

Mall grants Christmas wishes for Boys & Girls Club

By DIANE M. REY, For The Capital Published 12/24/09

At Westfield Annapolis mall in Parole, Santa Claus usually takes time off twice a day to feed his reindeer, as a sign at Santa's Workshop clearly states. But on Tuesday the jolly old elf gave up his break to grant a few last-minute wishes for children from the local Boys & Girls Clubs.



Matt Cole - For The Capital

A curious D'Andre Covert, shakes his gift hoping it is his Christmas wish fulfilled at the Wishes and Dreams ceremony Tuesday, where 24 children from the Boys and Girls Clubs of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County were given gifts by Westfield Annapolis mall.

"It's cool!" said Anthony Dixon, 9, of Glen Burnie, after he unwrapped his gift to reveal a new video game. Nearby, his 7-year-old sister, Aja, modeled a new pink backpack and princess tiara while waving her magic wand in the air. The gift-giving event was originally scheduled for Sunday afternoon, but was postponed after a storm dumped 21 inches of snow on the area between Friday night and Sunday morning.

At the ceremony, hosted by WRNR radio's Alex Cortright, mall officials also unveiled a whole tableful of surprises for 4-year-old Zion Logan of Pasadena, the grand-prize winner of a holiday shopping spree, and presented a check for \$1,200 to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Annapolis & Anne Arundel County. Jim Hossick of Bowie, aka "Kidsinger Jim," kept the crowd entertained with songs of the season.

Mall Marketing Director Scott deGraffenreid said the original plan was to grant wishes for 12 area children for the final event in Westfield's "12 Days of Shopping" promotion that began on Black Friday, Nov. 27. But after they received a number of heartfelt requests, the decision was made to double that number to 24 children from the Boys & Girls Clubs and also select one winner from among contest entrants.

"You couldn't pick just one of these kids," said Caitlin Tyler, mall marketing coordinator, who read through the Boys & Girls Club requests. Many of the children asked for basic needs like clothing and shoes. Tyler and Lisa Jacobs, the clubs' chief development officer, wheeled a large shopping cart around the mall last week to help Santa with the project. "It was one of the most gratifying things I've done in awhile," Tyler said.

To help Santa with his vast list-making duties, area children have been writing out their wish lists and depositing them at collection boxes located at the mall's concierge desk and where Santa does his meeting and greeting. Electronics, including cell phones and computer games, were among the most-requested items. Some children told stories of family hardship, such as a mother suffering from cancer, and others asked Santa their burning questions, like how many elves work at the North Pole and whether he likes polar bears. At least one child asked for straight A's on her report card.

Moriah Logan was surprised to learn that her son Zion's wish list was picked as the winner from at least 500 "Dear Santa" letters turned in. Zion, who attends preschool at The Salvation Army in Annapolis, asked for winter pajamas and a short list of toys, including LEGOs and Hot Wheels cars. His form letter also included several hearts to convey his love for Santa. "He talks about Santa all the time," said his mother, who also received several gift certificates from mall vendors.

This year has been a particularly hard one for the family, she said. A single mother and nanny to five children, she is going through a divorce and has seen her child care business drop off. The combination took a toll on her Christmas shopping budget. "I felt terrible that I would only be able to give him one present. Now I guess things have changed. I'm overwhelmed, happy and relieved," she said.