



## John M. Cittadino

February 2, 1961 - January 14, 2024

John M. Cittadino, also known as Coach C and later as Santa John, of Clinton, NY passed away at the Wynn Hospital on January 14, 2024 after a brief illness. Born in Utica, NY on February 2, 1961 to the late Peter and Muriel (Ainsworth) Cittadino. John married Barbara J. Cox on July 25, 1992 (little did we know that Christmas in July would become a significant thing in our lives).

This obituary is in my own words as related to my wife, and then polished by my wordsmithing niece, Morgan Lloyd. Thank you for going down Memory Lane with me. Here are just a few meaningful highlights from my life.

My life-long thirst for knowledge began at 11 years old when I started working at City's Lunchette, the family restaurant. Here, and until the age of 30, I spent countless, invaluable hours listening to World War II veterans recount their experiences, which fostered a lasting love of American History. I graduated from New Hartford High School in 1979 and encouraged my multitude of passions by continuing my education, ultimately receiving an AAS in Criminal Justice from MVCC, a Bachelor's of Professional Studies in Human Services from SUNY College of Technology in Utica, a Master's Degree in School Counseling from St. Bonaventure University and SUNY Oneonta, and last, but certainly not least, a Bachelor's Degree from the International School of Santa Claus as well as a Master's Degree in Santa

Claus-ology (stay tuned, more on this to come). After graduating from college, I began my first long-term career as a school counselor. I started at Poland Central School for a short time before transferring to Holland Patent Middle School and the Holland Patent High School, and finishing my career at Holland Patent Middle School, where I retired in June 2016. During my tenure at Holland Patent, I was a coach for football, outdoor and indoor track, and one very interesting and successful, might I add, season of downhill skiing despite never having skied a day in my life.

Being a coach had an immeasurable influence on me, both personally and professionally. My coaching career started in my early 20s as a junior in college, with my buddy Gary Flanagan, for the New Hartford Minor League Baseball team. Those kids were some of the grittiest bunch of individuals I've ever had the pleasure of working with and they rose above each and every expectation we placed upon them. My experience coaching this team awakened yet another passion and I ambitiously sought out coaching opportunities at Holland Patent, which led to some of my favorite (and more challenging) moments. At Holland Patent, I started as an assistant football coach under the exceptional talents of Ken Burt and Bill Brown, to whom I owe an enormous thank you for the mentorship and the skills they so freely shared with me. In 1987, with the hard work and dedication from a very special group of boys, we won the section title.

In the spring of 1987, I became Jim Frucella's assistant coach for the Holland Patent HS Outdoor Track program and once again won the jackpot in terms of mentorship. Jim helped me further refine the skills I needed in order to bring out the best in our athletes. During the next 14 years, I remained the assistant Outdoor Track coach while also launching the Indoor Track program. In my final 9 years as a coach, I focused solely on being the head coach for the Outdoor Track program. I used all the knowledge and skills I acquired from my talented predecessors and, with the help of my assistant coach Phil Lucason,

won 6 league titles and 2 section titles. The relationships that I developed with my students will always be a source of inspiration for me. Some of those students, who are now grown men, are still an important part of my life, and I am forever grateful for the part they allowed me to play in their lives. Looking back, I realize I learned as much, if not more, from them as they learned from me.

After retiring from Holland Patent, I'd get asked the common question all retirees receive: what's next? Little did they know, I already had a plan. My next, and some might say greatest, adventure, was to go to Santa School. It all began when years earlier, my sister Rosella asked me to "play" Santa for her children at a family Christmas party. Christmas has always held a special place in my heart and I jumped at the chance to share this joy with my family. But "playing" Santa was not enough for me; I wanted more. In the spring of 2010, I attended Santa School and received my Bachelor's Degree from the International School of Santa Claus. Due to some rather exciting and fortuitous events, Barb ended up accompanying me on this trip and, on the way home, brilliantly suggested the name for my Santa business. Thus, Snowbelt Santa was born and I became an entrepreneur. Over the course of the next few months, I searched for the perfect outfit. Some might think this starts and ends with the suit, but the suit was easy. In true John fashion, it wasn't enough to put on the red suit. I needed to exude magic. The dressing was what I needed to collect in order to become a Santa worth sharing with the world. I needed to be prepared for any and all questions children would ask as well as continue to surprise and astound them. Some of my favorite dressings were the Naughty & Nice list and a special pocket watch, both of which I received from my sister, Laurie, as well as a set of magical keys I found that lit up for children that didn't have a chimney.

