



**FOR December 5, 2015**

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## **Operation Santa Claus 2015 takes flight to St. Mary's**

**JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska** — Local community volunteers with Operation Santa Claus will travel to St. Mary's to spread Christmas cheer, Dec. 5.

Children living there will soon be celebrating the 59th 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.

This year's events will bring Santa, Mrs. Claus and a team of elves to these villages on a C-130 Hercules aircraft from the 144th Airlift Squadron, Alaska Air National Guard.

**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 all but eliminated the big game animals available to hunt. 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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### **Details:**

**What:** 59th annual Operation Santa Claus

**When:** Saturday, Dec. 5

**Where:** St. Mary's, Alaska

**Note:** Seating is limited for media interested in attending. Please contact Tech. Sgt. Alicia Halla or Staff Sgt. Edward Eagerton with the 176th Wing Public Affairs Office at (907)552-3959. Arrangements must be made by noon, Tuesday, November 24.