



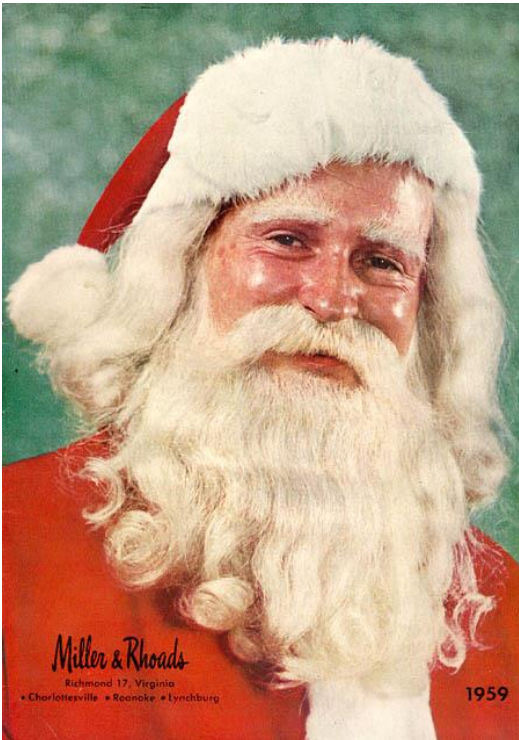
The Brothers Claus Present: SMART SANTA - REVISITED

By: Leon McBryde, Stephen F. Gillham and Debra Gillham

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I can see that we may need some explanations for this chapter. What do I mean “Smart Santa, Revisited”? Well, Smart Santa was one of our first magical effects we came up with, back in 2005, my second year as Santa Claus. It was so amazing that Deb and I immediately wanted to share the effect with other Santas and wrote it up. But, the world has come a long way since then and a revamp is necessary. Equipment and techniques have changed a great deal so instead of adding to the old document both Deb and I felt like it deserved a new write up, so here it is.

Debra and I always thought it would be great if Santa magically knew all about the children that came to see him. After all, that’s the way it is in all the Santa Claus movies. In the movies, a child walks up to Santa and he knows their name, how old they are and if they’re naughty or nice. He knows this without any one saying anything to him! Why he can even remember what presents he gave them last year. For us, knowing how sad it is for the parents, when their child reaches the age where they begin to doubt and question the existence of Santa. We knew that if we could figure out a way to get the “inside” information to Santa’s ears, then the child’s belief could be extended...no matter what they were hearing from school mates. After years of performing this effect, turns out we were right. Of all the things we do as Santa Claus, this is our most powerful effect and the one most expected from our clients. Now, approximately 95% of our Santa



work is done “Smart”. It was our clients that named the effect. We would get calls from them asking if we would be doing the “Smart Santa” thing again. It became so common that Deb decided that the name fit, and Smart Santa was born. But we were not the first Santa Claus to use technology in this way.

Turns out that this effect was done by one of the most famous Santa Claus of all time, Bill Strother. Bill was known as the “Miller & Rhoads Legendary Santa Claus” in Richmond, Virginia. He is a member of the [International Santa Claus Hall of Fame – 2010](#). He became the Miller & Rhoads Department Store Santa in 1942, his Santa Claus makeup was designed by the famous Max Factor and took 2 hours to apply. At the time he was without a doubt the most realistic Santa Claus ever seen. He was Santa there until his untimely death in a car accident in 1957 at the age of 61. If you were a child of the 40’s and 50’s who lived within 150 miles of Richmond Virginia, chances are Bill Strother was your Santa Claus. One of the things those children remember most about his Santa, he

knew their name, so he must be the real Santa. At the time it was with the use of a concealed throat-mic on an assistant that made this possible. He was able to address each child by name. Bill was not only the most famous Santa Claus in the history of Virginia, he was also the world's highest paid Santa Claus according to the book [“The Real Santa of Miller & Rhoads – The Extraordinary Life of Bill Strother”](#) by Donna Strother Deekens with foreword by Phillip L. Wenz. In 1942 Miller & Rhoads agreed to pay Bill the fee of \$1,000 a week for four consecutive weeks. If we adjust that for inflation the \$4,000 for the month would be \$63,620 in today's wages. I'd say he probably still holds the record for highest paid, but I could be wrong. The book on his life is



a great read by the way.

Funny thing is, at the time Deb and I were figuring the equipment needs out, we didn't know anything about Bill Strother. We just knew that this was an effect that would be wonderful for the children. I wish someone could tell us how Bill and Miller and Rhoads set the effect up but the only reference I can find is the one that mentions the use of a throat-mic on his assistant. Knowing that the first walkie-talkies were developed for World War II. These early walkie-talkies were not discreet, so my best guess is that the throat-mic worn by his assistant went to a public address type amplifier and then the signal went to a hidden ear piece worn by Bill under his hair with the wires being concealed by his clothing and being taped down the back of his neck. Possibly he hooked himself to the circuit

when he sat down in his Santa chair. I'm happy to report that today's equipment is much higher tech, but this was cutting edge at the time.

In previous editions of this discussions I have gone into detail with the first equipment that we used for Smart Santa with the pros and cons of each type of equipment. I don't feel that repeating this information is helpful so I'm going to just deal with what we know works and works well.

