

children in need

Variety chief executive Norm Hutton says: "It's great to see the joy on these special children's faces when they see all that the Christmas party has to offer."

"It's a wonderful day and the arrival of Santa and Mrs Claus is a highlight for all the kids."

Children came from all parts of Victoria, including Shepparton and Warrnambool, for the annual extravaganza, travelling by car, bus and train. The party catered for children of all abilities, from carnival rides and an animal nursery to dancing and disco music.

For children with limited abilities there were art and craft activities, and for those confined to wheelchairs or walking frames, the famous Variety Liberty Swing was there for all to enjoy.

ALL the children enjoyed having their faces painted in colourful designs and, of course, there was plenty of food, drinks, showbags and a wonderful gift to take home.

"The success of this much-anticipated annual event is largely a result of the generosity of the many sponsors involved, the entertainers and a committed band of volunteers, without whom it would not be possible to stage such a spectacular event," Hutton says.

Variety life member Maureen Hafey also attended the party with husband and AFL legend Tommy. It was Maureen, with a small group of volunteers, who started the party in the early 1990s.

For many of these children, this is the only Christmas they will have.

more > For more information about the party and the work that Variety the Children's Charity does, ph: 8698 3900 or visit www.variet VIC.org.au



Yummy in my tummy: the children enjoyed the fun and the food... especially the sausage sizzle.

The Variety story

VARIETY began with a group of theatre owners and showmen in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The group would get together after performances to play cards at a social gathering they called the Variety Club. One night in 1928 they heard whimpering from the empty Sheriden Theatre and when they investigated, they discovered an abandoned baby. The baby's mother had pinned a note to the child's clothing that read: "Please take care of my baby. Her name is Catherine. I can no longer take care of her. I have eight others. My husband is out of work. She was born on Thanksgiving Day. I have always heard of the goodness of show business people and pray you will look after her. Signed, a heartbroken mother."

The theatre owners took the baby in, named her Catherine Variety Sheridan and raised money to buy items needed for her care.

They were so successful they decided to offer help to local orphanages.

Their philosophy was they would not give money, only goods and services. That ideal remains the ethos of Variety today.

Variety now has 80 branches in 14 countries around the world and has raised more than \$2 billion to help children in need.

The theatrical traditions of the charity remain integral to the organisation; branches are called tents and chairmen and women are chief barkers.

Lord Louis Mountbatten brought Variety, the children's charity, to Australia in 1975 and Paul Hogan was the first chief barker. Today celebrity ambassadors include Marina Prior (patron), Natalie Bassingthwaite, John Blackman, Derryn Hinch, John-Michael Howson, Merv Hughes, Tamsyn Lewis, Keith Potger, Daryl Cotton and John Burgess.

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