

Intell Sunday
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Santa Claus is not coming to town.

He LIVES in town.

The Santa in this case is Jim Brennen, building superintendent at 97 Albert Park Apartments.

Every December, he dons his Santa suit — he already sports white hair and beard — and stands on the sidewalk on Sidney Street in front of his building and waves to passing motorists. He also hands out candy canes and other goodies to students who walk by and visit with him during the stretch he's Santa from about 9 a.m. to when it turns dark.

He does that for a few days in the weeks leading up to the big day.

This was his 11th year being Albert Park Santa.

Why?

"I guess it's because I like to see people with a smile on their face," the 63-year-old Brennen laughed with a hearty Ho Ho Ho.

"A lot of times I think it brings Christmas cheer to people and a lot of pleasure for myself."

Most of the motorists blow their horns, smile and wave back at the waving Brennen in appreciation of his kind gesture to play Santa and instill some festive cheer.

"Some even give me the 'thumbs up' sign....that's rewarding for me because I like to see people happy at this time of year."

Brennen started the Santa tradition shortly after becoming Albert Park's building superintendent in 1992.

"I initially put on the Santa suit and went to visit the residents of the three buildings. When I was walking back, a couple of people tooted their horns at me. So I got the idea to stand on the sidewalk and bring some Christmas cheer to motorists," he said.

He wears a Santa suit that has been made especially for him. He purchases his own candy canes and other candy treats to hand out to students.

Brennen gets a kick out of playing Santa (he was Santa in the city of Belleville's first Santa Claus night parade last year).

With his white hair and beard, he even looks like Santa.

"I have been told that many times," he acknowledged. "It's a really nice feeling because Santa is a nice guy and children around the world love him," Brennen said.

The Belleville-born Brennen has been more than Santa all his life. He worked for a woodworking manufacturer after leaving Belleville Collegiate Institute and then drove a dry cleaning truck for a few years.

Brennen then embarked on a 28-year career at the Glen Miller paper mill (now called Sonoco).

He took early retirement in 1990 and, in 1992, moved to 97 Albert Park and became its superintendent.

He enjoys the work — from cutting grass and shovelling snow to planting gardens and doing minor repairs.

"The people I work with and the residents are all very good to me," he said.

Brennen has also been involved in various charitable causes over the years — many of these involved walking long distances.

He did his first walk for charity in the late 1960s. He and another paper mill worker walked from Kingston to Trenton to raise money for under-privileged children. They raised a few thousand dollars and donated it to the Salvation Army in Belleville and Trenton.

Brennen has also walked from Kingston to Belleville in support of muscular dystrophy and cancer research.

His last fundraising walk was from Napanee to Belleville in 1999 to support a young Deseronto girl with cerebral palsy to receive hyperbaric oxygen therapy in hopes it will help her develop normally.

"The youngster's grandmother lived in our building and I offered to help raise money for her treatment. We raised over \$4,000 for her," he said proudly.

Walking those distances is always challenging, he noted.

"It's not easy but it gives me a lot of satisfaction as a human being to be able to help people and bring some joy in their lives. I like to see people happy...especially at Christmas time."