

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Eisenhower Collecting New Books For Kate's Kart

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Times-Union Staff Writer

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Austin McCleary loves to read.

"He's an avid reader. So every night he makes sure he blocks out a half hour to an hour to read," said Angie McCleary, Austin's mom.

In 2003, when he was only 3 years old, Austin McCleary was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a form of cancer of the nervous system.

Last summer Austin, now 10, had his second relapse with the cancer. His family has been taking him back and forth to Fort Wayne hospitals for treatment. And whether he's at home or in the hospital, Austin still finds time to read.

Eisenhower Elementary School is collecting new books for Kate's Kart. Kate's Kart provides books to children in pediatric units of Fort Wayne hospitals, where many area children go for medical care. Behind the idea for the book drive at Eisenhower was Austin McCleary (L), who has a form of cancer called neuroblastoma. Pictured with McCleary and some of the books already collected in the Eisenhower library are Drew McCleary (C), his brother, and Eisenhower librarian Tammy Boggs.

Austin is the son of Andy and Angie McCleary, Warsaw.

Recently, Austin has been able to get new books to read at the hospital or at home through Kate's Kart. The program provides free new books to hospitalized children. When Austin is in the hospital, Angie said, sometimes Austin will pick a new book to read up to three times a week. He may read it at the hospital or at home.

One day when Austin was checking out Kate's Kart Web site at www.kateskart.org, he saw other children were having book drives for Kate's Kart. Angie said Austin then wanted to do a book drive at his school, Eisenhower Elementary School.

Because of Austin, during the month of February, Eisenhower is collecting new books to donate to Kate's Kart.

"It's just an awesome organization," said Angie.

"I think it makes me feel kind of proud because other kids in the school are giving books to other kids to read," said Austin of the book drive.

"I'm glad to be able to give to children who are in the hospital, to bring a bright spot to their day," said Tammy Boggs, Eisenhower librarian.

Kate's Kart services Fort Wayne hospitals like Parkview, Lutheran and DuPont Hospitals. Some of the waiting areas in the pediatric units have book carts for children, Angie said.

Kate's Kart was named after Kate Layman, daughter of Andy and Krista Layman.

According to the Kate's Kart Web site, "'Baby Kate' was born on June 26, 2006. Shortly after her birth, she was diagnosed with heart and pulmonary defects. During Kate's journey, she endured four open heart surgeries, five heart catheterizations, and over 150 days in the hospital. During her stays in the hospital, one of Kate's favorite things to do was look at books and have others read to her. She also loved eating ice cream and popsicles, and going on wagon rides. On Jan. 15, 2008, at the age of just 18 months, her fragile heart gave out and she passed from her mother's arms into her Heavenly Father's arms.

"In honor of Kate, and her love of books, the Layman family decided to start a rolling book cart in the pediatric unit of a local hospital as a way to give back to the medical community that had taken such great care of Kate. The cart would be filled with new books, and each child would be able to select a book off the cart to keep. The cart was fondly named, 'Kate's Kart'".

Angie said, "They prefer new books because they are going into the hospital."

Eisenhower is collecting gently used books, too, but those will be donated elsewhere. When the book drive at Eisenhower is over, Angie said the McCleary family has agreed to take them to a Fort Wayne drop-off center since they frequently travel to Fort Wayne.

Boggs is a member of the Silver Lake Rambling Farmers 4-H Club. The club, she said, also is collecting books for the Eisenhower collection for Kate's Kart.

Kate's Kart has grown to several hospitals outside of Fort Wayne, including hospitals in Columbia City, Kendallville and Portland.

In May 2009, after less than a year, Kate's Kart Inc. received its official nonprofit status and is recognized by the State of Indiana as a charitable organization. In October, Kate's Kart handed out its 10,000th book.

Angie said Krista had been keeping track of Austin on another blog. When Kate's Kart handed out its 10,000th book, Krista didn't realize right away that the 10,000th book was being given to the same Austin she had been following. When Krista realized, she was shocked at how the blog connected two families together. Angie said Krista has remained in touch with the McCleary family since.

On the Net:

www.kateskart.org

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