

# Who's that Riderwood resident sporting a white beard?

Christmas may be over, but you can still find Santa in Maryland

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You may have told your children and grandchildren that Santa Claus lives at the North Pole, but he's recently been discovered living at [Riderwood](#), the Erickson Living community in Silver Spring, Md!

Riderwood resident David Nation is a dead-ringer for jolly old St. Nick. He and his wife Becky (who has played Mrs. Claus on a few occasions) moved from Hanover, Md., to Riderwood. With his unique Santa-like look, David is well known around campus.

"Several people greet me as Santa when they see me in the hallway," he says. "I am also referred to as Santa sometimes in conversations."

## **Santa society**

"I started being Santa in 2000 at the suggestion of another real bearded Santa I knew who had worked as Santa for many years," David says. "We were both in a senior theater group in Howard County, Md., called the Fabulous Fifty Plus Players. I worked for Cast of Thousands in Virginia that season at his suggestion."

In 2001, David attended Santa School and met Tim Connaghan, the so-called national Santa. Connaghan has been playing Santa since 1969 and works with celebrities, presides over national events, and has appeared in U.S. and international commercials. He's also the national Santa for the U.S. Marines' Toys for Tots and the official Santa for the Hollywood Christmas parade.

"Tim was involved in a group called the Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas (AORBS), and I first joined that group in 2002 and attended one of their annual dinners in California in 2003," David says. "I attended a large Santa gathering in 2006 in Branson, Mo., sponsored by AORBS."

The AORBS eventually disbanded, and David and others went on to join the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas (IBRBS), which currently has 1,800 members, including a few hundred Mrs. Clauses. He says the organization's large gatherings offer classes on different aspects of playing Santa and have vendors selling Santa suits and accessories.

## **Where to find him**

Each holiday season, David takes on about five to ten Santa gigs. He started out playing Santa at private company parties in the Washington, D.C., area.

He's also done numerous appearances at day care centers, country clubs, nursing homes, and charitable events in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Northern Virginia.

For a few years, he was Santa at the Arundel Mills Mall in Maryland. He has a relationship with casting company Carbone Entertainment, which has sent him out to many private parties over the years.

"I worked for several years at a country club where Santa once arrived on a golf cart and for a lobbyist who had an annual Christmas party at his home on the Potomac, where the first year I got a \$300 tip," David says.

Of all his Santa appearances over the years, David says his most memorable job was in 2003 when he was one of two Santas at Santa's Workshop, a small amusement park in Adirondack Park in New York.

"I worked in Santa's Cottage there, participated in a small stage show, and rode down a hill in a sleigh behind a live reindeer," he says.

As technology has come to play a bigger role in our lives, children have some new ways to visit with Santa. Recently, David took on a job with a company called Hello Santa, through which people could make video calls to Santa. David would delight kids from afar by answering calls in full Santa gear in front of a backdrop provided by the company.

Whether he's chatting with them in person, via video call, or at an amusement park, David says the kids make it so much fun to play Santa.

"I mostly enjoy talking with small children about their Christmas wishes and responding to their questions about Santa," he says.

## **Playing the part**

When you look at David, with his kind eyes and long white beard, it's easy to believe that he is, in fact, Santa Claus. When he was in Ecuador and Peru several years ago, children and adults greeted him on the street as "Papa Noel."

"I often get smiles from people on the street and sometimes stares from children," David says. "IBRBS and the other fraternal organizations encourage

their members to be Santa-like in their behavior year-round because you never know who may be watching.”

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