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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2004

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PRESS RELEASE

Employee Plays Santa Claus to Bring Holiday Cheer to Foster Children

Robert Vaughn, a Unit Clerk in Adoptions at the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Covina office, has special job during the holiday season – he moonlights as Santa Claus to bring cheer to thousands of children, including foster youth.

This season, Vaughn, a resident of Pomona, will play Santa at the annual Spark of Love events at movie theaters throughout the county. Coordinated by DCFS, ABC 7 and county and city firefighters, the Spark of Love events draw about 1,000 foster children and their caregivers for a movie, snacks, gifts and of course, a visit and photo with Santa Vaughn.

“Santa represents joy and the giving spirit of the season. When I see the magic in a child’s eye, it’s great,” he said. Vaughn has been playing Santa since 2001, when he started growing out his 8-inch beard. “I do have a little bit of a tummy, so I’m pretty authentic.”

With a real white beard, a “bowl full of jelly” belly, and a desire to help children, Vaughn is one of 450 real bearded Santa throughout the United States who belong to an official Santa organization called The Amalgamated Order of Real Bearded Santas. Some of the Santas bleach their beards, said Vaughn, but most are naturally white. Vaughn really gets into the spirit of things by supplying and maintaining his own red suit, complete with a sash made by his wife.

In his 9 to 5 job, this child welfare Santa assists social workers in finalizing adoptions. Last year, Vaughn assisted with the completion of 100 adoptions. “I’m very happy where I’m at,” he said. “Seeing the kids get a permanent home is the best.”

Vaughn is also currently playing Santa at the Whittwood Shopping Center in Whittier. He is attending college to pursue a degree in psychology or maybe even social work. Vaughn’s two children love the fact that he’s Santa, but the youngest, a four-year-old daughter, is not fooled. “She knows I’m Dad playing Santa. She knows the other Santas she sees are the real Santa.”

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