

Comsewogue student-athletes volunteer to help spread . . .

Christmas Magic to Kids

By Gregg Sarra
STAFF WRITER

This was so much more than a touchdown scored or a volleyball spiked. This was teamwork of another sort. It was a group of Comsewogue student-athletes going the extra yard to give during the holiday season.

More than 3,300 children were the beneficiaries of a Santa Claus that came as early as two weeks ago and will work through tomorrow morning. These kids were identified through letters sent to Santa Claus from homeless shelters, schools, foster-care homes, Child Protective Services, safe houses and even private residences. Santa then makes door-to-door deliveries.

"They've called it Christmas Magic since 1985. 'We look forward to this every year,' said Matt Lisagar, a senior defensive end on the Comsewogue football team. 'I've been involved for three years and there's nothing like it. There's a warm feeling of accomplishment when you see how happy the kids are.'

Lisagar narrowly escaped little Joey Fernandez, 6, who raced through the Pine Brook Elementary School in Brentwood, with his new toy truck Wednesday night. Joshua Santiago, 3, cradled a Magic Lights Elmo and Danny Cortez, 10, cried when Santa gave him the new blue bicycle he wished for. "That's the magic of Christmas," said Kim Simpson, a sophomore volleyball player at Comsewogue. "It brings people together for what's right. It's amazing the way a kid's face lights up. It's great."

Christmas Magic blossomed to 1,550 kids last year before it doubled that total in 1999. It begins with a year-long fund-raising campaign by attorney Charlie Russo for Christmas Magic Inc. in Hauppauge. The children send their letters to Santa Claus, c/o Christmas Magic Inc., 400 Town Line Rd., Hauppauge 11788.

"We started with 26 kids in Brentwood," Comse-

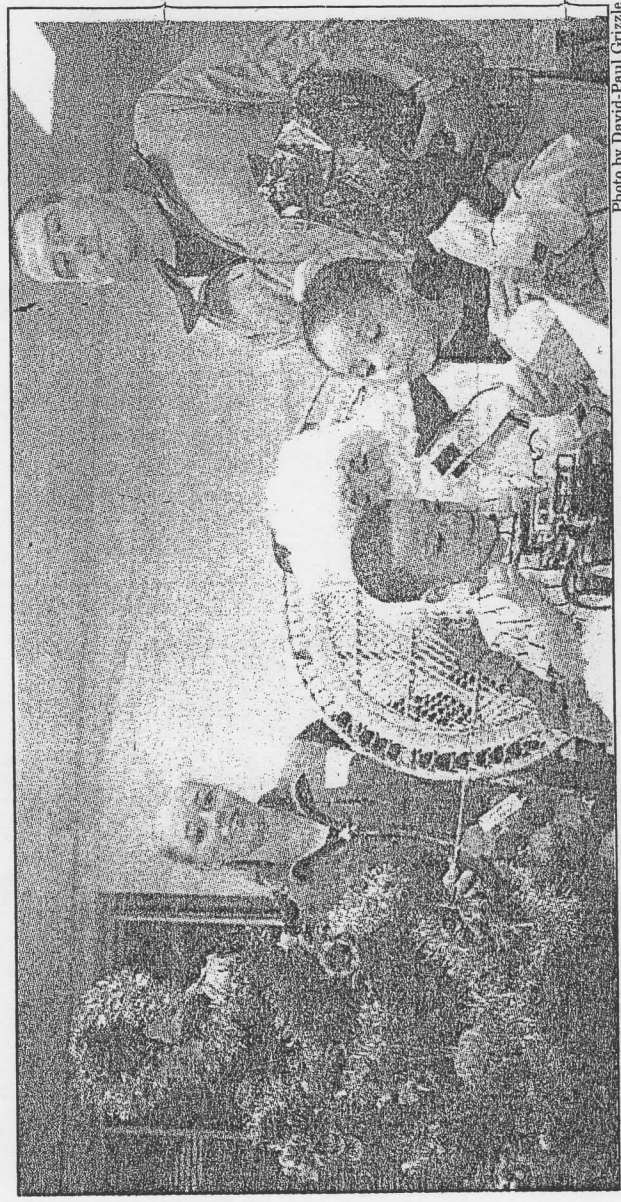


Photo by David-Paul Grizzle

Comsewogue student-athletes, from left, sophomore Kim Simpson and senior Matt Lisagar help Santa (Charlie Russo) deliver presents to 5-year-old Elizabeth Santiago and her 3-year-old brother Joshua at Pine Brook Elementary School.

As Santa (Russo) left Pine Brook, he said, "The spirit of the holiday season is not just captured in the eyes of the children that sit on Santa's lap but also in the eyes of the 300 volunteers, who realize after this experience what the season is truly about."

There is nothing like the smile on a child's face and Russo knows you can't put a price on happiness. That's why he makes each succeeding year bigger and brighter than the one before.

"If there's a true meaning of what Santa Claus is, it's Charlie," Amodeo said. "His office is the North Pole."

wogue special education teacher Fred Amodeo said. "We got the students together with Charlie and said let's help people during the holidays. And it went over big."

Various stores are targeted and Santa's helpers [students] take to the aisles to fill Christmas wish lists after store hours.

"We have seven periods of wrapping presents," Amodeo said. "Then we load the trucks and send them out to the designated sites awaiting Santa's arrival. When Santa leaves, we go shopping again, and do it all over for the next day."