

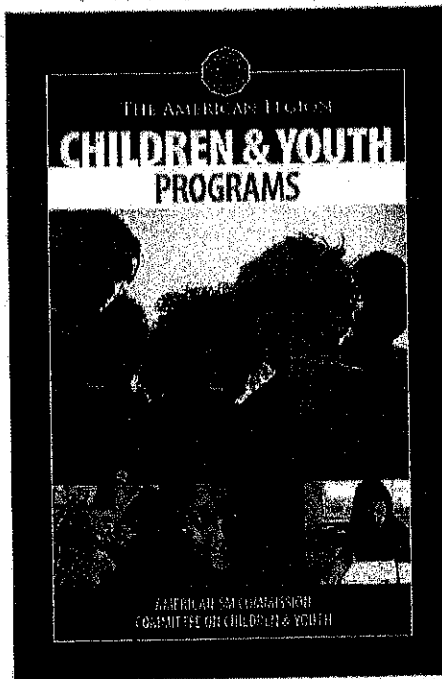
THE AMERICAN LEGION

Department of



OHIO

Child Welfare Worker of the Year Award 2025



60 Big Run Road ♦ Delaware, OH
43015 Phone: 740-362-7478
www.ohiolegion.com

HISTORY & INSTRUCTIONS

The Department of Ohio Children & Youth Commission created the Child Welfare Worker of the Year Award to recognize those front-line civilian warriors who work tirelessly on behalf of children every day.

The successes of those who have received this award are the youth who emerge as productive tax paying citizens from all walks of life that may be underserved and at-risk of basic needs of shelter and food. These children may suffer from poverty and broken homes filled with abusive or dysfunctional families that rely upon care and resources distributed, or administered, by the selfless this award recognizes.

Each year, the award recipient chosen by the Children & Youth Commission will receive an award with their name and year ascribed onto the plaque. They will be notified, and the award will be presented at the Mid-Winter Conference Awards Ceremony.

Eligibility and Selection

1. The Ohio American Legion Child Welfare Worker of the Year Award is open to professional or volunteer youth counselors throughout Ohio who demonstrate outstanding devotion to the ideals of The American Legion and provide children of Ohio with positive direction.
2. Nominations must be submitted to Department Headquarters by **September 15th**. Nomination forms available on the Department website: www.ohiolegion.com/of-the-year-awards/. Those permitted to nominate include Post officers, County officers, District officers, Department officers and the Department Children & Youth Commission. Nominations must be sent to your District Children & Youth Commission Chair to be taken into consideration as a District Winner. Acceptance of nominations submitted by anyone other than those noted above will be at the discretion of the Department Children & Youth Commission.
3. The Department Children & Youth Commission will review and judge award nominations in October each year. The recipient will be invited to receive the award at the annual American Legion Mid-Winter Conference.
4. Selection of the recipient will be based upon judging criteria established by the Department Children & Youth Commission and amended as may be deemed necessary, subject to the approval of the Department Executive Committee.

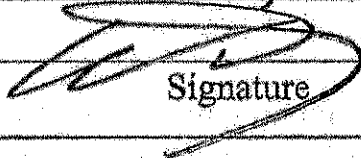
NOMINATION FORM

2025

THE OHIO AMERICAN LEGION

Child Welfare Worker of the Year

NOMINEE DATA

1. Name of Nominee WILLIAM DIETERLE
2. Address 15400 BUNDYSBURG ROAD
3. City, State & Zip Code MIDDLEFIELD OH 44062
4. Telephone number: Daytime (440) 632 5000
Evening (440) 376 3404
5. Title EXEC DIRECTOR
6. Employer NON PROFIT SANTA'S HIDE A WAY HALLWAY
7. Nominees Authorization 
Signature

NOMINATOR DATA

1. Nominator Janet K. Dieterle
2. Address 15400 Bundysburg Road
3. City, State & Zip Middlefield, Ohio 44062
4. Telephone number: Daytime () - 440 376 3404
Evening () 440 632-5000
5. Post Number _____ District _____ City _____
6. Legion Office _____
7. Signature of Nominator Janet K. Dieterle

