Traveling to the North Pole to meet Santa Claus is a fantasy for most children, but this year that fantasy will become a reality for a group of critically and chronically sick children in the Kansas City area. United Airlines and The Shadow Buddies Foundation are teaming up for The Fantasy Flight to the North Pole.

“It is the second consecutive year for the flight, which was discontinued after September 11th, 2001,” said Marty Postlethwait, Shadow Buddies founder and executive director. We offered the flight 20 years ago and were able to re-start it last year thanks to the generosity of United Airlines, which donates a 737 airbus, flight time and flight staff.

On Saturday, December 14, approximately 60 chronically and critically sick children will board a plane at Kansas City International Airport with boarding passes having the destination to “The North Pole” printed on them. Once on board the captain and flight attendants dressed as elves will announce the North Pole as their destination and pass out Christmas bells and sing songs. After flying around Kansas City for about 45 minutes the children will deplane and walk into a terminal that has been transformed into a winter wonderland.

The children will be greeted by a cheering tunnel of volunteers, parents, and their siblings in the “North Pole”. Special guests include Santa, Mrs. Claus, Sports Celebrities, Super Heroes, Princesses, a cookie decorating station, and more. The looks on their faces when they walk into the terminal are priceless. We really are able to create the magic of Christmas for these children. And sadly, for some of them it may be their last.

The children, their siblings and parents who will participate in this year’s event, are patients at The University of Kansas Medical Center and Children’s Mercy Hospital. The children have a variety of chronic and life-threatening illnesses, including cancer, congenital heart defects, cystic fibrosis, and cerebral palsy to name a few.

Following their visit with Santa every child in attendance will receive a bag full of gifts to take home. Often times these families are financially challenged due to their child’s illnesses, so this helps take the pressure off of buying presents this holiday season. The parents will also receive a $50 gift card to a local grocery store that they can use for a holiday meal.

Holiday Hugs Toy Drive
This year Shadow Buddies is holding a Holiday Hugs Toy Drive to collect toys for the children of the Fantasy Flight through December 2nd. A total of 1,200 toys are needed for the event this year to ensure all of the children receive enough toys. They are asking businesses and organizations to hold toy drives to help extend the holiday cheer that many of these children wouldn’t otherwise receive.

To participate in the toy drive simply decorate a bin, box, or barrel and place it inside your place of business. Then you can ask employees or customers to donate a new toy for the children of the Fantasy Flight. You can find the marketing materials to print out on their website. Donations must be dropped off at the Shadow Buddies Headquarters by December 2nd so that the elves have time to wrap the gifts for the children. Their headquarters is located at 14700 W. 107th Street Suite #100, Lenexa, KS 66215.

In addition, individuals can donate on-line by visiting smile.amazon.com and designating Shadow Buddies as their charity of choice. Orders can then be designated to go Shadow Buddies and will also include an extra percentage of the purchase price which will be donated back to the organization.

Shadow Buddies
The mission of the Shadow Buddies Foundation is to provide emotional support through education regarding illness, disability, or medical treatments. The foundation accomplishes this mainly through unique programs designed to enhance the lives of children and adults and increase compassion and understanding of differences. In pursuit of that mission, the foundation will continually raise funds, develop new programs, and build relationships between organizations with complimentary goals.