At long last, my professional visits began in the holiday season of 2011 and

would continue year-round until 2019. I started small, attending family Christmas parties, and expanded to contracts with Bass Pro Shops for four years as part of their Santa's Wonderland, as well as participating with various charitable organizations. A key tenet of embodying Santa is giving back; as Frank Cross says in *Scrogged*, "[y]ou've just got to want that feeling [of giving back]! And if you like it and you want it, you'll get greedy for it. You'll want it every day of your life." This could not be more true. I was a member of the Red Suit Society which enabled me to donate a percentage of time as Santa to the Anita's Stevens Swan Humane Society taking pet photos, Cornell Companions of Oneida County, an animal-assisted therapy group where we visited schools and handed out presents to children with our furry friends, and the Roser Communications' Stuff-the-Bus Campaign. I would like to especially thank Liz DeSantis for asking me to participate in Stuff-the-Bus, and for doing a wonderful job at facilitating my appearances.

Given the sports fan I am (Go Cowboys!), we cannot forget to mention my involvement with our community teams. One of my favorite bucket list moments was throwing the first pitch at the Syracuse Chiefs (current the Mets) Christmas in July game (twice), thus allowing me to create my famous summer baseball Santa outfit. I had an incredible time picking out the perfect white pants with a red stripe and candy cane baseball socks. I was also honored that the Utica Comets hosted me as Santa, enabling me to bring joy not only to children, but to adults.

Unfortunately, as they say, all good things must come to an end. To my dismay, the pandemic and my health forced me into early retirement in 2019. Words do not begin to describe the emotions that washed over me every time I put on the red suit knowing the cheer I could spread to people of all ages and different species of animals (even turtles!). I lived my life with the ultimate goal of trying to make a difference and I felt closest to achieving this goal as Santa. I didn't just "play" him. I became him. In this red suit or green suit or

kilt, with all my dressing, I could spread goodness to anyone that crossed my path. Santa saved my life in a number of ways by bringing to the forefront all the good in me (some of which I had buried) and allowing for the introductions to so many amazing people that changed my life. I will forever be grateful to “Santa” and to all the people that welcomed me into their homes and shared their Christmas celebrations with me. I hope you all know it was an absolute honor to be part of your Christmas traditions.

As I come to a close, I want to say a profound thank you to a number of individuals that altered my life for the better during my time in this world:

To my high school partners in crime, Eric Bryant, Gary Flanagan, Bill Bashant, and Tom Bashant, I want to thank you for your friendship and the mischief, laughs, and adventures that came along with it.

To Mrs. Willis, my middle school choir director, I want to thank you for giving me the confidence and determination to pursue choir and theater throughout high school. The skills I learned and developed with you became particularly invaluable when I followed my dream to become a professional Santa.

To my Shih Tzu and Therapy Dog partner, Comet, who I had to help across the Rainbow Bridge in May of 2023, I say...see you soon.

To Dr. Shwe Win and Dr. Rajvee Patel, thank you for being the first two doctors that listened to me, making me feel heard and seen. To the nurses, especially Jessie Menzies of the Intermediate Care Unit on 5 East, and the medical staff at Wynn Hospital, thank you for your care and kindness during the last moments in my life. Your jobs are hard, sometimes thankless, and you are greatly appreciated.

To my family, I want to thank you for all your love and support through the

good times and the bad. Family is the foundation that continues to shape you throughout the course of your life and you have each shaped me and the person I became in many different ways. For that I am grateful.

