

Annual holiday bash was truly a party with a cause

By **MARK HAYWARD**
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MANCHESTER — For last night at least, Santa Claus put away the red snowsuit and played down the ho-ho-ho.

Rather, Claus wore a repeating-pattern tie, mingled with 20-

some things from the financial services industry and let loose to a thumping pulse of club music.

About 175 guests were expected to gather last night at the Alpine Club, site of the sixth annual Holiday Bash hosted by Joseph Venturini and Jeff Moynihan. The two city residents promised a fun evening in exchange for a simple donation — a gift for a needy child.

Just out of college six years, the pair held a Christmas party at their apartment and asked guests to bring a gift for a child.

The party of 35 grew to 100 within two years. Last night, the hosts were expecting twice that. This morning begins the fulfilling task of delivering the gifts to NeighborWorks Greater Manchester. The low-income housing development group has 116 families that could use a last-minute gift for a child this Christmas.

“With rising energy costs, taxes and utilities, many families just don’t have the money to spend during the holidays,” said Robert Tourigny, executive director of NeighborWorks, formerly known as Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services.

“The contributions from these folks will help ease the burden on families and create a cheerful holiday for all,” he said.

The party is a mix of friends, relatives and co-workers of Venturini and Moynihan. Both work at Fidelity Investments in Merrimack, and they grew up on the

West Side.

“By word of mouth and a quick e-mail, we’ve got 200 people who RSVP’d,” Venturini said. Next year, they hope to draw even more people, which will mean a bigger hall.

Boston resident Kevin Begley said he had such a good time at last year’s party, that he came to this year’s despite the fact Christmas was Monday at his parent’s house is in Connecticut.

“I’ll get there eventually,” he said.

“So many come out, and it’s such a good cause,” said Orsi Gagnon, 28, another Fidelity worker.

Tables featured platters of crackers, cheese, dip, vegetables, chicken fingers and lasagna from the Venturini home kitchen. Across the room, DJ Sam Smoove provided the music. In the other corner was the bar, where the hosts hired three bartenders this year, all the better to cut down on lines and keep the crowd happy.

The T-ball set and a Nerf-like basketball hoop that David Williamson brought cost less than some Manchester nightclubs charge for admission, he said.

“It’s a good cause, and it’s fun to get dressed up once in awhile,” said his girlfriend, Christine Beaulieu, who wore a low-cut, black cocktail dress and high heels. “None of the clubs in Manchester require you to dress up.”