

# For 50 years, secret 'Santa' has brought joy to children

## *Some who know Darrell Corder don't know his secret*

Submitted by Beth Byce  
Printed in the Wednesday, December 26, 2007  
Issue of the Tribune and Times

Darrell Corder has lots of accomplishments that can be associated with his name and reputation, but tonight (Dec. 20) we will not be thinking about all those things he has done that have helped so many people in and around Greenville County.

Tonight he is in his 50<sup>th</sup> year of being Santa, and it will be like all the other 49 years.

We will watch him light up the eyes of children and allow onlookers to see the spirit of Christmas come alive.

For many years, Darrell has walked the streets of Lancelot and Sagramore, ringing his Christmas bell, or his wife, Sandra, has driven him around to ring doorbells where he suspected there would be a little one who would enjoy a glimpse of Santa.

Santa has been known to appear at private Christmas and birthday parties in neighborhoods, First Baptist Church of Greenville Seniors Christmas events and the entire fellowship at First Baptist with lots of children.

Santa has been showing up at one particular family's Christmas party for more than 5 years and the 45-plus family members gather from all over the United States from as far away as California.

In 1957, Darrell was working at the Baptist Children's Home in Thomasville, N.C., and became a member of the Jaycees. Every year as a Jaycee, he borrowed a really nice Santa suit from a lady in town and delivered 20-30 boxes of food in the mill village to families that were less fortunate than we can imagine today.

The children could be heard running to the windows and door to look out at Santa; quite a highlight for such a family.

They never knew who he was but they knew they could expect that visit every year a couple of nights before Christmas, just so they could have a taste of the good things so many others would take for granted.



Georgia Strickler, 8, whispers her wish list to Santa -- Darrell Corder -- who has played the role for 50 years.  
GWINN DAVIS / Staff

That was what made Darrell Corder into a real Santa.

Darrell says the most fun is when the children and adults don't have any idea who you are, because that makes you feel more like Santa.

It's like they don't know you, so you really are just Santa. Santa used to just pop in at people's homes for visits where there were parties and that could be even more interesting.

There have been times that people Darrell knew didn't know it was him for years until he finally gave them a clue about his appearance or a particular remembrance of the party. That was the moment he gave it away to them, and they were shocked.

Darrell and Sandra have lost two of their children, Stephanie and Carey.

Stephanie died in a tragic accident at a very young age while they were in Thomasville, and the Christmas after her death in April was the hardest he ever had to play Santa.

He had never let her know that he was Santa, and every Christmas he would walk around to the front of the house and look up in the window. There would be Stephanie with twinkling eyes and a smile on her face and her mother, Sandra, waving back to Santa.

All the while Darrell didn't get close enough for her to really see who he was. The fact that he couldn't do it that Christmas was so hard because it meant he could be Santa to everyone else's children that year, but not to his own little Stephanie.

Not only is he Santa for Christmas, but Darrell is Santa all year long, as many readers may know him as their Meals-On-Wheels deliverer who will also come over to do repairs on their homes or work in their yards without being asked, caring for someone that has lost a loved one or has a special need, visiting in the hospital, delivering bread his wife has made and adding name after name to his prayer list.

And that really is just like Santa, adding name after name of needs to your everyday way of thinking. What a life to follow.

So why don't we start being Santa right here and now and see what we can do with the next 50 years of our lives?

Can we be Santa every day for 50 years, too?