III. NOMINATION CRITERIA		For Selection Commission Use Only	
		POINTS	
<i>To be completed by Nominator</i>			
1. Years of Services	<u>40 YEARS</u>	1.	5
2. Average number of children served each year	<u>3000 - 5000</u>	2.	10
3. Brief description of services provided	<u>GIVING DYING CHILDREN A CHANCE TO CELEBRATE THEIR LAST CHRISTMAS.</u>	3.	5
		4.	20
Check one: ☐ Professional ☒ Volunteer	<u>WE ARE ALL VOLUNTEERS - NO SALARIES TO ANY ONE</u>	5.	10
4. Other honors or awards received		6.	25
		7.	20
5. Articles published	<u>USA TODAY - SAT EVE POST MANY NEWSPAPERS</u>	8.	5
6. Why is this nominee exceptional above others providing similar services	<u>NO OTHER NON PROFIT IS SIMILAR TO SANTA'S HIDE A WAY. 2962,000 CHILDREN SERVED.</u>	TOTAL 100	
7. Nominees achievements for which nominated	<u>BEING SANTA TO TERMINALLY ILL CHILDREN. BUILT THE NORTH POLE VILLAGE FOR CHILDREN TO VISIT - FREE - NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.</u>		
8. Supervisor's Name	<u>CHARLES C. BOEHNLEIN</u>		
Title	<u>POST COMMANDER 459</u>		
Address	<u>PO. BOX 261, BURTON, OH 44021</u> <u>440-313-2095</u>		
Supervisor's Authorization			
	Signature <u>Charles C. Boehnlein</u>		

HARRY L. FRITINGER 200940918
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18851 WEST HIGH ST. MIDDLEFIELD, OHIO 44062
440-479-0502

Harry L. Fritinger



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about

A magical place where the spirit of Christmas lasts forever.

Hospitals

How Can We Help?

Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow welcomes all children and their families with critical and terminal illnesses – all disabilities. Visits can be arranged by any Hospital's Child Life Department, Hospice, or Child's Disease Association, and is "absolutely free" for the child and family!

Hospitals that we currently have relationships with are:

- [The Cleveland Clinic](#) – Santa has worked with the Cleveland Clinic for 15+ years. Contact: Huma Moulvi, Child Life Manager, 3057 or MOULVIH@ccf.org
- [University Hospital – Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital](#)
- [Hattie Larlam](#), Mantua, OH – Services for People with Developmental Disabilities – Santa has visited there every Christmas Eve morning for 20+ years.
- Various Hospice Organizations
- We have visited children in Columbus, Cincinnati, and children at Akron Children's Hospital.

We are often contacted to help create memories for these families, to help the child have a turn in spirit – which often helps them become more cooperative – and to celebrate the magic of Christmas ANY and EVERY day of the year. Multiple family visits can also be arranged.

Please visit our Events page to learn about special events we have for children with Autism, Downs Syndrome and handicapped children who often cannot visit Santa at the mall. We help make all the magic of Christmas possible and comfortable for all of these special children and their families.

Ask us about our Christmas in July celebrations.



send santa a letter!

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What is "The Hollow"?

Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow, described as "A Magical Place Tucked in Your Heart Where the Spirit of Christmas Lasts Forever", began as a dream, and was completed in 1992. What started out as a desire to help terminally ill children and their families, has resulted in a Christmas retreat from the reality of their illness, creating wonderful memories instead. The Mission of Santa's Hide-A-Way is to bring families together during a very difficult time in their lives. It provides a perfect setting for a visit with Santa Claus, no matter the date.

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North Pole Chapel at Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow is a labor of love, a place of hope

News of the Diocese | September 25, 2019



It hardly looks like Christmas outside, but inside the North Pole Chapel at [Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow](#) in Middlefield, it's Christmas every day.

