

Seeking out your stories of Santa

Inverness couple want to share Christmas spirit

By Deborah Donovan ddonovan@dailyherald.com

December 22, 2013

An Inverness couple who have a very special relationship with Santa Claus want to hear your own memories of everyone's favorite elf.

Frank Sesko has been "bringing Santa Claus" to friends, relatives, nursing homes and schools for 50 years, ever since his mother brought her teenage son a Santa costume discarded from the department store where she worked.

And he gets a lot of support from his wife, Mary Ann, including a suit of red and "ermine" she made for those special appearances.

"We have 18 trees now throughout the house, all decorated with different themes. And the only real one is out on the deck," Frank Sesko said.

That's because this man who loves Christmas learned years ago that he is allergic to real Christmas trees.

The Seskos — both retired educators — want to publish a book full of special Santa memories. They are asking people to send stories and photos to santamemories@comcast.net.

While their first book, "Santa & Sam's Big Secret," has sold only a few hundred copies, the Seskos are not discouraged easily and have rewritten the ending of the children's story with a twist in hopes of attracting Hollywood's attention.

Frank himself has great memories of Santa's appearances, including a surprised young woman who opened an engagement ring while perched on Santa's knee and older folks whose gift revealed they were going to be grandparents.

"Santa Claus is the spirit of giving," Frank said. "If we can promote that, I think it's important for children to see. Christmas is giving and trying to be of service to others."

His heart belongs to low-income children who appreciate getting a lollipop from Santa.

"They are so enthusiastic," he said. "Not one said 'Is that all?'" That's what it's all about — Christmas is giving."

Most years the Seskos start decorating their home right after Halloween, trimming the trees and displaying collections, including Mary Ann's snow globes and Frank's Santa Clauses.



Photos by Mark Welsh / mwelsh@dailyherald.com Frank Sesko stands by the entry tree, one of 18 in the Inverness home he shares with his wife, Mary Ann.

"We were really quite poor when I was young," Mary Ann said. "Somehow mom got me a snow globe. I thought the little girl inside couldn't be happier. It seemed like such a beautiful place to be, the most peaceful things to watch."

The dining room tree actually "snows," the family room tree wears all white ornaments, and the bubble lights on the one in the living room captivate Gabrielle Dyckman, the 18-month-old child of their daughter, Peggy and her husband, Andy, of West Chicago. There's a silver '50s tree, Frank's fishing and golf tree, and a small tree decked with pink and white that Mary Ann's late mother made. And, of course, many of the ornaments were made when their children were young or were gifts from their students over the years.

"When we moved here 30 years ago, we knew we definitely wanted a tree in the living room," Mary Ann said. "But when we sat in the family room, we had no tree.

We have to have one in the entry, and you want one when you eat in the dining room. I cook so much in the kitchen at Christmastime, so of course I have to have a tree there."

How do people react to what some might consider overdoing the holiday?

"Our friends love it," Mary Ann said. "So many of them are starting to have more than one tree. And we have them over at Christmas. Everyone knows it's the Christmas house."

Peggy brought a group of mothers and little ones to see the house, and next year Peter and his wife, Jamie, will probably drive in from Winnebago to show their twin daughters, Rylie Brooke and Saylor Anne, what their grandparents have wrought. The babies were born in September.



"We love the Christmas season and Santa so much, we want to share it with other people and spread the joy of Christmas as far as we can," Frank said.

Santa spends a long time talking with fans young and old, so these days he has to limit his visits. Frank takes Santa to three nursing homes now, St. Joseph's in Palatine, Heartland ManorCare in Rolling Meadows and Alexian Village in Elk Grove

Mary Ann Sesko made a Santa suit for her husband, Frank, who for almost 50 years has been "taking Santa" to visit nursing homes, friends and schools.

Village, where Frank's 100-year-old aunt, Estelle Douglas, waits impatiently for the visit.

He goes to the school where Peggy teaches, Oak Park Elementary in East Aurora Unit District 131.

But Frank misses the times at the preschool in Crystal Lake where Santa needed two days to visit all the children, and a Chicago school where the former principal's annual gift was inviting families in for professional portraits with Santa.

"These little kids who don't expect much are the most fun," Frank said. "They don't have a 12-page list. They want one toy or 'something for my brother.'"