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Yes, Virginia...

Postal service helps kids hook up with Santa

The Norman Transcript

By Randall Turk

Transcript Business Editor

For years, children have sent letters to Santa in hopes of inspiring better rewards from the jolly old gentleman.

The U.S. Postal Service guarantees such letters will get through to "North Pole." With a little nudging from the family, Santa is certain to reply.

General practices indicate a child ought to be "nice" throughout the year to get a letter from Santa, with most urgent wishes granted and giftwrapped. But hey! Kids are mere mortals, too. The brighter ones might be doing a little catching up at this time of year. They could well copy Lauren Whatley, 7, who has done truly "nice" things several times this year.

On Wednesday, Lauren shipped boxes containing Christmas cards, photos of red, white and blue hearts and U.S. flags to American military in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was her third shipment to the troops this year.

"We don't know anybody in the military," said Susan Whatley, Lauren's mother. "We found a Web site, anysoldier.com, where members of the armed forces tell you what they need. Our soldiers over there are feeding starving children. They need simple things like crackers, Tang [an orange drink] and cough drops. But most important, they need letters and cards."

Lauren, a first-grader at Washington Elementary School, said American soldiers "give so much" to children in Iraq and Afghanistan. For Lauren, sending the packages had other benefits. "It makes you feel so good to do it," she said.

The Postal Service tradition as Santa's helpers began in 1912 when Frank Hitchcock, then the Postmaster General, authorized local postmasters to allow individuals or institutions to use letters

Photos



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addressed to Santa Claus "for philanthropic purposes."

Today, post offices across the country make letters to Santa available, upon request. But action is necessary soon. Letters must be received at "North Pole, AK" by Thursday. After then, priority mail will be the only way to reach Mr. Claus.

"We're happy to do our part to deliver the holidays," said Norman Postmaster Andy Tengeres. "It's what we do best."

For others wanting a festive address on cards and letters, post office remailings are available from locales like the Oklahoma towns of Antlers and Snow. Also on the list of possible postmarks are places like the many Bethlehems, Nazareths, St. Marys and St. Josephs on the map.

Even the postmasters in Rudolph (Ohio and Wisconsin) are willing to postmark your Christmas cards. A complete list of cities participating in the remailing program is available from the Holiday Press Room at usps.com. Click on "holiday cities."

Parents, families or friends helping a child get a letter from Santa can mention some of the child's accomplishments and successes in the letter from Santa. (At this time of year, the jolly old elf cannot handle all this himself, you know.)

Santa's letter should be in a stamped envelope addressed to the child. "North Pole, AK" should be in the return address. Place the self-addressed envelope inside a larger stamped first-class mail or priority mail envelope and send to North Pole Christmas cancellation, Postmaster, 5400 Mail Trail, Fairbanks, AK 99709-9998.

Those interested in having postmarks from other holiday cities should place all addressed and stamped cards and letters in a larger envelope addressed to Postmaster, and including the city, state and zip code. If the zip code is unknown, use the zip code locator on usps.com.

Yes, Virginia, there really is a Santa Claus with supernatural powers, also known as St. Nick. At this very moment, he is speeding along on his appointed rounds.

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