The chapel is the latest addition to the 93-acre village -- a magical place where the spirit of Christmas lasts forever. It joins places like the post office, bakery, general store, town hall, barber shop, tailor shop and toy store. There also are live reindeer, a carousel, fishing pond and more activities. Terminally ill children and their families can be invited to visit and retreat from the reality of their illness.

Bishop Nelson Perez and Father Dan Schlegel of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, paid a visit to the chapel to dedicate the new chapel. It was the bishop's first visit.

For Father Schlegel, former pastor of Church of the Holy Angels, parish in Middlefield, the visit was a special one. During his tenure at Holy Angels, parish in Middlefield, he had the opportunity to visit the chapel.

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Bill Dieterle and Santa Claus

Bringing Christmas to
sick and dying children

Santa Claus lives in Middlefield, Ohio.

Oh sure, he has his main headquarters at the North Pole. But he has a branch right here in Middlefield too and it is a full-service operation. You might say it's his "Summer Home".

Of course Santa sometimes needs help and for his Middlefield Office he has enlisted the aid of Bill Dieterle. Not everyone has Santa's North Pole Phone Number, so people who need to contact him go through Bill.

Bill was born in Chicago and originally thought he was going to be a priest. In fact he spent five years in a Catholic seminary studying to do just that. He got a football scholarship to St. Procopius College and graduated with a degree in English.

He took a job as the midnight bellman at Stouffers Hotels and went on to be their youngest Vice President.

Bill was once a vice president at Tony Roma's as well. He's even the man responsible for the idea of Stouffer's French Bread Pizza!

If Santa hadn't called Bill and asked for his help he'd probably be in New York working for the big chains and making the big bucks.

But Santa did call, and Bill is working for him at the Middlefield Branch of the North Pole "and loving every minute of it."

"I had a great childhood. Christmas was always celebrated in wonderful ways in my house." So of course, when Santa called, Bill answered the call.

It seemed that there were a lot of children in the hospital and critically ill and Santa wanted to visit them - whether it was Christmastime or not. But he needed someone to coordinate his efforts so that he could still see to his work at the North Pole. So he called on Bill.

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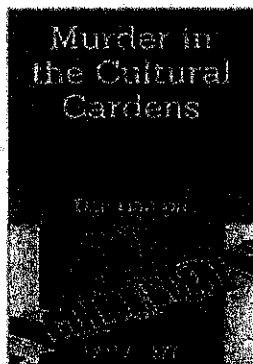
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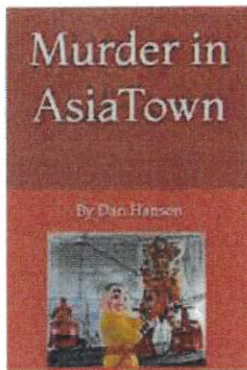
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Santa Claus visiting a sick child

At first Bill was nervous, after all this was Santa Claus asking for help and he wasn't sure if he was up to the challenge. So he decided to go with Santa one day and watch Santa work. He watched as Santa made each child smile.

Bill remembers one little boy who jumped to the beginning of the line of children waiting to sit on Santa's knee. The people in charge were about to ask him to go to the back of the line when Santa noticed a scar on the child and motioned that it was okay for him to stay where he was. Santa asked him what he wanted for Christmas and the boy answered "nothing."

Santa was astonished and so was Bill who was off to the side watching. "You must want something" Santa said. Then the young boy answered Santa in the most sincere, childlike voice and said "Santa, you know I'm dying. Please just make my mother happy."

Santa gave the young boy a big hug and the boy walked away happy. His mother was crying tears of pride, joy and sorrow all at once. Bill was stunned as he watched the child and Santa interact and he knew he couldn't say no to Santa; he wanted to help him make children like this happy.

So now, whenever Santa goes to visit a sick or dying child, Bill facilitates the visit and is there on the sidelines making it all happen. He remembers many calls from families whose child is a patient at Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital or any of a number of other places. They know the child will not live until Christmas, but they would like just one more picture with Santa.

