

James Edgar remembered as the Christmas 'miracle'

By Elaine Allegrini, Enterprise staff writer
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BROCKTON — In this season of giving, downtown businessman John Merian pays tribute to the man who lived that credo — James Edgar.

“He was so giving, he closed his store at Easter one time and clothed many orphan children for Easter Sunday,” Merian said Thursday. “On Saturdays, he'd be standing outside his store giving children pennies for candy. Whenever he found out there was a sick child in Brockton, he would immediately send the best medical care to the home and do it anonymously.

“He wanted to give joy and happiness to children,” added Merian, whose Main Street business pays tribute each Christmas season to Edgar, founder of the downtown department store that bore his name and the man who brought Santa Claus to life.

Tonight, Merian proudly talks about Edgar's role as the first department store Santa Claus on “Chronicle,” a WCBV-TV Channel 5 show that airs at 7:30 p.m.

“I really look at him as being the real Santa Claus because the whole essence of Christmas is giving,” said Merian.

Edgar first dressed as Santa Claus in 1890, bringing to life the 1863 cartoon by Thomas Nast. It was just one of the costumes the Scottish immigrant donned to bring joy to children and it became the most famous.

Merian, whose family has owned and operated downtown businesses since 1951, remembers enjoying the third floor of Edgar's store, located at Main and Belmont streets.

“When I was a kid I used to go to Edgar's Department Store, where the third floor was the Christmas floor,” said Merian, who now operates Tuxedos by Merian on Main Street.

There, a holiday window display annually pays tribute to Edgar. Soon, Merian said, a plaque will also be erected to recognize the man whose depiction of Santa Claus quickly became a national highlight for the holidays and today is largely portrayed by mall Santas.

Merian said Edgar was the real miracle in the movie “Miracle on 34th Street.”

“The miracle actually happened on Main Street in Brockton, not in Manhattan at Macy's,” added Merian.