

# It takes a tech village to track Santa on Christmas Eve

December 24 2019, by James Anderson



Monitors are illuminated in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 telephone calls from children and their parents who will be checking on the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Depending on which country they're from, the kids may ask about

Father Christmas, Papa Noel, Saint Nick or Santa Claus.

But those who believe all want to know one thing: where in the world the jolly old man and his sleigh full of gifts are on Christmas Eve.

For the 64th time, a wildly popular program run by the U.S. and Canadian militaries is providing real-time updates on Santa's progress to millions around the globe.

And this year, the North American Aerospace Defense Command is offering even more high-tech ways for children and parents to follow along.

Operation NORAD Tracks Santa has evolved from a misdirected telephone call in 1955, to a trailer parked outside the command's former lair deep inside Cheyenne Mountain, to NORAD 's modern-day headquarters at Colorado's Peterson Air Force Base.

Along the way, the tens of thousands of telephone calls fielded by NORAD volunteers each year have been augmented by an explosion of technology that lets millions track St. Nick's journey from the North Pole to the Pacific and Asia, from Europe to the Americas.

This year's portals include Alexa, OnStar, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and 3-D apps developed for mobile devices by Cesium, a Philadelphia-based IT and defense contractor. The apps integrate geospatial and satellite-positioning technology with high-resolution graphics that display the actual positions of the stars, sun and moon and the shadows they cast at any point in Santa's journey.



United States Navy Specialist Petty Officer 1st Class Shannon Chambers of Long Beach, Calif., looks over a volunteer playbook in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 telephone inquiries to learn of the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

It takes a village of dozens of tech firms—including Google, Microsoft, Hewlett Packard and Bing Maps—to deliver the immersive effect for global Santa trackers, with some 15 million visits to the website alone last year.

And it takes a village of 1,500 volunteers to field emails and the 140,000 or so telephone calls to 1-877-HI-NORAD (1-877-446-6723). They staff



phone banks equipped with monitors inside a building at Peterson, which offers a view of snow-capped Pikes Peak to the west.

More volunteers and firms donate food, water and coffee to those on Santa Watch.

"Hi Santa Trackers! Lots of kids are waiting to ask you about Santa," a sign reads.

Volunteers are equipped with an Operations Center Playbook that helps ensure each and every caller can go to sleep happy and satisfied on Christmas Eve.



A decorated tree stands in the NORAD Tracks Santa Center at Peterson Air

Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will handle an estimated 140,000 telephone inquiries from around the globe from children and their parents on the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

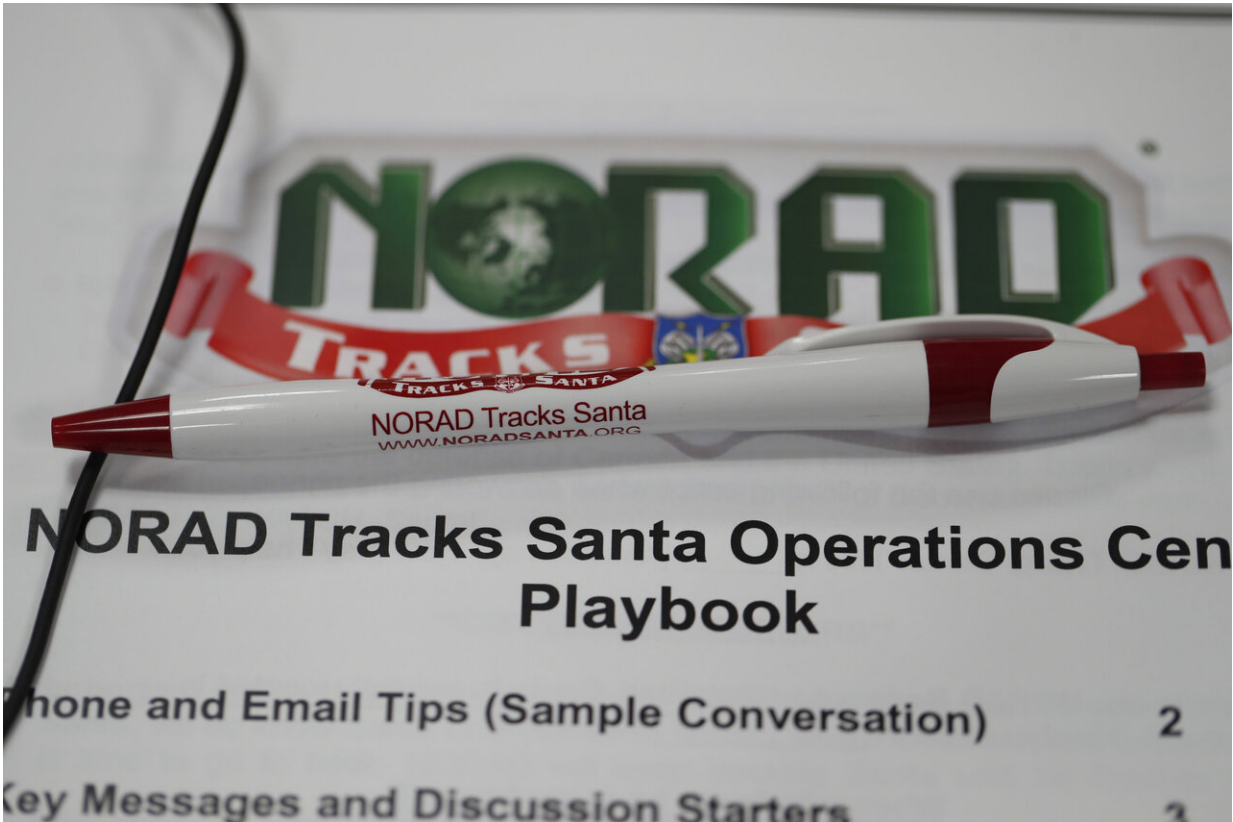


Canadian Armed Forces Major Andrew Hennessy, of Armstrong, B.C., talks about the volunteer effort in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 telephone inquiries to learn of the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)



Preston Schlachter, program manager of the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, stands in one of the three conference rooms that will be used by volunteers Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 telephone inquiries to learn of the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)





A pen rests on the playbook for volunteers who will be taking calls from around the globe in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)



Lanyards stand at the ready for volunteers who speak foreign languages to wear while answering telephones in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 calls from children and their parents from around the globe to check on the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)





Volunteer Nicole Schreiner places a display of poinsettias in the NORAD Tracks Santa center at Peterson Air Force Base, Monday, Dec. 23, 2019, in Colorado Springs, Colo. More than 1,500 volunteers will answer an estimated 140,000 telephone inquiries to learn of the whereabouts of Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Longtime Santa trackers are familiar with the NORAD-Santa story.

In 1955, Air Force Col. Harry Shoup—the commander on duty one night at NORAD's predecessor, the Continental Air Defense Command—fielded a call from a child who dialed a misprinted telephone number in a newspaper department store ad, thinking she was calling Santa.

A fast-thinking Shoup quickly assured his caller that he was. And a

tradition was born.

Today, most early calls come from Japan and Europe. The volume soars in the U.S. and Canada, said program manager Preston Schlachter. United Kingdom callers ask about Father Christmas. Those in France generally seek Papa Noel's whereabouts.

For team members, once "Big Red"—Santa's code name—is airborne, Schlachter said, "it's off to the races."

"I've never had a block of time move so quickly," he said.

© 2019 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: It takes a tech village to track Santa on Christmas Eve (2019, December 24) retrieved 3 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-12-tech-village-track-santa-christmas.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.