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# Kate's Kart cheers kids' hospital stays

Frank Gray

Sometimes, a simple effort to be nice to people catches on and grows into something bigger than anyone ever imagined.

That's the story of Kate's Kart, one of those little personal projects started by a grieving family that spontaneously bloomed into what seems destined to become a major organization.

Kate's Kart is named after Kate Layman, the second child of Andrew and Krista Layman. She was born June 26, 2006, and within hours was diagnosed with serious heart and pulmonary defects. She spent the first 10 weeks of her life in the University of Michigan Hospital.

A hospital, though, isn't a home, so to bond with their new daughter, to soothe her and get her to recognize their voices, the Laymans read her books and showed her pictures.

As time went on, Kate didn't improve. She underwent four open-heart surgeries and other procedures and spent much of her life in the hospital.

The books and her parents were always there, though. She loved looking at the pictures and listening to people read to her. Actually, it was one of the few distractions in her life.

On Jan 15, 2008, just 18 months after she was born, Kate died. As a memorial to their daughter, the Laymans took memorial donations given to the family and started something called Kate's Kart. The cart, full of books for children, from babies to young adults, all new, first appeared in June 2008 at Lutheran Hospital. Every time the cart made its rounds, every child got a new book.

By the end of their stays, some children had amassed 30 or more books, but they got to keep them.

The idea caught on quickly. The next month, Jay County Hospital in Portland, where Kate was buried, got its own cart.

A month after that, a third cart was established at Parkview Hospital, and by then, 40 people had volunteered to distribute the books.

Month after month, more hospitals were added to the list with carts of new books for sick children, more volunteers stepped forward and donations poured in.

Within a year, with the help of a friend who was a lawyer and another who was a CPA, the Laymans had established a non-profit organization to finance the project.

Today, 12 area hospitals have a Kate's Kart, more than 70 people volunteer to distribute books up to three times a week. Now, more than 2,000 books a months are being distributed, all of them new, all of them paid for by contributions from people or businesses, including bookstores.

"Each hospital has a person who notifies us when we're low," and more books are added to the cart, Andrew Layman said.

Demand isn't slacking off, either. Other hospitals as far away as Cleveland are hearing about the program and inquiring about getting a cart.



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Luke Fallon, a junior at Canterbury High School, is one of more than 70 Kate's Kart volunteers who distribute books to children at 12 area hospitals.

## Kate's Kart growth

The first Kate's Kart appeared at Lutheran Hospital in June 2008.

Later, additional Kate's Karts appeared at Jay County Hospital in Portland, Parkview Hospital, the Neonatal Intensive Care unit at Parkview North, Parkview Noble Hospital, Whitley County Hospital, Parkview Huntington Hospital, Dupont Hospital, Parkview Lagrange Hospital, Ball Memorial Hospital in Muncie, Cameron Memorial Community Hospital in Angola and St. Joseph Hospital in Fort Wayne.

As of March, the non-profit's 80 volunteers had distributed nearly 16,000 books to hospitalized children.

The whole show is run by Krista Layman, who handles all the chores while working as a stay-at-home mom with two children.

The books that are usually in the shortest supplies are books for infants and toddlers. "Because they are in the hospital for longer times because of neonatal intensive care units," the toddlers tend to accumulate more books.

Kate's Karts will also have an ice cream social fundraiser from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday at Parkview Family Park, which is on the Parkview North campus on Dupont Road.

The Kate's Kart website is [www.kateskart.org](http://www.kateskart.org).

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**Frank Gray** has held positions as a reporter and editor at The Journal Gazette since 1982 and has been writing a column on local topics since 1998. His column is published Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. He can be reached by phone at 461-8376, by fax at 461-8893, or by e-mail at [fgray@jg.net](mailto:fgray@jg.net)

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