Bill knows how important those happy memories will be to the families in the years to come, so when he gets the call he calls Santa at the North Pole and together they make sure the child gets to see Santa one more time.



Santa's Hideaway Hollow

He's been helping Santa in this way for 26 years now. In the early years he would get requests for a bedside visit from Santa about 75 to 100 times a year. "Last year Santa visited over 4,000 children. Of course every time Santa goes to Rainbow he visits all of the children, not just the one he was called for. Wouldn't it be terrible if a child heard that Santa Claus was there and didn't come to visit?!"

Bill continued to work for Tony Roma's even after the call from Santa, thinking he would be able to do both. He refused to take on any client that was not flexible enough to allow him to go to Santa's aid on short notice. But Santa's work can be very demanding.

He remembers once when he was meeting with some Japanese businessmen in California. Santa called him and said there was a child dying and Bill had to help make the arrangements for Santa to be able to visit.

The Japanese businessmen told him to go, help Santa. They even kept Bills' wife Jan there and watched out for her until he returned.

Bill and Jan have one daughter, Jordan, a freshman at Notre Dame Cathedral Latin. "She's 14 going on 30" who also loves to help Santa and Bill whenever she can.

Santa arrives at the hospital in fire trucks with police escorts, elves, food, toys and shopping carts full of presents. Of course when he is in the North Pole he travels by sled but even the snow we get here in Cleveland isn't enough to keep a sled mobile, so he uses a fire truck instead.



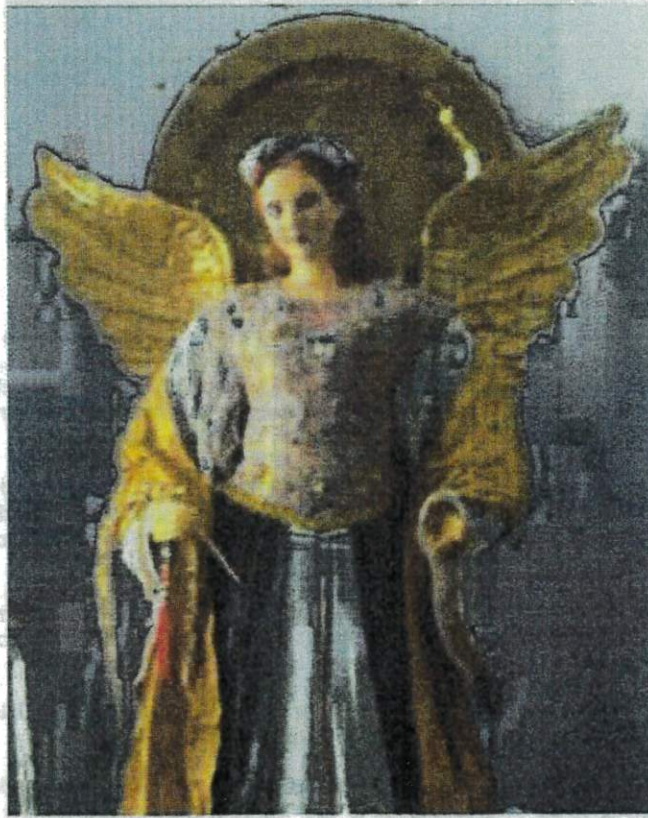
Santa Claus with elves

Santa and Bill have witnessed miracles and have seen things Bill can not explain.

"So often I wish I could pull a miracle out of my bag or maybe Santa could work a miracle and God, in his wisdom, sometimes allows that to happen. But it's not me or even Santa; it's God's will that must be done."

One such miracle occurred when Bill arranged for Santa to see a very young child who had just been taken off a breathing tube. The baby was dressed up in red and ruffles for Christmas and her picture with Santa.

When Santa held the baby, she started to choke and then breathe on her own. A true Christmas miracle. "I believe this is God's choice and I believe in the faith and love of the family."



