

# Zoom with Santa? Not for everyone

## Plexiglas allows families to have in-person visits with the man himself

BY ANNE HALLIWELL AND TRACI WESTCOTT  
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Santa's lap may not be free, but Rochester families are still visiting the jolly old elf this season.

ABC & Toy Zone's Santa Claus sits behind a Plexiglas barrier, bookended by evergreen trees as he listens to the children's Christmas lists.

On Saturday, Brantley Pahl, 4, asked Santa for Paw Patrol toys, Play-Doh, and monster trucks this Christmas. During his visit, he promised a variety of snacks for Santa when he visits the Pahls, including McDonald's apple slices and treats for the reindeer.

"I said there were carrots at (our) house," he said. "Just get a big ladder for me, I can go right up and put the carrots on our roof."

The Pahl family, of Mazeppa, hadn't expected to be able to visit Santa in 2020. But mom Jordan Pahl said there were upsides to the unusual setup.

"I almost feel like it's more personable, you're not as rushed," she said. "The last years, there hasn't been much of a chance to talk to him — you have the line behind you."

ABC & Toy Zone owner Rene Nordhus said in years past, the shop's Santa has visited with up to 30 families in any given hour.

This year, he's seeing four an hour in-person.

To avoid a line, families enter the store one at a time, visit with Santa, pose for photos, then exit through the shop. Staff members clean the area before the next group enters.

They're on a tight-schedule — Santa's in-person visits are booked solid.

Nordhus said the in-person visits' popularity outweighed the virtual ones 10 times — the shop made the visits live on their website at 6 a.m. Nov. 14, and by 7 a.m., the website had crashed.

She spent three straight days scheduling visits over the phone. Evenings and weekends sold out quickly, and the last of the "naptime slots" sold out at the end of November.



Photos by Traci Westcott / twestcott@postbulletin.com

Santa pokes at the Plexiglas barrier while he awaits scheduled visits from families on Saturday, Dec. 5, at ABC & Toy Zone in Northwest Rochester.

"It's the same families that have seen him for many, many years," she said.

As always, Santa reminds children to go to bed early and listen for jingle bells on their roofs — that's the sign to hurry to bed. He also wished them a "safe, happy and healthy" Christmas.

Although some children have been wary of the clear barrier, Nordhus said they've bounced back from the surprise quickly — unlike some of their parents.

"Some of the moms, I think they're having a harder time adjusting," she said. "They've seen him for 12 years or 15 years, whatever the case may be, and they just want to hug him."



Brantley Pahl, 4, of Mazeppa, tells Santa what he wants for Christmas during a visit Saturday, Dec. 5, at ABC & Toy Zone in Northwest Rochester.

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Joe Ahlquist / jahlquist@postbulletin.com

Dan Price, who plays George Bailey, and Rene Stiller, who plays Mary Hatch, perform while recording the Rochester Civic Theatre Company's production of "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play," directed by Tony Opelt, on Dec. 4 in Rochester.

## Tune in for area holiday productions

BY JOHN MOLSEED  
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Theater is going virtual to wrap up 2020, which means the best seat in the house is wherever the best seat is in your house.

Area theaters are turning to the oldest form of broadcasting to continue delivering performances to audiences. Rochester Civic Theatre, Commonweal Theatre and La Crosse Community Theatre are all presenting staged radio play performances this holiday season.

The Civic is presenting prerecorded productions of "It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play," Dec. 18, 19 and 20.

A grant from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act gave the Civic funds to hire Northern Sun Productions to record and produce the show for streaming.

The staged radio play allows actors to see each other and play off their performances, but also keep a safe distance recommended by health officials.

Commonweal will also stream a prerecorded staged radio performance of an original holiday radio play, "A Driftless Christmas." That will be available on the Commonweal website through Jan. 4.

La Crosse Community Theatre is presenting a recorded staged performance of the radio broadcast version of "Miracle on 34th Street." That production will be available beginning Dec. 19.

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## Conservation involves herd work

3 bison cows temporarily joined the herd at Zollman Zoo

Some guest grazers are gracing Zollman Zoo.

Three bison cows from Minneopa State Park in Mankato arrived in November as part of a program to increase the population of the animals in the state.

