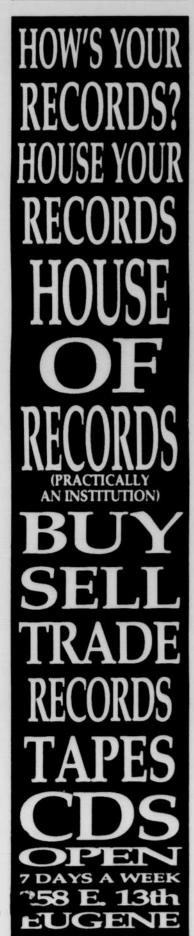




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Santa Claus takes gift wishes from Ashley Gonzales, age 8, and Carrie Evans, age 9, both of Eugene.

Plieto by John Stoops

Real-world Santa Claus rides into town

o you thought Santa's job was all ho-ho fun - he gets fan mail from kids all over the world and, come Christmas, dons his red-and-white suit, hops on his sleigh and breezes 'round the world delivering presents to the children.

Think again, Santa said what he does is just as demanding as any job, and he is as committed and as hard a worker as you and

However, his job is probably a hundred times more challenging, considering the millions of kids across the globe he has to tend to. And in order to maintain such universal appeal, Santa must definitely have inimitable public relations skills.

Santa is exceptional in other

ways, too. While many of us often get tired of what we do, or plod through commitments out of necessity, Santa has never stopped loving what he does.

In fact, he's so good at what he does that we all know him as the epitome of the Christmas spirit of love and giving

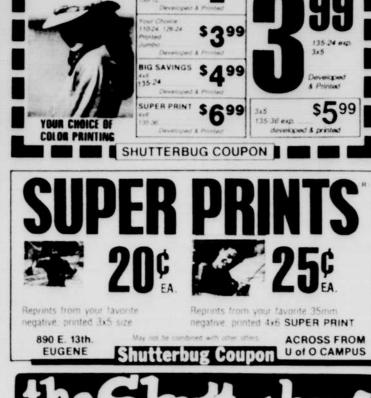
While Santa's in town this season spreading goodwill and

cheer at both Valley River Center and the Gateway Mall, I had a chance to get to know the Santa at heart — the man behind the charmed persona.

To kids at Christmas, Santa is the most important figure, above and over parents and even God," Santa said. "He is

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With Santa Claus, seeing is believing