

SANTA'S SLEIGH IS COMING TO TOWN!

For the past thirteen years, Tustin Police Officer George Vallevieni has helped Santa Claus fly through the streets of Tustin. This year, from December 1st through December 23rd on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, Santa, Mrs. Claus, and Santa's helpers will visit every neighborhood in Tustin. Officer Vallevieni will be flying the sleigh so that Santa and his helpers can meet every child in Tustin and give each a candy cane.

In the late 1990s, the Tustin Community Foundation, then led by former Mayor Chuck Puckett, donated \$2,000 to the Police Department so that they could build a sleigh for Santa to visit the children of Tustin. Santa's sleigh was purchased from an antique shop window display and with the minimal funds available for the sleigh, much of the work to prepare it for City flight was done by volunteers.

This year, the Foundation once again donated funds, \$1,562.00 to be exact, to rehab Santa's sleigh. Over the last ten years the sleigh has been visited and climbed on by over 100,000 children, and it needed refurbishing. Officer Vallevieni did most of the work himself, carefully rebuilding the fence, replacing the grass turf, handcrafting the reindeer and each detail of the renovation. Police volunteer Kathleen Byrnes hand painted the reindeer.

Both Officer Vallevieni and former Mayor Chuck Puckett (also known as Mayor Santa) delight in taking the time to help Santa bring holiday cheer to the children of Tustin.

"My third night helping Santa, during our first season, we turned on Bonner Drive and there was just one child waiting. The little girl stood, all dressed up waiting outside of her house. As the sleigh flew down the street, the girl started bouncing... vibrating... oscillating... and she yelled, 'Grandma, Santa came to see me! See me! See me!' That's why we do this," said former Mayor Chuck Puckett.

"I want to make sure each child in Tustin experiences the magic of Christmas. Some kids can't afford to go to South Coast Plaza and have their pictures taken with Santa. Instead, we bring Santa to their very own street. In some neighborhoods we can barely inch the truck down the street, there are so many excited children swarming the sleigh to meet their hero, Santa," said Officer George Vallevieni. *"If we can make the holiday season special for all children and let our community see the police helping Santa, I think we amass a lot of goodwill that will last long after the holiday season."*



HOW TO SEE SANTA:



- Starting December 1st
- Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday evenings starting at 5:00 p.m.
- www.tustinpd.org/SantaSleigh.htm
- Temporary signs posted in neighborhoods Santa will visit that evening
- A PD van will announce Santa's arrival with Christmas music