

North Country

December 2023

NEIGHBORS

"Santa"

NICK CASEY:
BRINGING THE MAGIC
OF CHRISTMAS TO ALL

Cover Photo by Lauren Hull Photography

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Naughty or Nice Meter



Santas Magic Timepiece

On a brisk October afternoon, Nick garnered a few second looks as he arrived for an interview in a quiet room at Crandall Public Library in downtown Glens Falls. A red cap, red and green button-down shirt, the signature beard and easy smile make a billboard for what's coming when you sit with a personification of jolly.

Nick's day job is with the New York State Comptroller's Office as the manager of the ISM Process Automation Team. "It sounds a lot more fancy than it is," he said.

The first time Nick donned the costume as St. Nick, it was as a favor for a friend when the original Santa became ill and couldn't make it to the Albany Lights in the Park celebration in 2013. "My friend, Mel Deigel, asked me if I could fill in at the fund raiser for the Albany Police Athletic League. He was and is a Santa and had a spare beard and suit. I resisted at first but agreed to do it," he said. "And then, I was hooked. The switch was flipped."

Dozens of events from private homes to the Stuyvesant Plaza mall are booked each holiday season, or any other time of year if requested. Glens Falls' hometown celebrations are regular venues for him. In 2020, when children were stuck at home because of the pandemic, Nick rode in a sleigh behind a fire truck in a small Christmas parade throughout the city.

Nick's website is **SantaNickC.com**. Check it out to see Nick at all of his events, learn about the organizations he has joined and schools attended which help him to stay in the spirit of Christmas every day.

Nick is a graduate of Cherry Hill Programs Santa School, three years of New England Santa Society Santa Camp, International University of Santa Claus, and Santaology. He's a member of the Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas, the International Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas, the Worldwide Santa Network, the New England Santa Society, The National Beard Registry and Michigan Area Professional Santas or MAPS. "You obviously don't have to live in Michigan to be a part of that one," he noted. "They offer free training and share ideas. To see the glimmer in a child's eye is addicting. I have an answer for any question that may come up during our talks," he said.

Small children who've been told the stories of Santa are fun to see, but when the appearance of doubt and questioning are on a slightly older child's face, Nick gets ready with answers to the logical questions.

"How does Santa make it to every house in the world in one night? He doesn't. Not every home celebrates Christmas, some (Christian) religions celebrate on a date other than December 25," he said. "Then there's the curve of the Earth and the different time zones. A trip around the world can actually be 35 and a half hours, not 24."

"Why is Rudolf's nose red? He ate too much fairy dust. Santa would never allow the other reindeer to make fun of Rudolf or keep him from playing games," he explained.

"Why does Santa wear red and shake sleigh bells? In the beginning, Bernard, the head elf, suggested the Christmas Eve ride should be stealthy with Santa wearing black clothing and soft booties. The sleigh glided through the air making no noise. That was a problem because the birds couldn't hear it coming and several were struck. So it was decided to forego the silence for safety's sake."

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BY KATHY BOWEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN HULL PHOTOGRAPHY & PROVIDED BY NICK CASEY



RESIDENT FEATURE

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Nick started to grow a serious beard for the first time in his life on December 25, 2018. “The culture of Santa has real bearded (men) and not real beards. Some of the custom beards are amazing. One of the best is Yak hair, it’s unbelievably realistic.” In addition to his costume, Nick arrives at his appointments in a White Ford Escape that is decorated with magnetic signs including Christmas bulbs that light up, a Respect the Beard plaque and his website QR code.



A love of Christmas was instilled in Nick by his mother, who had passed away a few months before Nick’s first Santa experience. ‘She would have loved this,’ he said. ‘She was all about Christmas



Nick Casey family

and anything to do with the holiday.” Nick visits several nursing homes in the region during the holidays and is rewarded by bringing joy to some care facilities that can be rather dreary. “It’s lovely to see an older person smile and remember Santa. Sometimes they don’t remember their family members, but they usually remember Santa,” he said.

Hundreds of children have confided wishes, asked questions or just stared at Nick. One little girl remains with him after a visit to an event a few years ago. “There was a little girl, maybe nine years old, who was hanging back and looking sad. We were getting ready to pack it up for the night when she was encouraged to come see me. She didn’t have much to say, but it was time for a photo and I told her I never say ‘cheese’ because people might be lactose intolerant. When it was time to smile, I said ‘Pickles’ and she lit up,” he said. “The mom explained Pickles is the name of the girl’s cat and this would be their first Christmas with a new family after a lifetime of some pretty sad experiences.”

Nick and his wife, Erica, live in Saratoga Springs in a house that came furnished with a dog named Crackers. “The lady who lived in the house was ready to move to assisted living but couldn’t take her dog. It turned out Crackers was one of the best features of our new home,” Nick said. Crackers has since passed away, but two new pups have joined the family with Nick and Erica. Nick also has a daughter, Amber, and a son, Nick, Jr., as well as a 6-year-old grandson, Gabriel.

Born in Brunswick, outside of Troy, Nick, Sr. joined the Air Force in his 20s and over the next 17 years visited every continent on the globe except South America. He began his military career working with explosives, but over the years switched to pneudraulic systems in aircraft and computers. He ended his service in 2007 with the 109th Airlift Wing of the Air National Guard in Scotia. “Two days before 9/11, I became a supervisor on the help desk at the base. Our unit was key for communications with New York City,” he said. It’s a long way from that tragic period to the daily joy being Santa can bring. Whether greeting children at the mall or acting as door man for a holiday party at a swanky home on Lake George, Nick said he’s ready and willing to make anyone’s day a little merrier, if given the chance. ~



Crackers, Nick and Erica

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