This year, Zollman Zoo joined the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd. The Olmsted County zoo, in Byron, is the fourth organization to join the herd, which has about 130 head of bison throughout the state.

Zollman Zoo has had bison since the mid-1980s. However, the zoo had to wait for recent genetic test results to join Blue Mounds State Park Luverne, Minneopa State Park and the Minnesota Zoo in Apple Valley as part of the statewide herd initiative.

While only up to five or six of those bison will ever live at Zollman Zoo at any given time, the zoo's role in conserving and growing the state's bison population will still help create genetic diversity within the conservation herd.

Two female bison from Zollman were moved to the Minnesota Zoo to breed with bison there. One resident cow and the three females on loan to Zollman will have a chance to breed with the zoo's resident bull.

"Having four here at the park doesn't seem like it would be a lot," said Jaide Ryks, Zollman Zoo naturalist. "If you think of it like your family tree, you're going to get a lot of offspring — four different family lines — from those four bison alone."

The genetic testing of the Zollman bison found no indications that the bison had cross-bred with cattle. That makes them good candidates to help grow the state conservation



### GREENSPACE

John Molseed

herd. Genetic tests also show the state conservation herd doesn't have traces of cattle DNA, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The long-term goal, set by the DNR and the Minnesota Zoological Garden, is to grow the state herd to 500 bison so that the population here can be sustained.

The DNR and the Minnesota Zoological Garden are coordinating the conservation herd partnership.

An estimated 50 million American plains bison used to roam the Upper Midwest before hunting dwindled their numbers down to fewer than 1,000. Ryks said she's excited to be part of an effort to thoughtfully increase the number of bison.

"We're not just a zoo that keeps animals in cages," she said.

Most of the zoo animals are rehabilitated animals that wouldn't survive in the wild, she added. Once at the zoo, animals there usually play a role in conservation and education efforts.

The female bison are adjusting to their new temporary surroundings, Ryks said.

Initially used to grazing as their sole source of food and wary of zoo staff, they've adjusted to their supplemental feed.

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# The nutcracker: From rock to detailed figurine

The nutcracker, a functional tool that has advanced from probably a rock. Through the centuries, man has applied ingenuity, imagination and engineering to come up with some unique pieces. Not just pliers, but some really unique beautifully decorated nutcrackers found in figure forms of cast or wooden carved. Some in shapes of birds, animals or people. Many nutcrackers are either lever or screw-type, made of brass or wood. The simple hand-squeezed nutcracker that can be found in my kitchen drawer is more like the lever style.

By 1830, when the term "nussknacker" made its appearance in the High German dictionary compiled by the Brothers Grimm, the Erzgebirge region of Germany and Bohemia had already become famous for producing the familiar-of-today wooden figures with nut-cracking jaws.

Popular as Christmas gifts and as household symbols of good luck, the figures often depict people of authority,



## ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES

Sandy Erdman

such as kings or soldiers, and inspired E.T.A. Hoffmann's 1816 "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King." Hoffmann's tale was, in turn, the inspiration for Tchaikovsky's 1892 ballet, "The Nutcracker."

Around the 1940s, U.S. soldiers stationed in Germany after World War II began purchasing the unique nutcracker figures to bring home as souvenirs, and soon the nutcracker figure collecting craze started.

Today, they are found everywhere, and in every price range. There are little 3-inch to 4-inch ornaments made in China priced for a dollar at the local dollar store, to a bit more at the big-box stores. The highly collectible limited

editions still produced in Germany are selling for several hundred dollars each.

### COLLECTOR

Polly Johnson, of Utica, has received a nutcracker for Christmas from her mom, Sarah Kieffer, of St. Charles, every year since she was 7.

"It was always a gift I knew was coming, but I loved getting them," Johnson said. "I have always loved how they look, and always look for super unique and detailed ones. My favorites are the Santa. I display them all on my fireplace, right under my stockings. It feels so Christmassy and brings such joy."

Each year, Johnson and her family look forward



Contributed photo

**Nutcracker collector Polly Johnson, of Utica, with some of her collection.**

to the tradition of setting them out together as a family.