Entry Level Equipment:

In the beginning, when we were attempting to do Smart Santa, we used walkie talkies. We have used cell phone also and the results were everything but good. The equipment is so important to how this effect is received that we now recommend the following type of equipment as the minimum standard for this effect. If cost is a factor, then purchase what is known as a queuing system for tour guides. The best of these devices that have a low cost are known as a "Tour Guide System".

Using a tour guide audio system with ear buds offers high quality audio for Smart Santa work. They are easy-to-use, easy-to-pair devices with reduced background noise, that set up easy and offer crystal clear audio, wirelessly.

One of the best entry level systems was discovered by Santa Leon McBryde and is made by Mipro.

This system sell for \$550.00 and is available from [ProKNOWS](#).

We used this system for about 5 years and it is excellent.

With this system you have one transmitter and one receiver.

Your assistant wears the transmitter and Santa wears the

receiver. Leon sells this with a mic for the transmitter and an



Includes Ear Buds & Microphone!

ear bud for the receiver so it's complete. This is the least amount of equipment needed for this effect. There is only one-way communication with this system, but we worked with this for a number of years and did great. It's important with a system like this though, for your assistant to be able to see Santa since Santa can't talk back. We always carried two complete systems with us and consequently we were able to use both for two-way communication. Of course, this required an outlay of \$1,100.00 but we always had a back-up if one system should stop working, which with the Mipro, never did. This might be a good time to talk about the technique of using this equipment.

Basic Smart Santa Equipment Technique:

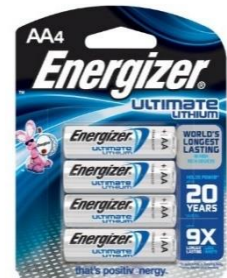
With the Mipro entry level equipment you will have one-way communication. Your assistant will wear the transmitter and is the person giving Santa all the information. Your assistant will need a pocket to put the transmitter in and we recommend that they run the wire for the microphone under clothing and possibly down their sleeve to their hand. You don't want anyone that sees your assistant knowing that they are "Wired". It's also very important that your assistant doesn't look conspicuous. They need to blend in with the crowd. The last thing you want is for everyone to be looking at your assistant. Debra is my assistant and usually wears black clothing with possibly a large red sweater that has pockets. Just the sort of thing a grandmother might wear at a Christmas party. When asked if she is Mrs. Claus, she always replies, "Goodness no! I'm Santa's driver! We never let Santa drive a car. He's used to sleigh speeds and it would be bad for him to try and drive!" Then you can just let their imaginations run with that. Probably the most important things for your assistant to know is always shut down the mic when not talking to Santa and never feed Santa more information than he can use at one time. For example, I need Deb to just tell me the child's name only waiting until I have said the name and then tell me the child's age. If she tries and tells me "This is David who is 5 years old and you gave him a red bike last Christmas last Christmas I will be lucky to remember his name when he comes up to me. The assistant needs to supply the information as needed. Not all at once. Deb has also learned that the easiest way to silence the mic is to use the palm method. She keeps the mic in her hand and speaks into her hand. When she wants to silence the mic she simply closes her fist around the mic which mutes it.

For Santa you need to have a spot to put the receiver. With the Mipro, you can hang the receiver around your neck. Personally, I like putting it somewhere that I can get to it if I need to check it or make a volume adjustment. I have special pockets for it on most of my suits and vest. The important thing is to run the ear bud wire discreetly to your ear. Go under your vest or shirt and come up your back to which ever ear you want to plug into to. It's also important to know which knee you are. I am left kneed which means I always put the child on my left knee, so they can speak into my left ear for their Christmas wishes. My right ear is the one plugged up with the ear bud. Which means I can't hear much of anything from the child with my right ear. It's important to make sure that the child speaks into the open left ear. With a system that uses batteries such as the Mipro, be sure to always check the batteries before doing an event. Always use 100% batteries when starting any event. Another trick we learned the hard way is always use toupee tape when applying the earbud into your ear. There is nothing worse than the ear bud falling out of your ear and having to discreetly put it back in while sitting in front of the children. Wrap a piece of toupee tape around the ear bud and seat it deeply into the ear canal. It will never fall out and as the season progresses your ear canal will

be hairless. We also use the mini binder clips for securing the earbud wire to the collar of my shirt. These are wonderful for relieving the strain of the wire to your ear. Deb always has me turn my head to the far left and then clips the wire from the ear bud to the collar on the back of my shirt. This prevents the ear bud from pulling out as I work and move around. It's also good for securing the wire to your fur and clipping to your suspenders. One bag of these clips should be enough for the entire season.

Tips for Smart Santa so far discussed:

1. With the basic equipment you will have one-way communication.
2. Always start with fresh batteries. We like the [Energizer Lithium Batteries](#). I buy mine at Sam's Club to help reduce the cost. The transmitter is the device that uses the most power. We never start an engagement with batteries that test below 100%. This is where the battery checker comes in. Every time we go out, I check all the batteries. I can't even tell you how much money I have saved since buying our battery checker. Prior to being able to check the batteries we always started with new batteries which was not always necessary and added cost.