Christmas Angel at Santa's Hideaway Hollow

He also recalls the child he visited one November, who was in a coma. The child came out of the coma in February and wanted to know when Christmas was because she remembered that Santa had come to visit. So Akron Babies and Children's Hospital decorated for Christmas in February and Santa went to visit.

The siblings hadn't opened their presents either - they were waiting to do it together. Bill has noticed that this happens a lot; people tend to forget about the siblings or at least forget how much they are hurting too.

"Santa always talks to children in comas. He knows they can hear him and he never forgets the siblings either."

Sometimes after Bill has spent the day with Santa (most of their hospital trips last 8-9 hours) he comes home and cries; he is so saddened by the young children in pain. But when he gets a call he doesn't hesitate to contact Santa and make it happen all over again.



Inside Santa's Hideaway Hollow

Santa told Bill that he was spending so much time in Northeast Ohio that he really needed a home here. So, 15 years ago, Bill built Santa a house in Bainbridge. But the neighbors were full of "humbug" and kept taking Bill to court, trying to keep Santa from living in their neighborhood.

Santa and Bill talked it over and decided that the Bainbridge home was too small anyway, so Bill bought 93 acres in Middlefield Ohio. Santa and Bill worked out the plans and they built a city. There's a candy store and a bakery and of course the elves are often there working.

There's a theater and carriage paths and a replica of the North Pole so Santa doesn't feel home sick when he's here. Santa took Bill to his North Pole home so Bill could make sure and get the details right - and he has - right down to the 6 reindeer!

There are no paid employees at Santa's Middlefield Home, which he calls Santa's Hideaway Hollow. No one gets a salary or a fee of any kind. Even the fire trucks and police escorts are driven by off duty officers.

They have no fundraisers or big pleas for financial help. They rely on the kindness of people.



Bernie Kosar building at Santa's Hideaway Hollow

Contributions have come from people like Bernie Kosar who has a building named after him.

The students at Notre Dame Cathedral Latin often help the elves. Families come out to the Hollow after a child has died and plant a Christmas tree in their memory.

There is one tree that was actually planted by a child who lived. The tree is in memory of his father who died in the transplant that saved his son.



Santa Claus with Elves visiting a child

Santa taught Bill sign language and how to say Merry Christmas in many languages. This comes in handy especially when Bill goes to Cleveland Clinic with Santa where there are patients from around the world.

It is remarkable work that Bill does, helping Santa Claus like that. It is his amazing heart that keeps him going - a heart filled with so much love and compassion it is overwhelming to even think about.

Bill says he wishes he could "create a miracle" and save these children. Once you know about Bill's work and how he helps Santa Claus and once you have seen Hideaway Hollow and realize how much he has put into it, you cannot help but think that Bill Dieterle is a true Christmas miracle.

Santa's Hideaway Hollow is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 corporation. To contact Santa through Bill for a child in need or to help with the tremendous financial undertaking please contact him at William Dieterle, Santa's Hideaway Hollow 15400 Bundysburg, Middlefield, OH 44062

Profiled by Debbie Hanson

[Top of Page](#)

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Santa's Hide-A-Way-Hollow Hosts Special Open House

June 1, 2023 by Rose Nemunaitis 

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The current warm temperatures and blooming flowers might make Christmas feel far away, but there's a place where its spirit lives all year round in Geauga County.

The current warm temperatures and blooming flowers might make Christmas feel far away, but there's a place where its spirit lives all year round in Geauga County.

While Santa's main headquarters are at the North Pole, his "summer home" is right here in Middlefield.

Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow, 15400 Bundysburg Road, is hosting its first-ever open house June 10 for past volunteers, donors, as well as those wanting to learn more about the sprawling 55-wooded-acre and 22-structure magical North Pole experience dedicated to children battling illnesses and their families.

