

Boy Saved by Fire Copter Enjoys Yule

BY WILLIAM GAINES

Santa Claus came early this year for a Kankakee county family—and he rode in a Chicago fire department helicopter.

A mission of mercy by a fire department helicopter crew saved the life of 2-year-old Michael Zurek of Grant Park.

The boy's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Zurek, were so grateful to the firemen, as well as to the police who assisted in the emergency, that they wrote to THE TRIBUNE praising the men.

Corn Stuck in Throat

Michael was playing in the living room of his farm home near the Indiana state line, east of Grant Park, on Dec. 6 when he put a kernel of Indian corn from a hard, dry ear into his mouth.

Within seconds, the Zureks found their son gasping for air. Mouth to mouth resuscitation and shaking him upside down failed to dislodge the corn from his windpipe.

They left their five older children with a neighbor and drove 30 miles to St. James hospital in Chicago Heights as a snowstorm moved into the area.

Doctors in the emergency room said Michael had to be



Michael David Zurek

taken to Children's Memorial hospital, 707 W. Fullerton av., Chicago, more than 30 miles north, where smaller sized laryngoscopes were available to extract the kernel. The snowstorm meant an ambulance ride between the hospitals might take up to two hours.

Firemen Answer Plea

An appeal for help was issued, and a helicopter piloted by Edward McCarthy, a fireman, was ordered into the air from Meigs field by Robert Quinn, Chicago Fire commissioner. "It is unusual for us to go that far away, but this was a serious emergency," Quinn said. "We are ready to go anywhere to save a life."

Chicago Heights police blocked 14th street north of the hospital, but the chopper was unable to land there because of utility wires. It was finally landed in the parking lot of the Abraham Lincoln oasis on the Tri-State tollroad in Thornton, and the child, being comforted by his mother and being administered oxygen by attendants, was taken to the helicopter by ambulance.

"During this ordeal, the policemen were just as concerned as we were. I think it is too seldom that the wonderful things they do are known," Mrs. Zurek said.

Within minutes the helicopter took the boy to Children's Memorial where the kernel of corn was extracted. Doctors told the Zureks that their son would not have lived if it were not for the efficiency of the police and firemen.

"Michael is home now for Christmas, and he'll get a toy bear that talks, and whatever else Santa Claus brings. For us, Santa Claus came in a helicopter," Mrs. Zurek said.