

Holiday magic arrives for 1,700 children at Casino Queen Hotel as they host their 24th annual Toyland

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EAST ST. LOUIS – For the past 24 years, the Casino Queen Hotel has been transformed into a winter wonderland for the Casino's annual Toyland event, during which Santa and Mrs. Claus make a special stop to visit with hundreds of children, presenting each with a gift bag filled with treasures to brighten their holiday season. In all, more than 1,700 pre-k through second grade students from East St Louis School District 189 got to participate in this year's event, held Tuesday, Dec. 12.



The event, which to date has now impacted more than 45,100 children, has become a holiday tradition for the employees of the Casino Queen, School District 189, AmeriCorps members, the volunteers from Southwestern Illinois College's baseball team who help to assemble all the gift bags, and the volunteers who transform the

ballroom into Toyland and serve as Santa's helpers distributing gifts. Over the years, some of the tiny feet once walking through the hotel's winter wonderland in awe have grown up and are now on the giving side of the event as employees of the Casino Queen.

"Year after year, it is with the help of our volunteers, employees and District 189 that we are able to impact so many children in the community in which we operate through this event," stated Jeff Watson, President and General Manager of the Casino Queen. "The holiday magic spread here is truly a result of the community pulling together and providing a positive impact on some of its smallest members."

This year, all 1,700 youngsters visited on a single day, filing off a steady stream of buses with teachers and other staff from District 189 who escorted them into the ballroom for their opportunity to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus before they received their holiday gift bag. Each bag was filled with a selection of both practical and fun gifts, including: a knit hat, socks and gloves; president ruler; animal crackers; crayons; Letters, Numbers, Spelling & Math Coloring Books; Smart Cell Phone toy; and a Chess, Checkers and Tic-Tac-Toe game. The 2017 Illinois School Report Card reveals more than 95% of East St. Louis School District 189 elementary students come from low income families, so this special visit with Santa really makes a big difference in spreading holiday cheer.

"Over the years, the Casino Queen and their helpers have been continuously generous in their efforts to make each holiday season special for our students. On behalf of the families, students and staff of District 189, we are grateful," shared superintendent of East St. Louis School District 189, Arthur Culver. "The event is a reminder of the magic of this and every holiday season."

Located at 200 South Front Street in East St. Louis, Ill., Casino Queen became the first employee owned, locally owned casino in the country in 2012. It was established in 1993 and has since made more than \$10 million in charitable contributions and invested more than \$200 million in capital improvements on the East St. Louis riverfront. For the past decade, Casino Queen has been recognized for having the nation's highest slot payback among individual casinos by Casino Player Magazine. For more information, visit www.casinoqueen.com. You can also find Casino Queen on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).