Lastly, and quite frankly most importantly, to Barb, my partner and the Mrs. Claus to my Mr. - my life would not be a fraction of what it was if I didn't have to wake you up that fateful day in our college counselor education class many years ago. I would not have reached the caliber of School Counselor, Coach, Santa, or person I was if you had not been by my side cheering me on along the way. You supported my every dream and endeavor, no matter how farfetched it may have sounded at the time. When I put on my red suit, you put on yours and stood (sometimes crouched) alongside me allowing me to embrace Santa in ways I never imagined. I love you and words do not begin to fully express my gratitude that you kept me by your side in this life and the honor it was being your person.

I am survived by my:

Wife and best friend of 31 years, Barbara J. Cittadino, along with my Shih Tzu Noel.

Sisters Laurie (David) Lloyd and Rosella (Rocco) Pandolfo

Brother Peter (Lorraine) Cittadino

Nieces and nephews: Alyssun (Chris) Scuderi, Evan (Brittany) Lloyd, Andrew Lloyd, Morgan Lloyd, Hayley (Joseph) Storm, Anthony Pandolfo, Louisa Pandolfo, Rocco Pandolfo and Darcey (Pablo) Rodriguez

Great nieces and nephews: Tyler and Emma Scuderi; Gemma and Britton Lloyd; Charlotte and Camryn Lloyd; and Lincoln, Atticus, and soon to be baby girl Storm

In lieu of flowers please consider donating to the Arthritis Association or the Arthritis National Research Foundation to help find a cure. I discovered only

recently that my lung deterioration was due to undiagnosed Rheumatoid Arthritis but it was too late, the damage was done.

I am not known for pomp and circumstance so I've asked my family to have a small family memorial in the Calvary Cemetery Chapel at a time that is convenient for them.

All arrangements are being provided by the Eannace Funeral Home, Inc.

# Tribute Wall

LB

“ *LONNIE BROWN lit a candle in memory of John M. Cittadino*



LONNIE BROWN - February 29, 2024 at 04:22 PM

GF

“ *He will definitely be missed, my children visited with "Santa" every year at Bass Pro or seeing him at a community event. Even as teens they insisted on seeing Santa at Bass Pro and getting their photo taken.  
Thank you for keeping the magic alive.  
John, you really were Santa Claus.  
Enjoy your reward in Heaven.*

Gail VanHatten and family - January 22, 2024 at 01:18 AM



“ *Mr. Cittadino was my high school guidance counselor... and, unbeknownst to me until today, my sons' Santa Claus. Thank you for helping me through the college admissions process and sharing your unbridled joy for the magic of Christmas with my family.*



Katie Parker - January 20, 2024 at 12:57 PM

DV

“ There are no words to express how sad we all are by the passing of Santa John (Coach C)  
Here is a picture of happier time. He will never be forgotten. Rest in Peace. Until we meet again ❤️



Donns Vanderlan - January 20, 2024 at 11:11 AM

MA

“ We are so very sorry to hear of John’s passing. He was the best Santa around. These photos are from 2016 at Valentino’s banquets. My stepdaughter was a little shy at first. John knew exactly what to do to get her out of her shell. Thank you so much for the wonderful memories over the years!



Mariah - January 20, 2024 at 05:02 AM

EL

“ He was the real deal. My sympathies to the family. ❤️



Elizabeth - January 19, 2024 at 10:25 PM

ME

“ Condolences this was the last picture we took with you, my daughter is very upset about your loss 💔😭



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**Melissa** - January 19, 2024 at 06:45 AM

CF

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



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**Castelli Family** - January 19, 2024 at 12:03 AM

CF

“ Rest in peace Santa John. You will ne missed by many, but never forgotten. My condolences to your family.



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**Castelli Family** - January 19, 2024 at 12:01 AM

SV

“ Coach C was my track coach for indoor and outdoor track. He wasn't my guidance counselor but I often went to him. He was a great man and taught us so many lessons on and off the track. I looked up to Coach C. I remember the first time he told me and some other Mr teammates about Barb. He was very excited to have met her.

I can honestly say that part of the reason I am the man I am today is because of John Cittadino, his mentorship, guidance, advice and love of helping kids grow was something I carried with me through my adult years.

I've told my kids about him though they never met him.

Rest in peace Coach, I wish I could have seen you as Santa Claus.

