

ALBION'S PRIDE

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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

Charles W. Howard Day held in Albion on Sept. 25 was indeed a heart-touching day. It was an event well orchestrated by all who planned and participated in making it happen. Kudos to all who were involved!

The program in front of the Courthouse set the mood of the day with proclamations followed by an overflow crowd who assembled in the First United Methodist Church. Here, the story of Charles Howard was told with appropriate video images.

The santas were eloquent; their oath superb in what was a beautiful tribute to the greatest Santa of all.

Descendants of Charles and Ruth were obviously touched by Albion's outpouring of esteem to a man who touched the lives of so many children.

Charles Howard, founder of the world-famous Santa Claus School in 1937 and later Christmas Park, never made a million dollars. However, he achieved something of greater value, he made a million friends. It is for that reason that those who portray Santa Claus wanted to recognize Howard in his own hometown as the greatest Santa, as he set the bar for excellence.

It was sometime in the early 1960s that Howard was invited to go to Australia to emit his persona as to how a professional Santa Clause should be. He met with department store heads and santas in training. One day, the woman escorting him said: "Today it will be difficult for you because we have scheduled a 20-minute interview with a very mean-spirited news reporter. She is as tough as nails. She was in one of Hitler's concentration camps and she will attempt to rip you into shreds with such fantasies as Santa

Claus."

Howard replied by saying, "I simply tell the truth."

What was supposed to be a 20-minute interview ended up being an hour and 20 minutes. When the hard-nosed reporter left, she was in tears. The escort lady said, "We have never seen that happen before. How did you do it?"

Charles Howard replied by saying, "I simply tell the truth."

Although he was a master of fantasy, metaphor and allegory, there was something astoundingly truthful about his visage and persona as a very real santa. That came about because of how he lived his own life greeting each new day with an ever-present infectious smile and a determination to pursue his convictions and imagination like none other.

"Yes. Virginia there is a Santa Claus."



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