

## **SANTA'S VILLAGE PROGRAMS EXPAND**

Orien Hodges, president of Santa's Children Christmas Village, Macedonia, Iowa described the mission and recent activities at Santa's Village. Hodges stated that Santa's Village has no paid workers. In the past two years they have had over 160 volunteers help with activities, decorating, and renovations. In the past year Santa's Christmas Village hosted a Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Christmas party, a Lydia House visit, a Micah House visit, and participated in the MDA summer camp. Santa has also visited Children's Hospital, the University of Nebraska Medical Center, the Leid Transplant Center, and other hospitals. Santa has visited about 1500 children in the past year. According to Hodges the goals for Santa's Village the remainder of this year include decorating 100 trees by Christmas, increasing volunteers, and teaming with many more fire departments. Santa's Village has over 60 Christmas trees throughout the building. This year they will be emphasizing Christmas Around the World by decorating additional trees in decorations typical to different countries.

Hodges stated that the third weekend of every month is a volunteer weekend at Santa's Village. Volunteers are welcome any day, but a new goal is to emphasize the joy of volunteering every month. Youth groups including the Riverside Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), the Griswold FCCLA, the Riverside dance team, and several Boy Scout groups have volunteered a large amount of time the past year. Santa's Village received an unexpected shipment of 57,600 books from Scholastic books with a retail value of about \$400,000. 1400 books are being sent to Children's Hospital in Omaha. Hodges explained Santa's Village is teaming with fire departments to distribute these books, clothing, and toys to children in need in communities in Iowa and Nebraska. When fire departments sign up with Santa's Village, every \$100 contributed comes back to the community as \$1000 worth of new clothing, books, and toys. Santa's Village provides certificates for the fire departments to distribute to children and families in need. Those certificates can be redeemed at Santa's Village, or Santa's Village will deliver the needed items to the fire department to give to the family if necessary.