3. Invest in a good battery checker. This is the [ZTS Mini Multi Battery Tester](#) for \$42.00 from Amazon. I use this all the time for other props as well. In fact, this tool is so valuable that I have two. I carry one with my mics for the body packs that I use with the PA system. It's awful having a mic die during a performance so getting a couple of these is a really good idea. I keep two since I never seem to find just one when I need it.



4. Always, always, always use toupee tape around the ear bud. I learned this lesson after the second or third year. You will sweat and when you sweat things will fall out. It's hard to put an ear bud back in your ear in front of a group of children without them wondering what you are doing. This is one of the best things you can have in your kit. [Vapon Topstick 1" X 3-yard roll of Grooming tape](#) is \$8.50 from Amazon. Cut a strip of the tape lengthwise so that it is 1/2" wide. Wrap the ear bud with this sticking tape and seat it deep in your ear canal. It will never fall out and you will quickly develop a hairless ear canal.



5. Use a decent ear bud. My favorite is a white one made by Sony that I purchase from Best Buy. You can find them here: [Sony Mdr Ex15lp - Ex Series - Headphones \(white\)](#) for \$11.32. For this price order three sets. Plug it into your system and put one in your ear, I'm right eared. Once you have made sure you have sound, cut off the other ear bud. You will never wear both buds since you must be able to hear the children. I'm "left knee'd" which means I put the children on my left knee to take a photo or talk. I wear my hair long and my hat hangs on the right side to hide this ear piece. I use the white one for obvious reasons.



6. Buy a bag of the [Mini Binder clips](#) like these. They are wonderful for relieving the strain of the wire to your ear. Deb always has me turn my head to the far left and then clips the wire from the ear bud to the collar on the back of my shirt. This prevents the ear bud from pulling out as I work and move around. It's also good for securing a mic in your assistant's sleeve or sweater. One bag of these mini clips should get you through your season. You will find them at any office supply store or you can order them from Amazon. Get black and white.



TYPES OF VISITS: Note that we have now found the **ULTIMATE RIG for Smart Santa** but I'm going to discuss that after talking about the types of visits.

The Short Visit:

For a child to think they have found the real Santa, it takes what we call the three **Santa Qualifiers**. When doing these "Short Visits", we use a **Santa Admission Ticket** (example is found at the end of this discussion) which is sent to the event organizer at time of contract or handed out by my assistant to the parents of the children. The important thing is don't let the child read or see this ticket. Ask that the parents fill in the form as completely as possible without asking the child any questions. The child should never read this ticket. These tickets are then given to my assistant in the order that the children come up to visit Santa. My assistant reads the information to me as the child walks up. For a Santa Qualifier to work it must be a bit of information that the child knows you couldn't know without someone telling you. Since no one is near you when they approach, then you must be the REAL Santa.

For example, the **first qualifier** might be their name. Usually as the child gets within earshot I will call out their name and say something like, "Well hello Jason! Oh, it's good to see you again!" Lots of times this will stop them in their tracks. It's important if you have helpers bringing the child to you that they DO NOT say the child's name. You want the child to know that no one said their name and yet you still know it.

The **second qualifier** I use is their age. As the child comes up to my chair, after hearing their name, I stop them again with, "Hey! Aren't you five this year?" and I hold up five fingers to the child waiting for affirmation from them. Holding up the five fingers is more for my assistant than anyone. I want my assistant to feed me the information as needed not all at once. Seeing the age signifies that I'm now ready for the third qualifier. As the child continues to advance, and just before I left them to my knee, I say, "Hey, can I ask you a question?" followed with a pause. Then "How did you like that red bicycle I gave you last Christmas?" **the third qualifier**.

So just in the time it took for the child to get to my chair I hit them with their name, age and their favorite gift from last Christmas. Once you have given them these three qualifiers you can go on with your visit. Find out what they would like for Christmas and then just when they are leaving, look them in the eye and tell them my favorite bit of information, the response their parents gave us when we asked them on the short form "What about this child makes you proud?" I take their parent's response to that questions and say to the child, "You know, I want to tell you how proud I am of you! Do you know what I'm most proud of?" Wait for them to say no, "I'm proud of you because you treat people so well. You never make fun of others

and you always treat people with respect. I'm so proud of you and you know what" Your parents are proud of you also!" I usually give the child a hug and tell them "Keep up the good work!"

Of course, this is a good example. Sometimes the parent will say something that's clueless such as, "I am so proud of my child because she is so pretty!" At these times, I will say something safe like, "I'm so proud of you because of how you treat your friends and family!" and then go on from there.

For most line work you will only have time for three Santa Qualifiers. Deb and I can see 55 children an hour doing Smart Visits with each, and that includes taking pictures as well as finding out what the child wants for Christmas. This is major work. It requires a good assistant and a Santa that is used to working with them. After four hours (220+ children) you will be tired. After 6 hours (330+ children) you will be exhausted! But, the parents and children will be amazed and leave with a Santa memory they will never forget. The Santa Admission Ticket will be at the end of this document.

