

# Holiday Spirit Shines at DDSP's Children's Holiday Party

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The 38th annual Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna, Penn. (DDSP), Children's Holiday Party hosted by the DDC Installation, was held on December 8, at the Susquehanna Club. One hundred students, ages five to nine, from Middletown, Steelton-Highspire, Harrisburg and West Shore school districts attended. The children were selected by their schools because they would not be afforded the holiday luxuries that their schoolmates enjoy. The children enjoyed many activities from the time the buses arrived starting at 9:30 a.m. until, packed with twice their original load, the buses departed around 2:00 p.m. In addition to receiving more than \$100 worth of presents, Santa handed each child a small gift as they thanked him and said their good-byes.



*Students from local elementary schools gathered at the Holiday Party.*

"This annual event is important for one hundred, precious children, and it would not be possible without the selfless efforts of dedicated volunteers," said DDSP Commander CAPT Robert Ritchie, SC, USN. Throughout the year, volunteer employees of the New Cumberland installation holds fundraisers and gather donations from area businesses to fund the event. Equally important is support from the community such as local retirees, clubs, churches, and friends who donate money, items, and time. More than 65 volunteers, including 15 military, transformed themselves into Santa's helpers for a day. They may have mended coats, handed out gifts, entertained, or doled out lots of one-on-one attention to the young guests. In return, the children shared their enthusiasm and wonder at the activities and gifts prepared just for them. Whether they were quiet or rambunctious, it was a party each child should long remember. The volunteers were rewarded with seeing the pure spirit of Christmas through the eyes a child.

The youngsters were greeted by clowns and with high-fives by members of the military, including DDC Commander BG Kathleen Gainey, USA, then scurried to the decorated ballrooms. Snacks were served as the Depot Singers sang Christmas carols. CAPT Ritchie welcomed the children just before Santa made

*Santa listened to the children's holiday wishes.*



his grand entrance, greeted by song and cheers. Mistress of Ceremony Polly Charbonneau, DDC Command Affairs, introduced the entertainers and held the children's attention easily. Ronald McDonald measured the excitement of the crowd on his smile-o-meter, Tatters and Tess the clowns provided skits, and The Cedar Cliff Players, a group of local high school students, taught the crowd the motions to the *Twelve Days of Christmas*. Ramona Douglas (DDSP) provided a blessing followed by an delicious lunch of pizza, chips, and juice. Mary Ritchie read *The Night before Christmas* to the attentive tots seated on the floor around her winged-back chair. Later, Magician Rick Westhaven of USASAC was followed by Willy-Bill the Clown who entertained until the last group of children was dismissed.

Throughout the day Slip-Knot the Clown and the UTZ girl character mingled with the kids. In conjunction, several volunteers painted holiday motifs on little faces. The children were encouraged to sign a personalized card for Santa. DDSP Army Riggers repaired damaged coats, and replaced some coats with new ones if needed. Each of the children had all the time they wanted to whisper their holiday wishes to Santa Claus, Jim Ditzler of DDSP, before having their photo taken with him. To top off the event, military personnel, who honorably carried each child's load of presents, including a sleeping bag, a gift-packed duffel and shopping bag, escorted them to their bus.

*Military personnel helped the children carry their presents to the buses.*

