

Casino Queen celebrates the magic of the holiday season with 25th annual Toyland event

December 26 2018 10:34 AM



EAST ST. LOUIS - Christmas came early this year for more than 1,700 pre-kindergarten through second grade children from District 189 with a surprise visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus, who've made the stop in East St. Louis for the Casino Queen's Toyland event for the past 25 years.

The two were on hand December 19 to greet the children in the hotel ballroom, which was once again magically transformed into a winter wonderland where each child also was presented with a gift bag filled with treasures to brighten their holiday season. The 2018 Illinois School Report Card reveals that 83% of East St. Louis School District 189 elementary students come from low income households, so this special visit with Santa can make a big difference in spreading holiday cheer.

“Seeing the excitement as the kids wait to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus and watching them leave holding their gift bag with a big smile on their face are just a few of the many reasons we are proud to continue this treasured tradition,” stated Terry Hanger, General Manager of the Casino Queen. “We are so grateful for the help of our volunteers, employees and District 189 who all work so well together to make this special event possible year after year and positively impact so many children in the community.”

All the 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 as they anxiously awaited their turn to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus before receiving their holiday gift bag. Each bag was filled with a selection of both practical and fun gifts, including: a knit hat, socks and gloves; globe; president ruler; animal crackers; learning numbers BINGO game; and large fleece blanket. Transportation of the children to and from their visit to Santa was provided compliments of Illinois Central Bus Company.

The event, which to date has impacted more than 46,800 children, has become a holiday tradition for the employees of the Casino Queen, School District 189, student athletes from Southwestern Illinois College, East Side High School Running Start students, VISTA members, volunteers from various departments within the School District and parents who help to assemble the gift bags and transform the hotel ballroom into a winter wonderland in time for Santa’s big visit. Over the past quarter of a century, some of the tiny feet once walking through the magical wonderland in awe have grown up and are now on the giving side of the event as employees of the Casino Queen.

“For some of the children visiting the winter wonderland, this is the only Christmas they get,” said Sydney Stigge-Kaufman, Director of Strategic Partnerships for School District 189. “We are so appreciative of Casino Queen for being continuously generous in their efforts to make each holiday season a special one to remember for our students.”

About Casino Queen:

Casino Queen, located at 200 South Front Street in East St. Louis, Ill., is the only employee owned, locally owned casino in the country. 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 more than a 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 or find Casino Queen on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).