The Long Visit:

These visits are the most magical we do! The families each get approximately a ten-minute slot for this visit. If the family has one child or five we try and stick with this time. If we run long with one family, we might make it up with a family that has an infant. There just isn't much talking you do with a baby. If you do the math, there are only six families an hour. Typically, about 4 hours of these visits is all I can perform. With those six families I could see anywhere from 6 to 24 children in an hour.

The parents fill out a "**Long Form**" on each child. (Long Form is at the end of this discussion) This form contains much more information on each child. These visits are incredible, but some type of video feed for the assistant is strongly advised. This is where Apple's FaceTime is so beneficial. Deb is in a separate room from me and giving me the information. She needs to see what is happening in the room. The small iPhone shows everything in detail and with the two-way audio communication system we use she can time information flow during the visit. Of course, I am the only one that can hear her, but I will tell you that some of the best things I say are her thoughts. Because of how this works, I look like the most caring, sensitive Santa in the entire world. Many times, people can't believe what I am saying, but it's my feminine side....my wife, Deb.

Over the years we have listened and helped families with many incredible things. Some tear at your heart, while others make you laugh out loud, but most are amazing. This can only happen because we are using technology to create an effect that brings Santa Claus to life. As far as the children are concerned, I am the real Santa. I must be! There is no way I could know all the things I know if I wasn't. This is an unbelievable power and must not, at any cost, be abused!

One of the things I never do **is say anything negative about the child or anyone else**. If you can't say something nice, then don't say anything at all. This is very important. Regardless what the parents request, we do not say anything to the child that is a negative comment or criticism of the child or anyone else. I am even careful now phrasing questions about their elf. Instead of asking if their elf is misbehaving, I now say "How is your elf? Are they being silly?" The children will usually smile and tell me stories about the latest adventures of their elf.

I try to stay away from comments about appearance and focus on more substantial praise, such as how they are doing in school or how they treat others. As Santas, we need to build up children, rather than put them down.

The Mechanics of Doing the Long Visits:

When we started doing these visits, we had people wanting to help us, and they did. The problem was, through the years they left, and we were the only constants. Many times, we didn't know how to set up the equipment that originally, they set up. For this reason, we have developed our own system using items that we can take care of. We no longer need a website for sign ups. We don't need a room with \$5,000 worth of electronic gear. We don't require a sound engineer to set up the electronic equipment and mixing boards. There is still room for volunteers to help, but they are not necessary in the mechanics of how the process works. Because of the internet and technology advancements we can now handle everything we need for this to work.

You will need a location to use for the visits. A church works great. This is what we use. They provide a room for us to set up in and this is where our families come. It's a win – win for the church. They get exposure to people who normally wouldn't know they exist and sometimes they return to become members of the church.

FIRST STEP:

First, in early November, we meet with our team of volunteers to pick dates that work for most of us. I use the weekdays since weekends are prime time for contracted Santa work. Times for these visits are from 5 pm until 8:30 pm, knowing that we probably will not leave until 9 pm. The later times are usually booked for the older children. We recommend a cut-off age of eleven for these visits. Occasionally we do make exceptions on this rule, especially if it is a child that has seen me since they were little or are special needs children.

TYPES OF VOLUNTEERS NEEDED ARE:

- **THE DOOR GREETER**- this person stands inside by the entrance door and directs the families on where to go – not necessary but nice to have.
- **CHECK-IN PERSON** – this person checks the master list for the night with the name of the family that just came in and notifies Deb by Instant Messenger or Jabber on laptop that the family is in the house. Their job also includes making sure the correct family goes into the Santa room at the right time (after sending Deb an alert that they are checked in and ready to go.)
- **DOOR KEEPER FOR SANTA ROOM** – this person walks the family to the door of the Santa room and sticks their head inside to inquire “Are you ready?” at which time the photographer will say yes or no if Santa is not ready and they need to stall. This person can also be the Door Greeter between escorting families to the Santa Room.
- **PHOTOGRAPHER** – this is a volunteer with a love of photography. They work in the room with Santa for the entire night.
- **SANTA CLAUS** – Me
- **DEBRA** – the brains behind the entire operation and my better half. Remember that Santa is in his room with a volunteer photographer and Deb is in her control room at the other end of the building. So total people involved are five to six counting us. Once the dates are set for the event, then you go to the next step.

SECOND STEP:

We used to have a volunteer that built a sign-up web site for us. This was OK, but not without its own set of problems....one of which was the time it took for him to build the site. Remember, everyone helping us is a volunteer, and all of them also have real jobs. The sooner you get a sign-up site going, the better. Our appointment times, this past season, were gone in a matter of a couple of hours. We sent out a blanket email alert when registration went live.

A couple of years ago our daughter, Heather, told us about the greatest app ever [Sign Up Genius](#). Using this website, we were able to build a quick sign-up site in which as times were chosen, they disappeared from the sign-up site.

It worked like a charm and created a spread sheet that Debra was able to use for keeping track of who was coming when. She was also able to print out a schedule for the door greeter and check-in person to use, as well as an email list that our photographer could use for sending out the pictures to the families. The time savings for her was incredible. We didn't need a special website designed for us and it was **FREE!**

THIRD STEP:

We sent the following email out to the people we have on our mailing list. You could also post this on social media. This announcement let people know that the dates had been set and that appointments were on a first come, first serve basis.

