

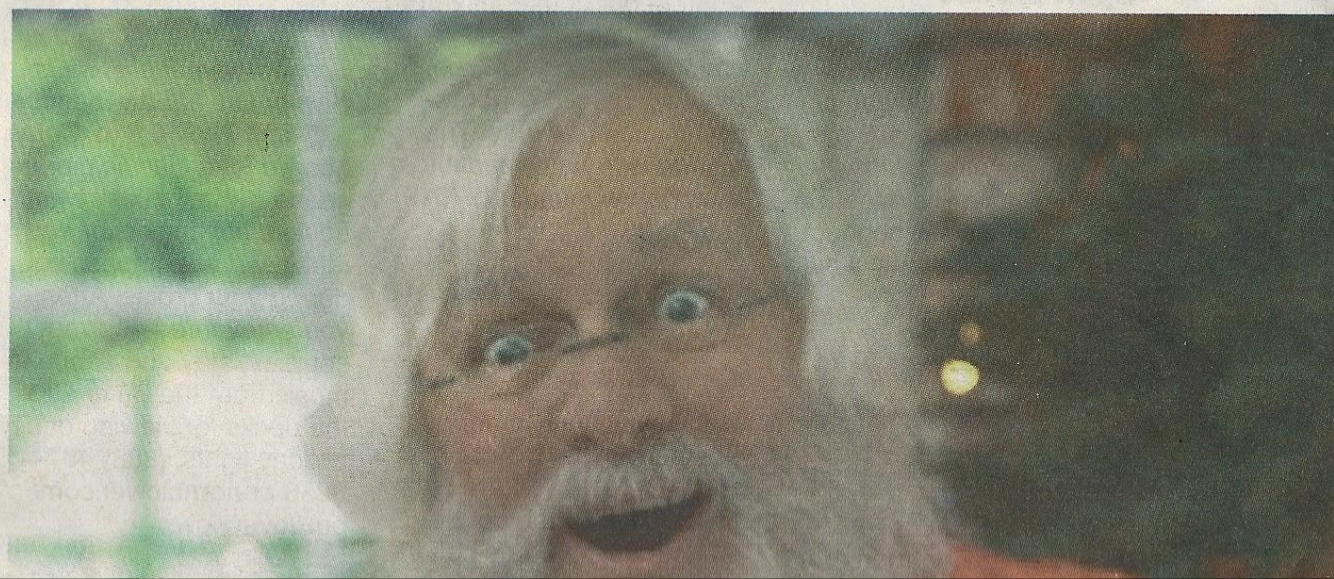
A lifestyle guide for the 50+ generation



# sdprime

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## SAN DIEGO'S SUNNY SANTAS

BY CARL ROBINETTE

In a Clairemont Souplantation a big guy with a beard watches a man approach his table. Apology is written all over the approaching man's face. The big guy has never seen this person before, but for the approaching man this big guy is not exactly a stranger.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but my daughter thinks you're Santa."

"Well I am Santa," the big guy says, not the least bit surprised. "Send her over."

Even out of costume, Santa Joe Mystic is everything you want a San Diego Santa to be. He wears relaxed fit denim on top of no-frills sneakers. A Hawaiian-style shirt patterned in lots of green and red lies open, letting a big belly stick out with a bright red t-shirt stretched over it. A white beard hangs from ruddy cheeks down to his chest.

Santa Joe has been Santa for 22 years and he is seriously committed. Private parties. Corporate events. Charity events. He does it all.

A member of the United States Consulate in Tijuana once hired Santa Joe to make a midnight visit to his house and

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## SANTAS

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"accidentally" wake up the twin girls who were asleep on the couch.

"It was not easy to wake those girls up," Santa Joe chuckles. "I had to make a lot of noise."

Joe is not the only real-bearded Santa in San Diego. In fact he has personally recruited about a dozen other Santas as treasurer of Real Santas of San Diego, a local chapter of the Fraternal Brotherhood of Real Bearded Santas, or FORBS.

"I've always been fascinated by Santa Claus, and I've actually always believed in Santa Claus," said Santa Scott, a chiropractor who was trained to do home visits as Santa by Santa Joe. "As I got older, I always had a reverence for Santa Claus. Then I started looking like Santa Claus. I thought, 'Hey I can actually be Santa now.'" Other Santas did not find it so easy to get in touch with their inner Claus.

"I really didn't like Santa. I was scared to death of him until I was 33 years old. Is that weird?"

That's Santa Marv Nicholson, the vice president of Real Santas of San Diego. He told the story about a Santa who came to the door of his childhood home in Iowa and scared young Marv half to death.

The fear stayed with him all of those years until he saw a Santa at a craft fair in Salt Lake City. This Santa was so convincing the 33-year-old Marv could not resist sitting on his lap for a photo.

"Is that weird?" Santa Marv asked.

Santa Marv has been Santa for four years, but he was in the toy business for 45 years, making puppets and traveling the world to craft fairs and trade shows where he sold his products. Talking about his career, it sounds like Santa Marv is unaware of how Claus-like it is to go around the

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SANTA JOE MYSTIC