You will be missed  
Scott Victor

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Scott Victor - January 18, 2024 at 06:42 PM

KZ

“ I and one of my best friends became quite close to Coach in high school due to long jump for outdoor track. We kept in touch with him even after he moved back down to the middle school and after graduating from HP she and I continued getting together with coach. He was almost like a guiding light for me in those few years we spent a lot of time with him. Of course once Coach became the beloved Santa, my friend and I had the privilege of accompanying Coach Santa on numerous Santa visits as his two “Elves” we even got to dress the part too. Those were some of my fondest memories as a college student. Coach C is just one of those pillar people in the lives of many especially those who looked up to him in sports and school. I will be forever grateful for the memories I have with him.

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Katie (Hoke) Zotta - January 18, 2024 at 01:38 PM

DW

“ This man was a coach, counselor, and friend at a time when I needed each. He was a godsend in my young life. As a high school student, he was one of a handful of people who kept me grounded. I just found out this morning that he passed away. The world is diminished with his passing. His second career was becoming Santa John Cittadino. It made so much sense to me because John was a Believer. He believed in seeing the best in people and making the world a better place. He was a crusader for kindness. In my mind, "Santa" should have worn a John Cittadino suit. Even in his passing, he was gracious, kind, and understanding. He had a profound impact on me during my formative years. Just knowing that people like him existed gave me hope during difficult times. Today is a sad day for me. I know his family and close friends are feeling the loss of his physical presence in their lives. However, they also get to cherish a treasure trove of memories with a great man. He touched many lives and was a source of positivity. I will endeavor to honor his memory by paying forward the gifts he shared with me. SIP Coach C! My condolences to the family, especially his wife Barbara.

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**Derek Westbrook** - January 18, 2024 at 10:25 AM

BC

*Oh, Derek, this tribute is beautiful. Know that he always had a special place in his heart with your name on it.*

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**Barb Cittadino** - January 18, 2024 at 11:11 AM

JM

“ John used to come to our office and always make our day! He was such a wonderful man. Even used to show us his "Santa" drivers license (business card) all the time. My favorite outfit was in the summer he'd come in with red or green shorts, red converse hi tops and a Christmas Hawaiian shirt. Haha... Just loved him. One of my favorite customers. So sad he has passed on. My condolences to his family. May he rest in Peace and continue to spread Christmas cheer in Heaven. God Bless you and your family Santa John. - Julie Murad-Caruso

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**Julie Murad-Caruso** - January 17, 2024 at 08:42 PM

PL

“ Santa John became a part of our family on Christmas Eve many years ago. He was the warmest and most sincere person we have known who made a lasting impression on our grandchildren. Keep those beautiful memories alive and he will always be with you!



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**Patricia Lupia** - January 17, 2024 at 07:58 PM

DG

“ Barb, Friends and family of John's I am sorry for our loss. He touched all our lives with kindness, compassion and respect. Often during tough days at work i would stop by his office where he would explain how are cowboys would win it all next year. Thanks for always cheering me up and the happiness you gave my grandsons Santa John. We will miss you!!!

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**Dennis Geer** - January 17, 2024 at 07:53 PM

BP

“ I first met John while coaching track and football. I always enjoyed talking with Coach Cittadino because he enjoyed the opportunity to coach. I always respected John because he truly cared about kids. Without question Coach Cittadino understood the world of the student/athlete.

*I truly know that the following motto fits Coach, " A good coach can change a game, and a Great Coach Can Change A Life!"*

**RIP COACH!**

*Bill ( Coach P) Pawloski*

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**Bill Pawloski** - January 17, 2024 at 06:55 PM

AB

“ You were my daughter's first Santa. Thank you for putting a smile on so many faces.