HERE IS A COPY OF THE EMAIL WE SENT:

BEGINNING OF EMAIL

Ho-Ho-Ho! Are you ready?

We have just finalized the dates and times for our 20__ Santa Visits and pictures.

With the help of our personal elf Heather, we set up a registration process that will eliminate the guess work of requesting a date and time. When you schedule a visit, that time slot will no longer be available to pick, removing the need to shift times because four different families chose the same time slot. Each family will sign up for only ONE appointment; multiple children can be seen during that time slot. This will eliminate the need for return emails confirming your appointment time. When you schedule, you are confirming that you have secured that date and time, and when returning to the scheduling site, you will see your last name and the names of the children you have scheduled. A reminder email will automatically be sent 2 days prior to your visit. We ask that you be considerate of others that may miss out on securing a slot and call to cancel if you find you cannot attend after securing a time slot.

NOTE TO PARENTS:

PLEASE REMEMBER - THIS IS INTENDED FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 11 YEARS!

The dates that are scheduled are:

Monday, November 30th from 5:00-8:20 pm

Monday, December 7th from 5:00-8:20 pm

Wednesday, December 9th from 5:00-8:20 pm

Thursday, December 10th from 5:00-8:20 pm

We are also offering the option of a Santa Storytime Show on December 16th from 5:30-6:30 pm. There will be traditional picture time with Santa following the Show – though there is no Smart Santa. This has no limit on seating, and if you miss scheduling an individual time, it will be an opportunity to still have a picture with Santa. For those that have come before, your children already know that Santa knows them personally!

Once again, Sunrise church has offered itself as the location for our special visits. The location can be mapped from their website online at [Sunrise Church](#)

We will provide light refreshments and ask that you arrive ~ 10 minutes prior to your appointment time. We try to move all infants to the front of the line – they tend to run on their own schedules and are speedy visits with Santa when they are happy. We always try to keep Santa on schedule, but he can't and won't be hurried. If he does fall behind schedule, please know that he will still take the needed time with your children. Their visit will be well worth the wait! We request that everyone register for the earliest possible date you can attend to fully utilize each time slot and prevent unused slots early in the schedule.

The link to the registration site is: [Link to SignUpGenius](#) Notes for Santas reading this: Once you have set up your site this will be a link straight to the registration site on Sign Up Genius.

The link to provide information for Smart Santa is: [GOOGLE Docs](#) This site is still up and is an example of what was created using Google Forms to gather up the information found on the Long Visit form

STEPS FOR REGISTERING:

1. Go to the link and register for just ONE appointment time for your family.
2. Make a note of the date and time for your registration form.
3. Click on the link for the information sheet site.
4. Complete the form – you can complete information for up to three children in one attempt.
5. Click submit when finished and you will receive confirmation that the email has come to our Gmail account.
6. Double check on the registration site to be certain that your name is listed as being registered.
7. There is no need to send the confirmation email to Debra.

If we quickly reach full capacity for a date, we may be able to add one additional slot for that date but will only do so if the date is 100% full. If we add extra appointments, there will not be additional emails to notify families shut out of registration. Each family will be responsible for checking their desired date to see if extra sessions have been added.

We're looking forward to another great year of special visits. Remember – there will be NO email confirmations of dates this year.

Merry Christmas! Deb and Steve **END OF EMAIL**

FOURTH STEP:

We used **Google forms** to compose the form for gathering information on the children. Once these forms were filled in, they came back to us in a Gmail account that Deb had set up. Deb then copied the information in the form and pasted into a word document. She prefers one sheet for each child, so she would add space between children prior to printing off the information. She then arranges the sheets according to date and time, using the sign-up genius schedule. The form had the information found on the Long Visit form, on each child, but your copy could be abbreviated if desired. You will find the Long Visit form at the end of this document.

If you decide to do the long visit, it can be a little over whelming to have a family walk in with 4 to 5 children. Remember you must nail the information on each of them. I will usually let them enter the room and say something like "Oh my goodness, it's so nice to see everyone in the (Insert last name of family here) family! Come on in." Once everyone has entered the room I will usually leave it up to Deb on the order but with her guidance I will say, "Tell you what, this time I'm going to start with the youngest child, (insert name of youngest child here) come on up!" We then go in order by age. Sometimes it will be the oldest but sometimes the youngest. I always let Deb decide.

Another thing that is very helpful for the long visits is a video feed. Best thing to ever be created for this is FaceTime by Apple. Both Deb and I have Apple phones and iPads. With Wi-Fi in most homes and churches we use their network to set this up. In the Santa room I use a small tripod for my iPhone that can be discreetly hidden in the room and we always mute the phone. Deb uses her iPad for viewing the interior of the room and practically what is happening to Santa. The [KobraTech Cell Phone Tripod Stand](#) for \$16.94 works well for this



If you don't have this ability with your phone, then you can purchase a baby monitor with a

video feed and work with it. The [CasaCam BM200 Video Baby Monitor](#) is highly rated on Amazon and is \$129.99 Having a video feed so your assistant can see what's going on in the room is very important. Just be sure to make sure you have the password for the Wi-Fi account.



