

Local kids' efforts help kids in need

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BY JENNIFER KANNON

When Kate Layman passed away at 18 months old because of heart and pulmonary issues, her parents, Andrew and Krista Layman from Fort Wayne, found a way to keep their daughter's memory alive while helping other children in the hospital, including Parkview Huntington Hospital.

"Kate enjoyed having books read to her," said Andrew. "We were helped a lot by a lot of people while we were in the hospital. She was in the hospital for so long and we were given the opportunity to help others who are going to be in the hospital for a long time."

The Laymans planned to begin their idea to give books to other children at Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne because that's where Kate spent most of her time. As they began to collect books, however, they found themselves with so many the couple was able to start at the main campus of Parkview in downtown Fort Wayne in July of 2008, just six months after Kate's passing.

Their goodwill spread throughout the Parkview system and found its way, with some help of Huntington locals, to Parkview Huntington Hospital for the first collection and giveaway on Monday.

"My uncle volunteered with Kate's Kart at Parkview main. He would share stories about how delivering these books really touched his life," said Carla MacDonald, a member of the PHH Foundation board. "He passed away in January and one of his requests for his memorial funds was to Kate's Kart because he wanted to make sure this continued on."

MacDonald's uncle was Richard Mollica, whose name will be placed on a plaque on Kate's Karts in three hospitals, including PHH. MacDonald said she only needed to make a few phone calls to see if some of the memorial funds could sponsor this and "it kind of all come together."

Also involved in Kate's Kart is a second-grade class at Northwest Elementary School, taught by Jean Gehrke.

Gehrke was looking for a social action project for her class and one of her daughters had heard about Kate's Kart on the news.

"It was something special to my heart because my daughter who sent me the information was two months premature and was in the hospital for a while," said Gehrke. "It seemed to really fit with my class. I presented the idea to them and they love to read also."

The second grade class donated 76 brand new books this year alone and joined with the Laymans on Monday to put Kate's Kart labels on the books and place the books on the cart to give to children in pediatrics and other areas in the hospital, even just in waiting rooms while a loved one is being cared for.

New books are given out and may be taken home. The Laymans are planning to start another phase soon for used books.

"For used books we get, we're looking to put them in waiting rooms where kids can read them but they're not necessarily a gift," said Krista.

By the end of the summer, the Laymans will have Kate's Karts in at least 10 hospitals, including all six Parkview locations. So far, they have given out 500 to 800 books a month, over 6,000 books total.

More information about Kate's Kart can be found at www.kateskart.org.



Northwest Elementary second grade students Madison Schlotter, left and Jenna Nelson prepare books with stickers for Kate's Kart at Parkview Huntington Hospital Monday morning. Students in Mrs. Jean Gehrke's class participated in the activity. (Herald-Press photo by Rob Edwards)