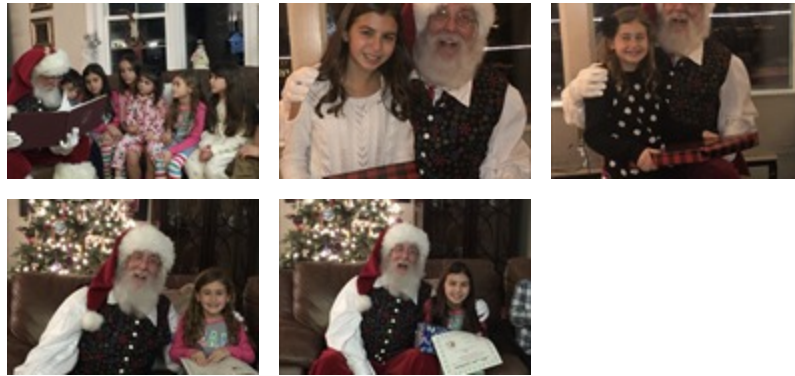


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**Abbey** - January 17, 2024 at 05:51 PM

JG

“ Thank you for all the wonderful Christmas memories throughout the years. Rest in peace Santa John! ❤️🎅 Giovinazzo “Crash” family



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**Jennifer Giovinazzo-Scaparo** - January 17, 2024 at 04:50 PM

GR

“ I am very to hear of the loss of John! What a great man he was. May he rest in peace. 🙏

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**Greg Rindenello** - January 17, 2024 at 04:28 PM

SE

“ He was our favorite Santa at Bass Pro! He made Christmas a little but more special with the twinkle in his eyes! Sending love and prayers to all



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**Serina** - January 17, 2024 at 04:03 PM

HA

“ *John was my high school sweetheart. What a beautiful soul!!*

*My deepest condolences to the family. He was truly one-of-a-kind....*

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**Holly Abel** - January 17, 2024 at 03:48 PM

MT

“ *We are so sorry to hear of your loss Rosella and to the whole family. Sounds like a great guy. He will be missed. Love you*

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**Malcolm and Jean Truax** - January 17, 2024 at 02:03 PM

MD

“ *1 file added to the tribute wall*



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**Mary Dyer** - January 17, 2024 at 01:06 PM

RK

“ *Barb and family I'm so sorry for your loss. As a classmate and being involved with HP track only due to John's help and of course seeing you both for footwear, I have nothing but fond memories. He was a great person and I wish you peace.*

*Rich and Pam Karaz*

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**Richard Karaz** - January 17, 2024 at 12:36 PM

CO

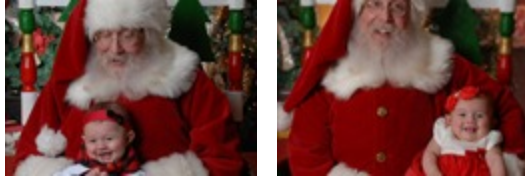
“ Barb-I am so sorry for your loss. I didn't realize while you and I worked in Camden that your John was a very dear friend of mine in college. His tribute is beautiful and captured the John I remember.  
Sincerely-Colleen O'Brien

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Colleen obrien - January 17, 2024 at 12:27 PM

JE

“ Sending condolences to the family. I did not know him personally but he will live on in many Christmas memories.



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jessica - January 17, 2024 at 10:30 AM

LL

“ We are so sorry for your loss of this truly remarkable man. What beautiful memories you have and may they bring you peace in the days to come. He brought us joy as well being his “Santa” self at our Leone christmas parties. May he rest in peace 🙏❤️ Pasqual and Lisa Leone

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lisa leone - January 17, 2024 at 09:24 AM

EA

“ Unfortunately, I did not have the pleasure of knowing John. However, he was a big part of my daughter's very first Christmas. It is a memory that I hold very dear. Santa gave us a truly magical experience and it is something that I will never forget. I send my sincere condolences to his Family & Friends.



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**Emily Albright** - January 17, 2024 at 09:24 AM

BH

“ To my favorite high school counselor, I am so sorry for the pain you are going through. You always helped me when I needed it most ( a kind word, a big hug, a kick in the arse when I was being stupid). You were my rock during so many hard times in my life.. if there is anything I can do, please let me know. Sending love and strength to you and your family... regards, Bri Harrington ❤️

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**Bri harrington** - January 17, 2024 at 08:49 AM

AJ

“ Tearfully, I remember a John as a good student, a jolly Santa for pet photos and for my granddaughter, and a friend. He brought sunshine into a room. A light has gone out in the world with his passing.