THE ULTIMATE EQUIPMENT FOR SMART SANTA:

Well this requires some explanation. We always thought that the Mipro was the best equipment ever for Smart Santa and it was. It was until I lost my hearing in my right ear. You see, I had a slight hearing loss in my right ear after the Christmas season of 2016. I originally thought it might be from wearing the ear bud all December using the queuing system. After speaking with my GP, he advised me that I have it checked by a specialist. It turned out I had a cyst growing in my inner ear. It needed to be removed and would take about 2 hours of surgery. Well, after 5 hours on the operating table, I ended up 100% deaf in my right ear. Seems it was a lot more serious than originally expected. My surgeon did an excellent job, but it wasn't possible to save the hearing of my right ear. To be honest with you the number one fear I had going in was how would I do Smart Santa if I lost that ear? It just didn't seem possible and it wasn't with our current equipment. We tried using our system once and found out it wouldn't work. I couldn't hear anything that anybody said to me other than Debra though the ear bud. I figured out a way to use two complete systems and a small battery powered mixer in a photographer's vest to make a system that would work but it weighed 6 pounds and had a total of 12 AA batteries, cables running everywhere, and I had to wear a bulking vest. This would sure put a crimp in my Storytime performances to say the least. This was a disaster in the making and with that much equipment, a weak link anywhere in the mix would spell disaster. In fact, one of our mics failed during the trail run and I needed an immediate replacement. So, I went to the internet to find a new mic.

Funny how God works! I shouldn't be amazed but I always am. Especially when something like this happens. There I was looking for a simple mic wondering how we would ever make this vest work and I found the mic I needed from a company called [Williams Sound](#).

They had the perfect mic for only \$69.00 but while I was looking at that mic, something in my head

said look harder. I went onto their website and found this. The DLT 300 Digi-Wave Digital Transceiver. The DLT 300 Transceiver features full-duplex capability, supporting up to six simultaneous talkers in two-way mode. Slim, lightweight, and simple to set up and use. One- or two-way operation offers flexibility in an array of applications. With the push of a button, users can access two-way communication for immediate interaction or Q&A.



I couldn't believe my luck. Here was the device that could save my season. This transceiver was 4" long, 3" long and 1/2" thick and only weighed 2.9 oz. It had a 750-foot range indoors and best of all runs for up to 14 hours on one charge. No more batteries for us. This alone would save us about \$190 per year. The best

thing about this was it was a transceiver. Two-way communication between Deb and me. The only problem was the cost. Each transceiver was \$560.00, and I wasn't sure they would work. I called Debra and we discussed the money. To try this our would take an investment of about \$1,200 and we didn't know for sure if it would work. But something inside both of us said it would. I really have come to love working with a company called CCI Solutions. They are on the west coast and the person I like working with is Dieter. I gave Dieter a call and asked him if they could get Williams Sound equipment. They could, and I did. I ordered two transceivers and the mics that go with them. The first event we used the equipment with was 500 children over 5 to 6 hours and it was amazing! The equipment worked like a charm. I was able to hear the children and Deb all through one ear. I firmly believe that this was a God intervention. He saved our season and improved our performance. This equipment is just incredible! By the way, the FBI and Walt Disney World both use these devices. I'm more impressed with Disney than the FBI but both are amazing.

Upon returning home from this event, I called Dieter and ordered the rest of our equipment. For us this meant ordering another DLT 300 as a back-up. Here is the list of our current equipment:

The Ultimate Smart Santa Rig

I like ordering from CCI Solutions at (360) 943-5378 ask for Dieter and tell him YOU WERE REFERRED BY ME.

ITEMS TO ORDER from CCI:

Quantity	Item #	Description	Unit Price	Amount
3	WLS-DLT300	Transceiver	\$450.00 each	\$1,350.00
1	WLS-CCS044Gray	Gray Silicone Skin	\$13.00	\$13.00
1	WLS-CCS044Red	Red Silicone Skin	\$13.00	\$13.00
1	WLS-CCS044Green	Green Silicone Skin	\$13.00	\$13.00
4	WLS-MIC090	Condenser Mic	\$59.00	\$236.00
2	EAR 041	Single Earphone	\$21.00	\$42.00
			Total:	\$1,667.00

ITEMS TO ORDER elsewhere:

1	Williams Sound CCS043 Leatherette Case	\$46.65	\$46.65 cheaper here
2	iSound Dual Power View Charging Dock for iPhone	\$4.95	\$10.00 cheaper here
4	Sony MDR Ex15lp EX series earbuds White	\$11.32 each	\$45.28 cheaper here

GRAND TOTAL: \$1,768.93

The applications for this system are incredible. It is the obvious choice for doing Smart Santa but also if one is doing a speaking engagement and wants to have someone in the audience keep them on track with their presentation, you will look like a genius never missing a cue. Being able to get feedback from someone watching you perform can be very helpful. For hospital work this is a goldmine device. You can also cut cost by only buying two transceivers and you can cut cost even more by buying a receiver (one-way communication instead of two-way) only as one part. The receiver cost is about half of what a transceiver is \$241.00

Dieter's prices were very good in my opinion. The amazing thing is that with just one ear, we were able to do Smart Santa just as well as we did if not better than when I had two ears. Also, for those Santas that wear hearing aids, Williams Sound is the leader of technology for these folks. The DLT 300 works with t coil technology. If you are someone that wears hearing aids that are equipped with t-coils then in place of the ear bud you can wear this neck loop around your neck and hear everything a child says as well as your assistant, through your hearing aids. This is the [NKL 001 neck loop 18"](#) and only cost \$52.00 If you already have one of the small blue tooth equipped mic for your hearing aids, you can jack straight into the DLT 300 and the signal will be crystal clear.



