



For Immediate Release  
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## Operation Santa Claus 2009 Set to Take Flight

*Alaska National Guard and partners celebrate sharing & caring for village children, families*

**CAMP DENALI, Alaska** — The holiday season is quickly approaching, and for hundreds of children living in Alaska villages, the revelry is about to start with this year's 53rd annual Operation Santa Claus.

This event is part of the Alaska National Guard's yearly community relations and support program that provides toys, clothing, books, school supplies, fresh fruit and sundaes to youngsters in communities across the state each year.

"Everyone involved in Operation Santa Claus looks forward to this time of year because we enjoy bringing the festivities and spirit of the holidays to children and families all across Alaska," said Brig. Gen. Thomas H. Katkus, acting adjutant general of the Alaska National Guard. "We value the opportunity this program gives the Alaska National Guard to reach out to several of our hometown communities and show our support for our fellow neighbors and Alaskans."

For children of rural Alaska, Santa's sleigh has come to resemble the Air National Guard's C-130 Hercules aircraft, the Army National Guard's UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter or C-23 Sherpa aircraft. This year, the Alaska Air National Guard will also utilize its C-17 aircraft for one of the village trips. Santa, Mrs. Claus and a team of elves spread the holiday spirit as soon as the aircraft land and cargo is unloaded.

This year Operation Santa Claus will visit Koyuk, St. George, Nondalton, Gambell, Klukwan, Pedro Bay and Kasigluk. The C-17 and C-130 flights, which will have media seats available, will be on Nov. 3 to Koyuk, Nov. 7 to St. George and Nov. 23 to Gambell.

**HOW IT ALL BEGAN...**The Alaska Air National Guard originally started Operation Santa Claus in 1956 as a result of a request from St. Mary's Mission for toys for their children. Spring floods denied a fishing season that year, and the drought that followed eliminated the big game. Every bit of money the Mission had was used to pay for food to be shipped in, so it appeared there was no money to buy gifts for the children for Christmas that year.

So, Guardsmen would accept new or used toys, in those days, from members of the Anchorage community. In turn, they'd rehab used toys, then hand them over to Santa Claus for delivery aboard an Air Guard C-123J Provider.

Throughout the years, as time and social conditions in rural Alaska changed, other villages, schools and groups have invited Operation Santa Claus to their communities. Literally, tens of thousands of Alaska's children and adults have been on the receiving end of St. Nick's good cheer.

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**Press Advisory: All media interested in covering Operation Santa Claus should contact the Public Affairs office immediately. Space is limited aboard the aircraft, and although every effort is made to accommodate media requests, seats will be awarded on a first come, first serve basis. Those interested in the flight to Koyuk on Nov. 3 should contact Public Affairs by Monday, Oct. 26. The airstrip in Koyuk has put limitations on the aircraft, and seats are very limited for this particular flight.**