



CITY OF DAVENPORT *Florida*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Davenport Toddler Gets Special Visit from Santa & Mrs. Claus

DAVENPORT – When Santa Claus comes to town, it's typically in the dark of night on Christmas Eve.

But sometimes he makes an exception.

Such was the case on Wednesday (December 7) when Santa and Mrs. Claus made a very special visit to an even more special Davenport toddler.

With the help of the Davenport Fire Department and the Davenport Police Department, Santa and Mrs. Claus brought a little Christmas magic to 19-month old Leila Durfee and her family.

"Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for putting a smile on our faces," said Leila's mother, Tammi Durfee.

Those smiles proved contagious as the officers and firefighters smiled along during the visit as well.

"You made magic for all of us tonight and there will never be a way to properly put into words what it meant for us," Durfee said. "For a moment, we were able to forget and we are so very grateful."

Knowing that Leila's weakened immune system would prevent her from enjoying any of the holiday community events being held, Durfee reached out to the City of Davenport in November.

"My daughter is battling cancer, so we cannot take her to meet him (Santa) or come to the parade this year as we have done previously," said Durfee when she initially reached out. "She is only 19 months, but we are desperate to give her a special Christmas despite her diagnosis... We will miss all of the Christmas festivities this year, but just can't take the risk during active treatment."

Leila is battling neuroblastoma.

"She was diagnosed in April with a rare pediatric cancer two days before her first birthday and we have spent most of those days in the hospital," Durfee said. "Much of her time is spent in the hospital, but we get a couple of weeks at home finally."

With that information, Davenport Fire Chief J.T. Torrance and various other city staff members sprang into action to make sure that Leila wouldn't miss a picture with Santa this year.

"We would like to facilitate this if possible," said Torrance at the time. "I believe we can make this happen."

Torrance and his team reached out to Santa and Mrs. Claus, while maintaining communication with the Durfee family, to coordinate a visit.

Leila is expected to return to inpatient care at AdventHealth Orlando, where she has been receiving continued care, on Sunday, so the window of opportunity to coordinate the visit was small.



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“She’s a fighter and stronger than anyone I know, but she’s also a little child who is just happy no matter what,” Durfee said. “This little baby has been through more than I could ever imagine and she is the strongest person I know.”

In addition to care at AdventHealth Orlando, Leila also had surgery and received radiation treatments in New York.

The Durfee family waited in their driveway as units from the Davenport Fire Department and Davenport Police Department pulled in front of their home with lights flashing. Spot, the fire dog, even tagged along for the chance to visit with Leila.

Once parked, Santa and Mrs. Claus climbed down from the fire truck and approached the Durfee family abounding with holiday cheer.

Santa presented Leila with various items from his bag of toys, and the Durfee family presented Santa and Mrs. Claus with a platter of cookies.

“We were honored to have the opportunity to escort Santa and Mrs. Claus to visit with the Durfee family,” said Torrance. “In an effort to help deliver cheer and blessings for this family, we actually received a blessing as well just in meeting little Leila. What an adorable little girl and a wonderful family. Interactions such as this help remind us all of what’s most important. I’m so glad that we were able to facilitate this for them.”

Leila appeared happy throughout most of the visit, blowing kisses to her emotional grandparents as they watched the interactions.

“We were so blessed tonight,” Durfee said. “From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.”