



Amanda Harville, 8, of Santa Maria arrives with the other 180 honored guests at Operations Kids' Christmas.



(Above) Walter Vanderlinden, 8, of Santa Maria enjoys his balloon with Master Sgt. Richard Niner, 30th Space Wing deputy inspector general. (Left) Veronica Flores, 7, of Lompoc takes a bite of her hot dog served at Pacific Coast Club.



Senior Airman Darryl Lyles, 30th Security Forces Squadron, shows Gilberto Cervante, 8, of Lompoc a few tricks with his balloon animal.

# OKC 2001

Photos by Jessica Ramos

Saturday Team Vandenberg hosted 181 Central Coast boys and girls for the 42nd Annual Operation Kids' Christmas. This was a remarkable effort providing untold benefit to the children and their families.

To all those who contributed in some way, I say "thank you" for your giving spirit. I'm sure most of you would agree that the return on your time investment was dramatic and meaningful. The ear-to-ear smiles of those kids as they left the club confirmed that you impacted their lives in a very positive way.

Again, thanks for all you did to make this such a success.

Col. Ken Van Sickle  
381st Training Group, Commander



Mathew Willis, 6, gives a hug to a special guest from the North Pole.



Airman 1st Class Mercedes Zamora, 381st Training Support Squadron, and Airman 1st Class Jamell Camper, 532nd Training Squadron, comfort Venezia Ranney, 6, of Lompoc. Ranney and 180 other children attended the 42nd Annual Operation Kids' Christmas Saturday at the Pacific Coast Club.



(Above) Tech. Sgt. Richard Hazen, 532nd TRS, totes gift bags for the children. Each bag contained seven gifts for OKC attendees. (Right) Airman 1st Class Julianne Lugan, 30th Transportation Squadron, helps an OKC attendee onto the bus with his gifts after the party.



## Child's dream comes true

OKC from Page 1

Nerf footballs for the boys.

Additionally, each family received food baskets and \$50 clothing gift certificates.

OKC is a giant holiday party held every year on Vandenberg for underprivileged children in Santa Maria, Lompoc, Guadalupe and the Santa Ynez Valley.

Vandenberg sponsors the event, but has nothing to do with choosing which children attend, said Master Sgt. Roy Blanco, 30th Operations Group first sergeant. Social workers at local agencies are responsible for selecting the children from low-income families.

Money is raised for the program through fundraisers like OKC Golf Tournament and the Texas Blowout. Additionally, Vandenberg members can donate money through the Combined Federal Campaign. This year's OKC budget was \$25,000.

It's more than the money that makes the event a success, Blanco said.

"It's the volunteers," he said, pointing out that an army of nearly 400 volunteers contributed their time and energy to make the event a success.

"I think this is the most generous community program on a military base that I've seen," Blanco said. "A lot of bases have fundraisers and give out toys, but to put on this kind of program, with this kind of generosity, it's amazing," Blanco added.

The party kicked off Saturday at 10 a.m. when the children stepped off the buses at the Pacific Coast Club. After some of Vandenberg's highest ranking officials greeted them, each child was escorted into the building by a uniformed Team V member.

Hundreds of presents lay wrapped and waiting in the hallway.

Once seated in the PCC ballroom, the children and their sponsors took a few moments to get to know each other before the clowns and dancers performed.

Asked if he was having a good time, 6-year old Lawrence Castillo answered with a resounding, "Yes!"

His "big brother," Senior Airman Matthew Royal, a satellite operations student at the 381st Training Group also said he was having a blast.

"I love kids," he said.

The afternoon concluded with each child spending a moment with Santa Claus. Some children were shy, others more talkative, but every one looked happy and excited when they left Saint Nick's lap loaded down with presents.

"To see the look in the children's eyes and see their expressions makes the whole thing worthwhile," Blanco said.

OKC dates to 1959, then known as Operation Big Brother.

Founded by Mike Petlansky, the operating budget was \$1,800 that first year and 100 children participated.

Jeannie McCreedy, whose 8-year-old son participated in OKC this year, said it was her son's fantasy to visit Vandenberg.

"Just being able to visit the base was a dream come true for him," she said.

McCreedy said she was so happy that her child was able to participate in the program.

"We are so blessed to live in such a wonderful community," she said.