As for adding to her collection, she said, "I am always on the lookout, but now my own kids help me pick them out. My twins that are 7 are so into them. My little guy who is 3 doesn't always understand why he can't play with them!"

"People are always so surprised at my collection," she added. "There is just such a variety of them, so there's at least one for everyone. It's hard to put

a dollar amount that I wouldn't pay for one I really like!"

### WHERE TO FIND

Brenda Janssen, of Treasures Under Sugar Loaf Antique Mall in Winona, said nutcrackers are a hot seller at her shop. Her stock includes traditional soldier designs, metal nutcrackers actually meant for cracking nuts, and others simply for decoration.

"For an intriguing decor twist, we have 'fun' nutcrackers, including

a beach girl, hobo, hippie, and fairy. We cannot forget about the Frankenstein and his bride nutcrackers. Prices range due to size and uniqueness from \$8-\$22," she said.

### VALUE AND CARE

As with any collectible, rarity and condition tells us the value and price. Yes, some can be repaired to fix loose joints in wooden pieces with wood glue, but a crack in the wood will change the price and value. Dirt can be removed from a metal piece by gently cleaning with water and a mild soap; dry thoroughly!

The patina of age should be left alone. Some pieces come in boxes decorated with graphics or special tags attached — save them. But plain shipping boxes are not worth keeping, except as storage containers.

Sandy Erdman is a Winona-based freelance writer and certified appraiser concentrating on vintage, antique and collectible items. Send comments and story suggestions to Sandy at [life@postbulletin.com](mailto:life@postbulletin.com).

## Herd

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As for their other task, bison don't breed until late summer or early autumn. However, they don't seem to mind the bull's company.

"They like to hang out with him," Ryks said.

That's a good start.

John Molseed is a tree-hugging Minnesota transplant making his way through his state parks passport. This column is a space for stories of people doing their part (and more) to keep Minnesota green. Send questions, comments and suggestions to [life@postbulletin.com](mailto:life@postbulletin.com).

## Theater

From page C1

"My overall vision for the show was a bright, colorful light brought into a very dark world," said Mary Cate

Wesling, who directed the show. "The classic film is in black and white, yet the message makes one feel warm and happy inside."

Misha Johnson, interim managing director at the Rochester Civic Theatre, said they dressed the stage for "It's a Wonderful Life" for the

same reason.

"It should look really nice on camera," she said.

LCT partnered with La Crosse Local to film the production. The company also added behind-the-scenes looks and interviews with the cast and crew.

## Santa

From page C1

### MORE WAYS TO SEE SANTA

• ABC & Toy Zone offers virtual visits with Santa Claus — see [abctoyzone.com](http://abctoyzone.com) or call 507-286-8440 for

more information.

• Century High School will hold a virtual Santa meet-and-greet Saturday, Dec. 12, with stories read by Santa's elves, crafts, games, a Christmas dance party, and short Christmas films on Dec. 12 from 8

to 11 a.m. and 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. Four-minute slots are available at [www.signupgenius.com/go/8050c4faeac2ea5f58-virtual](http://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050c4faeac2ea5f58-virtual).

• The Rochester Women's Shelter and Support Center will allow families to speak

to Santa at its Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/womensshelter](http://www.facebook.com/womensshelter)) at 6 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 16.

• Apache Mall offers virtual calls and messages from Santa Claus. See [www.jinglering.com](http://www.jinglering.com) for more information.

## PUZZLES | DECEMBER 12, 2020

### BRIDGE | KING FEATURES

South dealer. Both sides vulnerable.

<b>NORTH</b>			
♠	A 7 5 2		
♥	5 2		
♦	6 4 2		
♣	A 8 7 4		
<b>WEST</b>			
♠	K 10 9 3		
♥	J 10 9 8 3		
♦	—		
♣	J 6 5 2		
<b>EAST</b>			
♠	J 8 4		
♥	K 6 4		
♦	Q J 10 7		
♣	K 10 3		
<b>SOUTH</b>			
♠	Q 6		
♥	A Q 7		
♦	A K 9 8 5 3		
♣	Q 9		

The bidding:  
**South** 1♦ **West** Pass **North** 1♠ **East** Pass  
 2 NT Pass 3 NT  
 Opening lead — jack of hearts.

