

Casino Queen Continues Treasured Tradition With 26th Annual Toyland Event

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EAST ST. LOUIS - Christmas came to town a few weeks early for more than 1,600 pre-kindergarten through second-grade children from District 189 with a surprise visit from Santa Claus, who has spread extra holiday cheer at Casino Queen's Toyland event for the past 26 years. Santa made the special stop in East St. Louis on December 11 to greet the children in the hotel ballroom, which was once again magically transformed into a winter wonderland where each child was presented with a gift bag filled with treasures to brighten their holiday season.

According to the 2019 Illinois School Report Card, more than 93% of East St. Louis School District 189 elementary students come from low-income families, so the early visit from jolly old St. Nick had a huge impact.

“The holiday magic spread here is truly a result of the community pulling together to make the season merry and bright for some of its smallest members,” said Mitch Johnson, General Manager of Casino Queen. “We are especially grateful for the help of our volunteers, employees and District 189 that work diligently to make this one-of-a-kind event possible year after year.”

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 eagerly awaited their turn to meet Santa Claus before receiving their holiday gift bag. Each bag was filled with a selection of both practical and fun gifts, including: a stocking cap, socks and gloves, coloring books, crayons, president ruler, inflatable globe, animal crackers and a small watch. 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 48,400 children, has become a holiday tradition for the employee-owners of the Casino Queen, School District 189, student-athletes from Southwestern Illinois College, Wyvetter Younge Alternative Center students, AmeriCorps 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 arrival. Over the past quarter of a century, some of the little ones walking through the magical wonderland in amazement have grown up and are now on the giving side of the event as employees of the Casino Queen.

“This is a very magical and powerful time for the students, and we are so appreciative of the Casino Queen’s continued generosity to make each holiday season one to remember,” said Sydney Stigge-Kaufman, Director of Strategic Partnerships for School District 189. “Seeing the kids’ faces light up as they wait to meet Santa and watching them leave with their holiday gift bag and full of Christmas spirit – that is the greatest gift of all.”

About Casino Queen:

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 more information, visit www.casinoqueen.com or find Casino Queen on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).