

Inner Banks Santa ***Claude Milot***

The Albemarle Loop has its own real Santa. He's Gary Lico, the Loop's Assistant Director for Marketing and Communications, aka The Inner Banks Santa.

A couple of years ago he was checking out AARP "suggestions for things to do when you have extra time" when one suggestion caught his eye: Be a Santa. On the short side, somewhat rotund, and sporting a snow-white beard, Gary was the perfect fit. Through Santa Claus Conservatory, an on-line course for aspiring Santas, he learned the tricks of the trade, like how to do parties for adults or special-needs kids. He then went out and bought a Santa suit and started offering his services.



In 2017 he played Santa for the Edenton Steamers' baseball team at their Christmas in July event at the ballpark where he posed with kids and led the crowd in singing Christmas songs. In 2018 he threw out the first pitch at the Steamers'

Christmas in July, an event that included a benefit for the Commission on Aging.

But that was only the beginning of his life as The Inner Banks Santa. Since then Gary has played Santa at Edenton's tree lighting ceremony and has entertained 65 kids at the American Legion's Breakfast with Santa, mentally handicapped adults for Life Incorporated, under-privileged kids at Operation Santa, and blind adults for the Lions Club. He has also been doing house visits in Albemarle Plantation and will soon be wandering the streets of Edenton during its annual Christmas House Tour.



Asked what has been his biggest thrill, Gary answered, "Having a little kid with great big eyes come up to me saying 'I love you very much, Santa.' It was really hard keeping from tearing up."



When Gary is not volunteering his marketing services for the Albemarle Loop, he has a paying job in the television business. But he obviously has found his true calling as a perfect Santa. Loopers coming to the Albemarle Sound this month may very well catch a glimpse of The Inner Banks Santa guiding his sleigh somewhere over Edenton. Do wave at him when you see him.