

Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July

*Birdneck Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

What does Santa do in July? He goes to the beach, of course – Virginia Beach. And while he’s there, the jolly fellow takes some time away from sand and surf to visit students at Birdneck Elementary, along with their parents and teachers.

Knowing that Santa Claus is coming to their beach, the school administrators and its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July, now an annual community celebration that stresses the importance of summer reading. This was Santa’s second summer visit.

Shunning his sleigh and fur-trimmed red suit, Santa arrived in a Jeep driven by the Grinch. Santa was played by the Birdneck principal, wearing an old-fashioned bathing suit, swim cap and flip flops. He climbed onto a mobile stage to the cheers of hundreds of students and the strains of Christmas carols.

Santa came to the children’s neighborhood. Two bus loads of students and summer school staff arrived at the Wadsworth Housing development, while other families poured out of their apartments. The Birdneck staff also invited 150 students from a nearby summer school at Cooke Elementary. Cooke’s principal jumped at the invitation: “This was something fun to break up the summer and to get children to read,” he said.

Santa led the students in singing “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” After reading “‘Twas the Night Before Christmas,” Santa praised the children’s accomplishments in school. He added how important it was to keep reading, even during the summer. Students then lined up for individual visits with Santa.

Each child received a book, which Birdneck teachers helped them select. Their younger siblings also received books to plant the seeds of reading early. The children cooled off with popsicles during the celebration. Before Santa arrived, members of faculty, staff and administration greeted families from the neighborhood.

Christmas in July resulted because the school’s ATP wanted to help promote summer reading by adding books to the students’ home libraries. The practice supports the school improvement goal of increasing reading and language arts scores on state tests, especially among minority students.

The event also strengthened school and family relationships, as the staff spent time in the children’s neighborhood. The fact that school teachers and administrators took time in the summer to decorate the stage, distribute treats and books, and greet students and families showed the community how much they care about their students and about reading.

ATP members joined the housing development director, Birdneck’s Parent Involvement Coordinator, and other faculty and staff members to plan and conduct Christmas in July. Advertising began at the end of the school year with a notice in the June issue of the parent newsletter. Organizers also mailed fliers to all Birdneck families, posted notices in the housing office and throughout the neighborhood.

The school used Title I funds to buy books, treats, costumes, and other expenses. The cost was about \$800.

The event was a great success. “I got to meet Santa,” said one 5-year-old, who added proudly, “I read 15 minutes every day.” Teachers expected to see the benefits of summer reading when the students returned to school.

Birdneck Elementary will continue scheduling Christmas in July and hopes to add something new and exciting each year. And what was that sound as Santa headed back toward the beach? It sounded a little like: “Happy summer to all, and to all a good book!”

*Wendee Long
Parent Involvement Coordinator
(757) 437-4819, ext. 53448
wendee.long@vbschools.com*