Another thing that I ordered for researching things of interest for hard of hearing Santas was this device.

The [PKT 2.0 POCKETALKER Personal Amplifier](#). This device from Dieter is only \$169.00 and is like super hearing. If you replace the headset with an ear bud, you will never miss another whispered word from a child. Plus, this is also T-coiled loop compatible, has a built-in internal mic and can be used with an external mic as well. Super light-weight and ready to go and much more affordable if you are not planning on doing Smart Santa but need to hear the children. This is also a Williams Sound Product.



LINKS FOR HEARING AID RESEARCH:

["Let's Loop Wisconsin"](#) – an excellent article about Bluetooth and Loop technology

["How Hearing Loops Work"](#) – on YouTube

["Hearing Loops the Basics"](#) – on YouTube

["Hearing Wellness Organization: What's a T-Coil?"](#) – on YouTube

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR SMART SANTA:

- Always have a backup plan. Things might go wrong with equipment. Try to have at least two of everything you use and then still plan on what you will do if something doesn't work. Cell phones are a last resort.
- Always buy good batteries and always start out an engagement with fresh batteries in the transmitter. You can get away with two engagements on the receiver, but don't risk it with the transmitter. If using William's Sound start fully charged.
- Be careful what you say! At times parents will ask you to correct bad habits their child may have or threaten to not bring presents if behaviors do not change. We believe that Santa should deliver positive feedback to a child. **Never give a child negative information!** When a parent gives us information that doesn't feel fitting with the Santa image we want to portray, we simply leave it out. Then we really are "Smart Santa."
- Large groups (4 or more) can be difficult. Often the children are close in age and identical in size, or the mom has dressed them all in matching outfits. If they all have blonde hair and blue eyes and are wearing the same outfit, you could be in big trouble. Our solution is to have the children line up according to age. Deb will already have their information sheets arranged by age and bingo – Santa is a genius!
- Twins can also be an issue – especially if they are identical and mom thinks it is cute to dress them just alike (thank goodness that is not always the case). When that happens, I will look in their general direction and ask who was born first...David or Grayson? They will always point to the oldest twin and then say the name. Deb will help keep me straight from then on, remember she can hear and see what is going on also. But, never take your eyes off both while they are in motion, the trick only works once.
- Cell phones work in a pinch but have some major drawbacks. When we had an equipment failure three years ago we used our cell phones for 4 hours of visits!! First – be CERTAIN that you have the air minutes! Second – the clarity is just not there. Deb would tell me a child's name was Faye and I'd call her Kay. Deb would correct me and then I'd call her May. In frustration, Deb would then spell the name FFFF-A- Y-E, and by that time she was tickled and so was I. It made for a very long night with numerous apologies to the kids for being old and having a poor memory in addition to numerous long pauses while I tried to figure out what Deb could possibly be saying. It wasn't just names I had issues understanding...many of the toys were also lost in translation.

AND FINALLY CHOOSING THE ULTIMATE ASSISTANT!

When Deb and I first started offering Smart Santa, her fee was added on to my hourly fee. So, if you hired me and wanted me to be “Smart,” you had to pay an hourly fee for Debra also. Over the years we have come to learn that if you want me then you understand that I come with my assistant, Deb. So, we just added the two rates together and this is what “our Santa” makes an hour. The only exception to this is if the engagement is a straight photo shoot where the only thing I do is sit and take photos with each child and the visit time is less than a minute per child. With that being said, our clients have come to expect the two of us at 95% of what we do.

Consequently, choosing your assistant is so important! We are convinced that once you start offering Smart Santa, your clients will come to expect it also. My wife Debra is my assistant and I bless the day that we made the choice to switch her from a formal “Mrs. Claus” to “The Driver”. When someone asks her if she is Mrs. Claus she states very quickly, “No, I’m the driver; I drive Santa around.” The children and the adults accept this explanation very well. Deb will normally wear black slacks, black shirt, and a nice big red sweater with pockets to hide things in.

Debra knows me upside down and backwards. She is aware of my tonality and personality quirks. She also has 35-plus years of working with children as a pediatric nurse. She has been a Scoutmaster; gone to Philmont, New Mexico as a Scoutmaster; helped raise two children; and been married to me for 29 years now. There is no one on the face of the planet that knows me better or could provide such outstanding thoughts to Santa while he is talking to children.