"It's one of a kind in the country," Founder Bill Dieterle said of the nonprofit organization, which was formed in 1981. "The North Pole Village is for children who are critically ill, terminally ill. We are here to create memories. We celebrate Christmas every day of the year. Children travel to us from every children's hospital in Ohio plus Pittsburgh."

Those invited to the open house include members of charitable civic groups such as Lions Clubs International, local Rotary clubs, Kiwanis clubs and the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Dieterle said.

"This (open house) is not open to anyone or everyone," Dieterle said. "You must come through these organizations. We encourage these companies and civic groups to visit. We invite you to come see what you helped create. Come see why families don't want to leave."

Santa's Hideaway Hollow is 100% volunteer-driven, Dieterle said.

"We are a nonprofit, but unlike so many, we have no salaries, no rewards to the many volunteers," he said.

Santa arrives on the North Pole firetrucks, which are actual firetrucks driven by firemen who volunteer their time when not on duty at their stations, Dieterle said, adding volunteer elves are students from Notre Dame-Cathedral Latin School and Kenston, Chagrin Falls, Solon and Mayfield high schools.

Much like when children see Santa Claus during the holiday season, when they visit Santa's Hideaway Hollow, they are encouraged to ask for what they want, he said.

Born in Chicago, Dieterle originally thought he would become a priest and spent five years in a Catholic seminary. He earned a football scholarship to play at St. Procopius College and graduated with an English degree.

He has since dedicated his life to helping children battling illnesses, along with their families, by offering Christmas joy no matter the season.

When he gets the call, he calls Santa at the North Pole and together, they make sure that child gets to see Santa, Dieterle said, adding Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow does not hold fundraisers or make big pleas for financial help.

but instead relies on the kindness of organizations and individuals.

To participate in the open house, or for more information, call Bill Dieterle at 440-632-5000 to make a reservation.



OHIO LIFE (/OHIO-LIFE)

Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow, Middlefield

Bill Dieterle's 55-acre version of the North Pole in Geauga County offers a day of happiness to children battling illness and their families.

BY LINDA FRAGLER | PHOTO COURTESY OF SANTA'S HIDE-A-WAY HOLLOW

When Bill Dieterle agreed to do his father-in-law a favor in 1981 by donning a Santa suit, it led to what the retired Stouffer's executive considers his life's calling.

In 2002, he opened Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow — 22 structures nestled in 55 wooded acres in Middlefield designed to look like the North Pole. It provides comfort and fun for terminally ill children and their families.

Dieterle, who serves as executive director of the organization, estimates that more than 140,000 people (counting kids and family members) have visited the hollow. But it's the memory of that first experience playing Santa at a Chagrin Falls garden center that fuels his sense of purpose.

"A little boy named Joey took off his stocking cap for a picture with me. He was bald with a scar that stretched from the top of his head down to his ear," Dieterle recalls. "I turned to him and said, 'What do you want for Christmas?' He looked at me and said, 'Santa, you know I'm dying. Just make my mommy happy.'"

"I looked at his mom, and she was crying. ... She wanted one more picture and one more memory. My heart went to my throat, and I knew I had to help children during the final stages of illness."

Dieterle works with hospitals, nonprofit organizations, Geauga County police and fire departments, and a team of volunteers and donors to bring Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow to life. It's open May through October. Dieterle and his team visit hospitals and private homes throughout Ohio and surrounding states the other months of the year.

When families arrive at Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow, they board a trolley and ride to the Christmas village, where they are invited to participate in activities such as horseback riding, fishing and miniature golf as well as enjoy wheelchair-accessible swings and a carousel. After lunch, kids can get their hair cut or receive a powdered tattoo in the barbershop, followed by a private chat with Santa in his workshop. Each child receives a red velvet Care Bear made on-site to take home. And, all of this is done for the smallest of fees.

"I ask them to leave four cookies and a glass of milk for Santa on Christmas Eve," Dieterle says.

Santa's Hide-A-Way Hollow is open by appointment only. For more information, visit santashideawayhollow.com (<http://santashideawayhollow.com/>).

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