

# The keeper of the elves

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(Warning! You must believe in Santa Claus, elves, and the magic of Christmas to read this story!)

Christmas has always been a magical time for Dunwoody resident Piper Worthington. When Worthington and her sister, Anita, were children, Christmas meant listening to their mother tell wonderful tales about Santa Claus and the elves who serve as Santa's special helpers.

"My mother had my sister and I convinced Santa sent real elves to our home every Christmas to watch if we naughty or nice," said Worthington, founder of Elf Magic, a business that helps "lure" elves to families across the country.

Worthington, a former flight attendant turned full-time mother, continued the Christmas elf tradition with her own three children. Her two sons and her daughter fell in love with the elf stories, and, like their mother before them, believed Santa's elves were real.

In 1990, Worthington decided to locate elves for her children, and to invite the elves into her home for Christmas. She was successful, finding 13 elves that first year. When the children discovered the elves hiding around their house, they excitedly told her, "See, elves really do exist," said Worthington.

Her children loved their new elfin friends. The elves also became a huge hit with Worthington's family and friends. She was surprised how many parents and children wanted their own elves to visit their homes the following Christmas. "I found two dozen elves the second year. Before the year ended, I went ahead and found 144 boy elves and 144 girl elves for the next Christmas. Everyone I know thought I'd lost my mind," laughed Worthington.

Today, thanks almost totally to word of mouth and the Internet, Elf Magic, which consists of Worthington and her five seasonal helpers, helps attract elves to the homes of thousands of children each year during the Christmas holiday season. Worthington has helped more than 6,000 elves travel from the North Pole to their new homes this year. Elves have found homes in 44 states, including Hawaii. The elves have traveled across the globe, ending up with families in England, Ireland, Australia, Japan and Kuwait.

An elf visited Dunwoody mother Stephanie Renner's three children for the first time last Christmas. "My daughter, Anna, heard about the elves from friends at her elementary school," said Renner. "Once our elf arrived, Anna and my two sons, Will and Jacob, fell in love with him. He's our special "house" elf, and the children take him with us almost everywhere we go."

Worthington said it's easy to lure an elf to your home. "Children first write Santa a letter, asking him to reserve a special elf just for them, to visit and spend Christmas at the child's home," said Worthington. "The letters are then mailed to the North Pole, or, left by the fireplace for Santa. Children then leave the elves' favorite food, crackers and water, out on the kitchen counter for the elf to eat when they arrive between Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Each 10-inch tall elf, which can be either a boy or a girl depending on the child visited by the elf, has its own name, and arrives from the North Pole with a special letter explaining to the child why the elf has come to the child's home. The elves also arrive with magical "North Pole snowflakes." After playing with the elf all day, and before going to bed, the child must sprinkle snowflakes on their elf to help the elf play and hide at night while the child is asleep.

And elves can be quite adventurous and mischievous at night.

Children wake each morning to find their elves have been quite busy, said Worthington. She said elves have been known to stay up all night watching television, rearrange cars in the driveway, unroll whole rolls of toilet paper and leave notes for children.

"One night our elf, 'Park,' tried to climb the Christmas tree to say hello to the angel at the top. When the children woke up the next day, they saw he had fallen and landed upside down in the tree," said Renner. "Park also loves to eat Oreo cookies, but, only the white cream in the middle. So, the kids often find the chocolate outside pieces left everywhere downstairs."

Despite, or because, of the elves nocturnal adventures, parents tell Worthington the elves are one of their families' most exciting and joyous yearly holiday traditions. "Christmas is such a magical time for children," said Worthington. "I think the elves help capture that magic."



Elves like these have visited thousands of homes through the years, thanks to the assistance of Dunwoody resident Piper Worthington.