

Brockton doubles Santa hats record downtown

BROCKTON — By Maria Papadopoulos

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Wearing her Santa hat downtown on Sunday paid off handsomely for 9-year-old Kimberly Jean-Baptiste.

The Brockton third-grader won an iPad – worth several hundred dollars – in a free raffle. She couldn't stop smiling as she clutched her new technological toy and as hundreds of people looked on.

“Yes!” Jean-Baptiste, a student at the Huntington Elementary School, squealed as she jumped up and down.

She was among 1,792 people who organizers say wore Santa hats in downtown Brockton on Sunday – a feat that more than doubled the city's Santa Claus hat-wearing record from last year, when 872 people donned Santa hats.

“That's unbelievable. Whoever's watching, that's pretty big,” said organizer John Merian, a member of the Greater Brockton Holiday Parade planning committee, who planned the Santa Hat Challenge.

The hat challenge is part of the committee's efforts to celebrate Brockton's history as the city with the first-ever department store Santa Claus, played in 1890 by James Edgar, owner of the downtown Edgar's Department Store.

Many of the elementary schools in the area decorated the hats before Sunday.

Riley McEvoy, 5, of Brockton, was among city schoolchildren who wore a Santa hat.

“I saw Santa and I liked him,” said McEvoy, a student at the Baker Elementary School.

Maryann Lam of Brockton donned her Santa hat, as did her black Springer Spaniel, Baby.

“I want to help them win,” Lam, 47, said.

Brockton Elections Commissioner John McGarry dressed up as Santa Claus for the event.

The event closed off the one-block stretch of Main Street, at Crescent Street. Festivities began at 2:30 p.m. with DJ Joe Lupica playing holiday music. The official count happened in front of the parking garage at 3:30 p.m.

At that time, the entire crowd turned in one direction to pose, wearing the hats, for the official group photograph.

The crowd danced to the songs “Macarena” by Los del Rio and “I Gotta Feeling” by The Black Eyed Peas.

Liza Talusan donned a Santa hat with her two children, Joli Vega, 8, and Jada Vega, 5.

“This is amazing,” said Talusan, 36, of Brockton, who works as Stonehill College's director of intercultural affairs. “This is Brockton right here, really great people, great families.”

Mayor Linda Balzotti said she was proud of the hundreds of residents who turned out.

“It's just such a great day,” she said.

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