

North Richmond carries on holiday tradition begun by Charles Reid

From the Globe Richmond Desk

Even though Charles Reid died in 1979 at age 81, the tradition he began is bigger than ever nearly 60 years after he first dressed up as Santa Claus and distributed gifts to children in North Richmond.



Determined to bring holiday joy to the children of an impoverished neighborhood, the Richmond recreation director gave out stockings filled with fruit, cookies and candy canes. He even set up loudspeakers on the front porch of his house to play carols.

Today, a group Richmond High School alumni from the early 1950s organize the annual Charlie Reid Christmas Party at Shields-Reid Community Center. This year they will serve about 3,000 children and distribute gifts to another 1,000 kids through other organizations..



Each child who attends the party receives several gifts and gets the chance to sit in Santa's lap. For many of the children, the party is the highlight of the season and may be their only chance to receive holiday gifts.

Residents who encountered Reid as children cite him as a role model and mentor. The Charles R. Reid Foundation is now a certified nonprofit organization. It gives out fliers for its annual event in English, Spanish and Laotian.

The Contra Costa Sheriff's Department has been involved since the early days and brings in a large number of donations each year. The San Francisco Fire Department also gets involved.

Sponsors of this year's party included the National Football League Players Association, NFL Alumni, NFL Junior Player Development, the Coca-Cola Company and Omega Pacific Electrical Supply Company of Richmond.



PHOTOS BY ELLEN GAILING

For the past five years, Santa Claus has been played by a retired NFL player.