

[Databases selected:](#) Houston Chronicle



Santa's helpers / Christmas is a snap for those special elves working the malls with St. Nick; [2 STAR Edition]

CAROL RUST. *Houston Chronicle*. Houston, Tex.: Dec 23, 1999. pg. 4

Abstract (Summary)

At First Colony shopping mall seven miles away, he ditches blades for shoes and a Christmas vest, and gets ready for his customers.

He squeaks horns, rings bells, propels puppets and cajoles criers as children sit on the lap of Santa, just feet from his camera. He'll dance if needed. "C'mon, smiiiiile," he says.

Brandon [Seesing] is serious about his job as Santa's helper. This is his second Christmas season (he also worked as the Easter bunny last spring) at First Colony. He works for the Houston company Sepia Photos Promotions, which contracts for most of the Santa photo sets at local malls.

Full Text (962 words)

Copyright Houston Chronicle Publishing Company Division, The Hearst Corporation (the "Houston Chronicle") Dec 23, 1999

On most days after school, 15-year-old Brandon Seesing throws down his books, puts on his in-line skates and heads to the mall.

At First Colony shopping mall seven miles away, he ditches blades for shoes and a Christmas vest, and gets ready for his customers.

Some smile, some cry, some jump up and down with anticipation. Some are dumbstruck with awe.

Brandon must be ready for them all.

He squeaks horns, rings bells, propels puppets and cajoles criers as children sit on the lap of Santa, just feet from his camera. He'll dance if needed. "C'mon, smiiiiile," he says.

Snap. Snap. Snap.

A minute later, the child's parents scrutinize the photos. If all goes well, they agree to buy one or all of them.

If not, the child goes back on Santa's lap, and Seesing begins again.

"It's so much easier to work with kids than with parents," he says. "With kids, it's not hard to impress them as long as they feel they can trust you."

Brandon is serious about his job as Santa's helper. This is his second Christmas season (he also worked as the Easter bunny last spring) at First Colony. He works for the Houston company Sepia Photos Promotions, which contracts for most of the Santa photo sets at local malls.

When Seesing applied for the job last year, president Jeff Angelo initially turned down his application, saying he was too young to work on weekends and holidays.

He responded with a copy of the federal child-labor statutes that say a 14-year-old can work part time as a contract worker. He got the job.

"We knew he was serious," says Angelo, who admits that he, too, was an Easter bunny once. "We hired him."

He hires 80 to 100 teen-agers each Christmas and Easter as photographers and cashiers. "Many of them have been baby sitters, worked in day care or in youth groups in their church," he says of their job experience.

The teen-agers average about 20 hours a week, and pay starts at \$6 an hour.

They are provided a uniform of a tuxedo shirt, Christmas vest and bow tie. The body-pierced with dangling jewelry need not apply. The cameras are set up to computers, which shoot and develop photos at the touch of a finger.

His teen workers are excited, Angelo says. "They don't look at it as just a job, but as an adventure and as being part of the magic of Christmas. They bring a lot of enthusiasm to the set."

So much enthusiasm, 19-year-old Jennie Ma says, that she's hoarse, and constantly nurses a cup of juice or water when off duty.

"It's because we yell so much when the children are getting their pictures taken," she says.

Janie graduated from Lee High School, and this is her second Christmas at First Colony. "After last year, we wanted to do it again, and as soon as the season started, it was, 'I'm here.' "

She has always been interested in photography, and she loves children. So the job is perfect.

At San Jacinto Mall in Baytown, 18-year-old Julie Rendon is tweaking smiles from an ever-growing host of children. It's a job that doesn't stop, up to the last minute, she says.

"At a certain time on Christmas Eve, people still want their pictures taken. Ten minutes before we closed on Christmas Eve last year, a little girl and her father came in. She'd had surgery two days before and didn't feel like coming in," Rendon recalls.

Later, her father told her, "She was so worried she wouldn't get any presents unless she saw Santa."

Julee says she'd like to spend the next Christmas season doing exactly what she's doing now, even though she'll be in school at Texas A&M University right up to a week before the holiday. "Even if I can't catch the beginning, I'll jump in the middle and work right until the end," she says. "I love it."

At Willowbrook Mall in the FM 1960 area, 17-year-old Lara Tapp keeps the jingle bells handy. She looks at the temporary job working for Cherry Hill Photos as part of her avocation.

"I saw it as a opportunity," she says on her second day at work. "Eventually, I want to open an orphanage, and I'm not going to college right away.

"God led me to the mission field and gave me a love for children," Tapp says. She works part time home-schooling three young children. She graduated from high school last year as a home-schooler and studies theology part time at College of Biblical Studies.

The job? "It's neat, it's not really hard, and it's fun to see all the children so excited," she says.

"My main goal is to get a smile with Santa that the parents are happy with. The children don't really care what the picture looks like."

Brandon says the children may not care about the pictures, but they do care about that fleeting time with Santa.

He overheard one 4-year-old last year proclaim to his mother that he would be able to tell if the man in the red suit was real.

As he strolled with his mom to the cashier, he whispered, "Mom, it's the real Santa."

[Illustration]

Photos: 1. Janie Ma uses a stuffed reindeer to attract a toddler's attention for a photograph with Santa at First Colony Mall in Sugar Land. (color); 2. Brandon Seesing, right, gets a fresh supply of crayons and coloring books as a pair of children say goodbye to Santa. (color); 3. Julee Rendon, left, who is also pictured on the cover with St. Nick, teams with Maria Montalvo to take Santa pictures at San Jacinto Mall in Baytown. (color); 4. Julee Rendon with St. Nick (color, p. 1)

Credit: Staff

Indexing (document details)

People: Tapp, Lara
Author(s): CAROL RUST
Document types: Biography
Section: Yo
Publication title: Houston Chronicle. Houston, Tex.: Dec 23, 1999. pg. 4
Source type: Newspaper
ISSN: 10747109
ProQuest document ID: 47443423
Text Word Count 962
Document URL: <http://0-proquest.umi.com.catalog.houstonlibrary.org:80/pqdweb?did=47443423&sid=2&Fmt=3&clie ntlId=53902&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

Copyright © 2008 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