**Let's say you're South** and open with one diamond. When partner responds one spade, you have a difficult rebid problem.

If you jump to three diamonds, you run the risk of a pass, since that bid is invitational but not forcing. If you jump to two notrump instead, partner may pass or go on to three, and, in either case, runs the risk that the enemy may reel off the club suit.

**Yet these are the only bids** you can seriously consider, and, of the two, the recommended action is two notrump, risky though it may be. In any case, let's say you do bid two notrump

and partner raises you to three. **Even though West leads** a heart instead of the club you feared, your troubles are not yet over. If you misplay the hand, you will surely go down.

**If you win** East's king of hearts with the ace and play the ace of diamonds, which seems the natural thing to do, you will fail ignominiously. There is nothing you can do from this point on to overcome the unlucky 4-0 division.

**But if you make allowance** for the possibility that only a 4-0 diamond break can defeat the contract and take the proper steps to deal with that eventuality, you can make three notrump.

**The correct play** at trick two is the eight (or nine) of diamonds, not the ace. Observe that if you make this play, East can score only one diamond trick, not two. After he wins with the ten, you can later gobble up his Q-J-7 by leading the suit twice from dummy.

**It is true** that the recommended safety play will fail if West has all four diamonds, but in that case, no other line of play will succeed either. The best you can do in bridge is to address your attention to matters within your control.

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### JUMBLE | ARNOLD AND ARGIRION

## JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

CUPKL



MYDIL



DONIEI



LVRAOF



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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers Monday)

Yesterday's Jumbles: ITCHY DERBY BARREL ENTICE  
 Answer: When Queen Elizabeth II knighted Anthony Hopkins in 1993, she knighted a — "CELEB-BRIT-HE"

### SUDOKU | UNIVERSAL FEATURES

			7	9	3			8
		6		8				
	8							7
3			8			4		1
			9	1	7			
2		8			4			9
6								2
			6		3			
9			4	7	2			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★★

Complete the grid so every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

1	4	3	9	8	5	7	6	2
6	9	7	3	2	1	8	4	5
5	2	8	4	7	6	9	3	1
4	7	9	5	6	8	1	2	3
8	3	6	1	9	2	5	7	4
2	1	5	7	3	4	6	8	9
9	5	2	6	4	7	3	1	8
3	6	4	8	1	9	2	5	7
7	8	1	2	5	3	4	9	6

### CROSSWORD | THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

- Fall quaff
- Butler's love
- Love, to Luigi
- Disconcerted
- Bowler's challenge
- Candle sight
- Farm machines
- Gloss spot
- Imitating
- Most spooky
- Laugh sound
- Sports spots
- Adhere
- Show up
- Blue
- Sewing machine part
- Pitcher's stat
- Do something
- Game trip
- Intense beam
- Breaks, in a way
- Scoundrel
- Clear
- Completely full
- Cars' scars

#### DOWN

- Algiers section
- Gazelle's cousin
- Buck

#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	A	B	A	R	S	C	A	R	F
I	R	E	N	E	A	L	F	I	E
D	E	F	O	E	P	I	T	O	N
		O	D	D	S	M	E	T	S
D	A	R	E	A	F	A	R		
I	C	E	B	L	A	T	A	N	T
E	M	I	L	E	R	E	F	E	R
D	E	F	E	N	S	E	A	C	E
	O	T	T	O	A	S	K	S	
F	A	R	M	B	A	C	H		
U	R	G	E	D	I	C	I	E	R
S	I	E	G	E	D	R	O	N	E
S	A	T	O	N	S	A	N	D	Y

- Pennsylvania city
- Fell back
- Not running
- Movie computer
- Flowery shrub
- Negligent
- Skilled
- Soaps
- Brought to life again
- Squid's squirt
- Spring site
- Secret stuff
- Watched Rover
- Tar
- Haul in
- Speakers' stands
- Mediation events
- Flight cost
- Time of planning
- Spectrum end

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9	10
11						12				
13						14				
15					16		17			
18					19		20	21		
22					23					
				24						
	25	26						27	28	29
30								31		
32					33		34			
35			36	37		38				
39						40				
41						42				