted me to work in the school system," she said, adding that she was thrilled with her new position, because she can learn how to do more for the community through interaction with teachers and students, in addition to hosting Santa's Wonderland.

A tree lighting and awards ceremony was scheduled to follow Wednesday's event, at which local community activists were to receive a plaque from State Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages, whose office sponsored last year's 'Santa's Wonderland.'

Frank Hrbek Jr., a fire commissioner at the Elmont Fire Department, and Donna Doyle, an Elmont community member and worker that is heavily involved in the community, are recipients, as well as A27 Auto Masters of Garden City, a sponsor of 'Santa's Wonderland.'

The honorees, Forbes said are the "hidden gems" of the Elmont community.

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