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**Alice Janick** - January 17, 2024 at 08:29 AM

LK

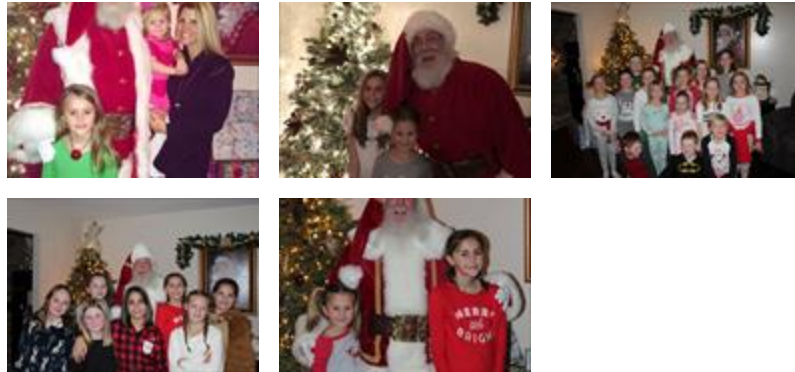
“ John was the most amazing santa ever. Working with him for hours at gwf taking photos with santa i have hundreds of pictures over the course of 3 or 4 years. He helped with the 1st grade christmas party and came with gifts for each child. My heart breaks for all of you. Just know he was truly 1 in a million and put a smile on so many childrens and adults faces. I am so very sad that he is no longer with us



Lori Kwasniewski - January 17, 2024 at 07:33 AM

DF

“ So sorry to hear of Santa John’s passing. He will surely be missed! He truly brought the spirit of Christmas into our home year after year. The kids & their friends still carry those fond memories and will cherish our annual Christmas party where Santa would always make his appearance. Santa John you truly did make a difference in many lives, so thank you for being you!



Diane Farina - January 17, 2024 at 12:40 AM

BD

“ I am deeply saddened to hear of John’s passing. I had the pleasure of working with John for 2 decades at Holland Patent School. Not only did the students love him, they often told me how he impacted their lives in a positive way. As a coach he was devoted and extremely knowledgeable about the sport, injuries, and rehab. I especially remember his days as the track coach at Holland Patent School. He also took a great deal of time after school hours to help me during a very difficult situation I was experiencing. For this I am forever grateful. John lived a full and exceptional life, and every time I watch the Dallas Cowboys I think of him and the happiness that surrounded him. I’m praying for Barb, knowing how painful the loss of her loved one will be. She supported John in every way, and was the wind beneath his wings. Now that he has officially gained his heavenly wings I’m sure he knows the depth of love we all feel for him. God Bless.



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**Barbara-Jo Deep** - January 16, 2024 at 10:41 PM

MA

“ Marlana lit a candle in memory of John M. Cittadino



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**Marlana** - January 16, 2024 at 09:29 PM

AS

“ Very sad to see this! My family and I would drive an hour to go see him at Christmas time! The best Santa ever! Thinking of his family and friends ☐

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**Ashley** - January 16, 2024 at 09:04 PM

JC

“ He was a very great guy he was the best guidance counselor in holland patent middle school, he always put a smile on my face! Rest in peace to a soul gone too soon. My condolences to family and friends ☐

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**Julia Cramer** - January 16, 2024 at 09:03 PM

DA

“ Danette lit a candle in memory of John M. Cittadino



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**Danette** - January 16, 2024 at 07:56 PM



*To Santa John & his family,  
I am so sorry to hear of John;s passing,,, I first met him  
at Citty's on James st many years ago, He was younger than me by 14  
yrs but he was so knowledgeable and friendly to every customer with a  
big grin and a wonderful belief in his future. He was so excited about  
playing Santa Clause even back then.I moved to Tucson 15 yrs ago  
and lost touch with him. His vibrant attitude towards all things  
especially Christmas was so heart warming that I think he really was a  
real modern day Santa. Rest in peace John.  
Your friend  
Tony Domanico  
Tucson AZ*

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**Tony Domanico** - January 19, 2024 at 08:20 PM