

Santa is everywhere as parties abound

By JESSICA DIKLICH STAFF WRITER December 15, 2008

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Santa was quite busy Sunday, making three stops at local organizations.

American Legion Post 129 in Toms River, the Italian American Club of Seaside Heights and the Middletown Elks all held Christmas parties and brought many children lots of holiday cheer.

About 100 underprivileged children from Seaside Heights gathered at the Italian American Club's clubhouse, where they and their families were treated to lunch and presents from Santa. The party was organized by Christine Massaro, Ladies Auxiliary president.

"Children from infants to 10 years old, both boys and girls, got presents," said Ray Massaro, club treasurer. "We thought it was very successful. The kids were all smiling and happy. They are very humble-type children. It was a good time."

The club raises money for this party through a car raffle it sponsors each year on the boardwalk. It also gives scholarships to township children and donations to rescue squads and other charities with money raised from the raffle.



Michael McDyer (left), of Toms River hangs his handmade ornament on the Christmas tree at American Legion Post 129 in Toms River, which hosted a party for families of soldiers deployed in Iraq. (STAFF PHOTO: TOM SPADER)

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Amber Savage, 5, of the Port Monmouth section of Middletown, goes under the limbo stick during a Christmas party at the Elks lodge in Middletown. (STAFF PHOTO: MARY FRANK)

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"We give nine \$1,000 scholarships out to children around here," Massaro said.

In Toms River, the American Legion threw a party for families of soldiers from Charlie Battery 3rd Battalion 112th Artillery currently deployed in Iraq. The Legion collected \$5,000 to purchase toys.

Bernice Stanton, Unit 129 Auxiliary chairman of children and youth, said the party, held for the first time but planned to become an annual event, was a success.

More than 100 family members were present to celebrate with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Children also decorated ornaments for the Christmas tree at the post.

"It was a family-oriented party. Everyone received a gift, including the soldiers. We really ran this party on donations that were given by members of 129. They were very generous in doing so," Stanton said. "We also had donations from the community."

Policemen's Benevolent Association Local 137 of Toms River donated six new bicycles to raffle off to children.

There were also some soldiers present who were on temporary leave. "They were glad to be home with their children," Stanton said. "There was lots of smiling, lots of clapping and a lot of excitement to see Santa."

Stanton said members of the post worked very hard Saturday to decorate and set up for the party and Sunday while families were at the post.

"Everyone just really worked together," she said. "The American Legion family is very strong in Toms River, and we work together as a family in everything we do."

Santa's last stop was at Middletown Elks Lodge to celebrate with special-needs children.

Todd Syrdale, chairman of the special-needs children's committee, said about 100 children were at the event.

"We run all the functions for handicap children. If kids need help getting any kind of braces or wheelchairs, we help them with that," Syrdale said. He said the annual party brings a lot of joy to the children.

"It's great. I was cooking in the kitchen earlier. We got a packed house," he said. "We've been running this forever."

ON THE WEB: Visit our Web site, www.app.com, for photo galleries from the parties in Seaside Heights and Middletown.



Michael McDyer (left), of Toms River hangs his handmade ornament on the Christmas tree at American Legion Post 129 in Toms River, which hosted a party for families of soldiers deployed in Iraq. Above: At the Elks lodge in Middletown, (from left) Austin Martin, 4; his brother Gavin, 5; Patrick Gesualdo, 4; and his brother Joshua, 6, try on hats and backpacks Santa Claus gave them. (STAFF PHOTOS: TOM SPADER, left; MARY FRANK, above [Buy this photo](#))

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