In reading the feedback and reviews from parents who have experienced our Smart Santa, many are amazed and touched by the experience. I don’t think they quite realize how much of who I am is made up of Debra also. While I’m speaking with a child, Deb is listening, and because of this, she is contributing to the session. Many times, she will say in my ear something that is just profound and of course the next thing Santa says is that profound remark to the child. Why, it makes me look like the most sensitive, caring, smartest Santa on the planet. But what I want you to understand, is there are two of us. Two of us that care more about that child than the parents will ever imagine. You, as Santas and Mrs. Claus, know exactly what I’m talking about. But just imagine that you as Santa, one of the most powerful influences a child can have, can speak with that child and have the input of “your Debra” in your head. The reason we get hired so much has a little to do with me, but even more...it’s us! My wish for you is you find “your Deb” for your assistant.



Deb's Famous Small Notebooks and Pen:



For a large event, where I'm storytelling to a group of 200 to 300 children, it is still possible to be Smart. Deb came up with the idea of using a small notebook like the ones above. These books are 4" X 6" notebooks we buy at Staples or Office Depot. She carries one into a large event with a couple of ball point pens. As I am telling stories she will identify two or three children that are wearing easily identifiable clothing. While I'm talking she will pick out one of these children and say something like "See the child at 2 o'clock with the purple toboggan, his name is David" and while I'm talking I will look out and find this child and then wait until the right moment in my story and say something like "David! You know what I mean by that don't you?" all the while looking straight at David as I do. The effect is amazing! The children sitting around David all say things like "Does he know you? How did he know your name?" and of course David is as amazed as everyone else. You only need to do this to two or three children for all the children to think you know their names. It's a wonderful effect.

The best effect is after storytelling, we announce that children that want to come up for a photo opportunity can line up and their parents can take a photo of the us together. This is the genius part. Deb will hand the parents in line her notebook/pen and as the children come up to me, I know their name and age.

She will stay ahead and all the children that come up to me will experience the effect of me knowing their name and age. We have done this with groups as large as 300 to 400.

Well, that's about all I can say about this subject. If you want to be the most realistic Santa Claus ever then go Smart. If you do start doing Smart work, be warned! It's almost impossible to ever go back. Working Smart is the strongest effect we do and once you are Smart it's oh so hard to not be. And I will say this also, it's a lot of pressure. When I do the few events that are just photo and chair work, where I've been told not to be "all knowing" the work is easy when compared to working Smart. I wouldn't change anything about what Deb and I do, and neither would she but it much more pressure to do than traditional Santa work.

Good luck with your Santa and please stays in touch and help me to improve this information for others.

You can email me at sgillham@nc.rr.com or call 919-624-6916 and ask for Steve

Forms for Smart Santa Visits:

SMART SANTA INFORMATION SHEET (LONG FORM)

YOUR NAME OR THE FAMILY NAME: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____ PHONE #: _____

CHILD'S NAME: _____

CHILD'S NICKNAME (IF ANY): _____

DESCRIBE CHILD (SO SANTA CAN IDENTIFY): _____

CHILD'S AGE: _____ CHILD'S BIRTHDATE: _____

CHILD'S SCHOOL: _____

CHILD'S GRADE: _____ CHILD'S TEACHER: _____

PET'S NAME (S): _____ PET TYPE: _____

FAVORITE SANTA PRESENT FROM LAST YEAR: _____

IF CHILD HAS "ELF ON THE SHELF," WHAT IS ITS NAME? _____ WELL BEHAVED? _____

NAME UNIQUE FEATURE IN CHILD'S BEDROOM (LIKE A BUNK BED, TRUNK, PAINT COLOR ETC...)

DO YOU HAVE ANY CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS IN YOUR HOME, SUCH AS LEAVING OUT MILK AND COOKIES, A PERSONAL LETTER TO SANTA, OR SPECIAL SNACKS? DID YOU DO ANYTHING LAST YEAR THAT ONLY SANTA WOULD KNOW ABOUT? SOME PEOPLE LEAVE MORE THAN MILK AND COOKIES AND IT HELPS TO COMMENT ON THIS TO THE CHILD AND THANK THEM FOR THE EXTRA SPECIAL SNACK.

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT SANTA? _____

ANYTHING ELSE SANTA NEEDS TO KNOW: _____

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD ABOUT WITH THIS CHILD? _____

SHORT VISIT TICKET

SANTA ADMISSION TICKET *Most important question

Child's Name: _____

Age: _____ Child is currently wearing: _____

DO NOT ASK THE CHILD

Favorite Santa Present Last year: _____

(If you do not remember simply complete next questions instead)

School grade and teacher's name: _____

*What about this child makes you proud? _____

SANTA ADMISSION TICKET *Most important question

Child's Name: _____

Age: _____ Child is currently wearing: _____

DO NOT ASK THE CHILD

Favorite Santa Present Last year: _____

(If you do not remember simply complete next questions instead)

School grade and teacher's name: _____

*What about this child makes you proud? _____

SANTA ADMISSION TICKET *Most important question

Child's Name: _____

Age: _____ Child is currently wearing: _____

DO NOT ASK THE CHILD

Favorite Santa Present Last year: _____

(If you do not remember simply complete next questions instead)

School grade and teacher's name: _____

*What about this child makes you proud? _____