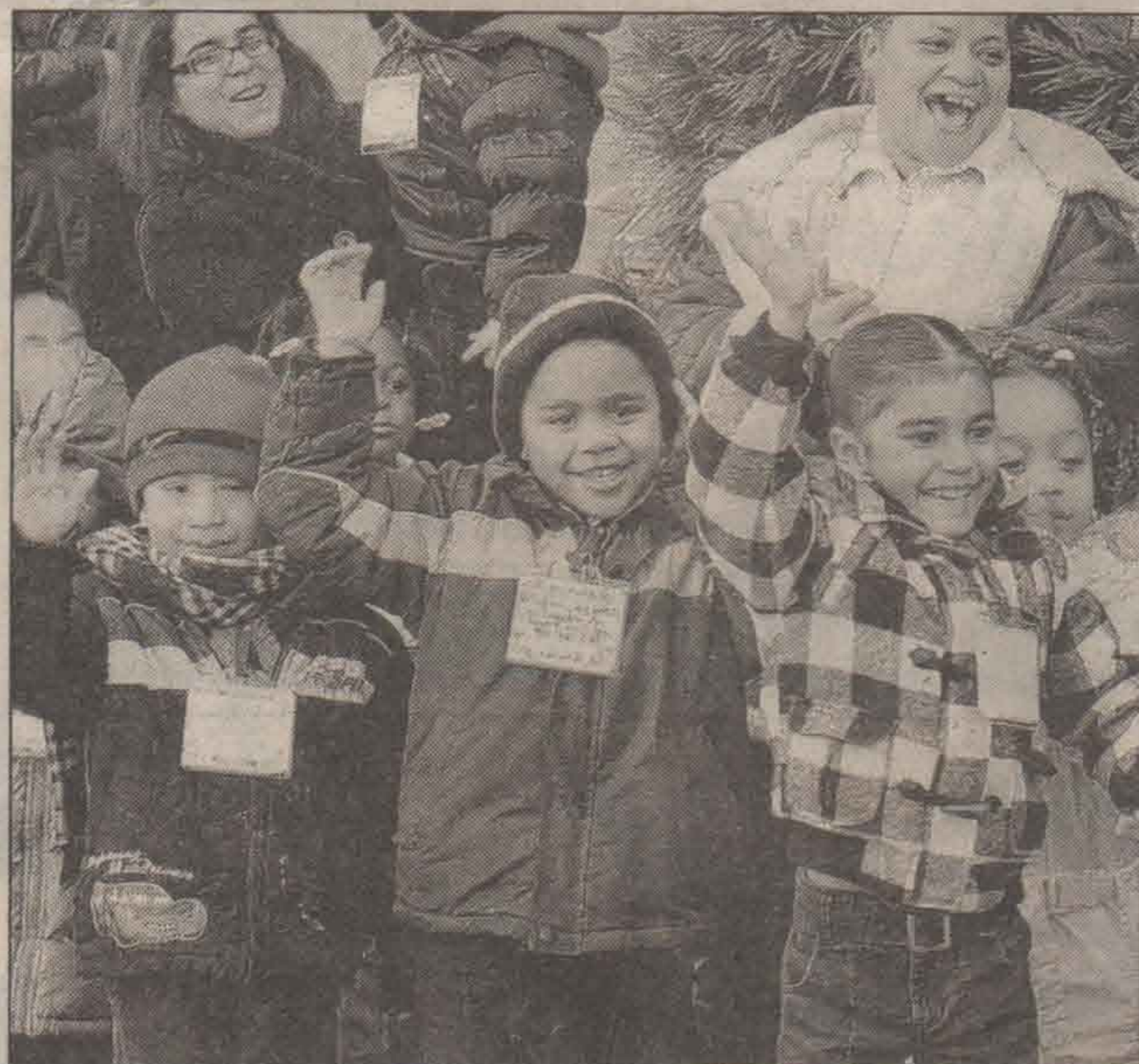




STAFF PHOTOS: JOE MCLAUGHLIN

# Santa lands in Linden for Leagers kids

Santa waves as he arrives by helicopter onto the parking lot behind Applebee's restaurant at Linden Aviation Plaza, Route 1, for the fourth annual event. Right: About 74 children between 3 and 4 years old from Leagers School attended. A few kids are all smiles as they wave to Santa after his landing.



# Local dispatcher makes Christmas even merrier



Above photo by Rosemary Cherego; below by Kate Rogers.

**A MERRY CHRISTMAS** — Local children in need had breakfast with Santa this week at Applebee's in Linden. Above, Santa's big arrival by helicopter. Below, one happy child takes a seat on Santa's lap and gets a gift in return.



**By Kate Rogers**  
Associate Editor

Santa Claus came to town in style this week, replacing his staple sleigh and reindeer with a shiny red helicopter.

His early arrival was a part of Doherty Enterprises' annual "Breakfast with Santa" celebrations, which this year will take place at more than 60 different locations throughout New Jersey. At Linden there was a breakfast at Applebee's in Aviation Plaza where children in need from the Leaguers School in Roselle were treated to arts and crafts, face painting, and of course, some quality time with Old St. Nick himself, thanks to the work of Rose Vazquez, a 9-11 dispatcher for the City of Linden.

For the past four years, Vazquez has teamed up with Doherty Enterprises to help make Christmas a little more special for disadvantaged youth. Each year, she contacts the state, who directs her to schoolchildren in need. This year she was able to help give breakfast and gifts to 74 three-year-olds from all over Union County.

"When you see kids that don't have, you want to give to them," she said. "That is our sole purpose."

Vazquez starts her fundraising efforts each year in July, by sending out letters to different vendors soliciting donations. By November, she is out purchasing gifts for the children with some help from her fellow dispatchers.

All of her hard work and fundraising pays off each year, she said.

"It's so rewarding," Vazquez said. "I love seeing the kids' faces when they see Santa Claus."

Nathan, a three-year-old stu-

dent from the Leaguers School, said his favorite part of the breakfast was getting a gift from Santa.

"I got a Batman car," he said.

For Madison, another three-year-old girl Leaguers student Santa's big arrival was most memorable.

"I got to see Santa and the firemen," she said.

Dave DiBartolo, vice president of Doherty Enterprises, said this year \$290,000 was raised in partnership with the U.S. Marines and the Toys for Tots program. DiBartolo said the work Vazquez does helps to make the event exciting for the children each year.

"Rose goes above and beyond," he said. "She single-handedly does it all — it's tremendous."

Due to the downturn in the economy, Vazquez said donations did fall somewhat, however the many organizations that helped to make this year's event happen were very generous. This year, donations came from Liberty Helicopter, SNS World Wide Transport of Linden, Mayor Gerbounka, Nu-Star, PBA Local 42, Superior Officers Association, FMBA Local 34, Linden Walmart, Infineum, Conoco Phillips, Apple Tree & Auto Center of Rahway, Fig Leaf Agency of Linden, Epicor Inc. of Linden and Chris Butler Licensed Acupuncturist of Cranford.

She said she hopes to continue to help Doherty Enterprises with Linden's breakfast for as long as she can.

"Just to make the kids happy, that's my main goal," Vazquez said. "When you see their faces, you'll understand."

*Kate Rogers can be reached at 908-686-7700 ext. 127 or at [krogers@thelocalsource.com](mailto:krogers@thelocalsource.com).*