

Merrill girl granted 10,000th wish from GM/UAW

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Resources

Jamie Taylor | December 31, 2008

For 10 years the International Union, UAW, and the General Motors Corporation have been partners in helping the Make-A-Wish Foundation grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions nationwide. That partnership reached a milestone Monday locally when a Merrill girl was granted the 10,000th wish in a celebration at the Stark Automotive Group dealership on Center Ave..

Lillia Bell, who was diagnosed with cancer, asked the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Wisconsin to grant her fondest wish: a camper. Lillia, her parents Shane and Kimberley and her four siblings were surprised when they saw the camper that was the fulfillment of that wish: a 2008 Forest River Grey Wolf camper complete with a starter kit that features queen, single and sofa beds, microwave, refrigerator, tub and shower, stove, TV, heat and an awning. It can comfortably sleep the entire Bell family of seven.

Lillia's father Shane said that the family does a lot of camping but with five children, tent camping was getting to be a complicated endeavor.

"This will make camping a lot easier now," Bell said. "That's a huge blessing there."

While the camper was a great late Christmas present for Lillia, who will turn four in March, the family got the best present a week before Christmas when they got test results back from her doctors in Marshfield that the cancer was in remission.

"We got a double blessing," Bell said.

Bill Ingram, a Make-A-Wish Foundation of Wisconsin "wish granter" from Antigo was on hand for the celebration. He said that steps are taken to make sure that the wishes granted are truly those of the child. The family is first referred to the foundation by the family doctor treating the child.

"He knows the records, he will relay the information to Milwaukee and they will do an interview. They, in turn, will contact the wish granters," he said. "We were contacted back in June. We set up an appointment with the family and do an interview. Our job is to find out whose wish this really is, if it's the child's or the family's."

He said that the wish for the trailer was actually Lillia's second wish. Her first was for a horse and corral but it was decided that would probably be a little too much for a small child. The size of the trailer surprised even Ingram.

"I thought it was going to be a pop-up. When I went to Brickner's of Antigo (who sold the foundation the camper) to see it, I was shocked," he said.

Shane Bell said that he was thankful for the efforts of everyone involved in helping



Left to right, Norm Johnson of Stark, Jesiah Bell, Shane Bell, Toby Bell, Mariah Bell, Micah Bell, Bill Ingram of the Make-A-Wish Foundation Wisconsin Chapter, and Scott Strobel and Bill Beresford of Brickner's of Antigo. Lillia and her mother Kimberley

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Lillia's wish come true. He said the two GM dealerships were instrumental in making sure the family van could tow the trailer, with Brickner's of Antigo installing the special hitch.

"There are just too many people to thank that I'm afraid of forgetting someone," he said. "I'm just so grateful to everyone involved."

Lillia couldn't wait to explore the camper. While the family was being gathered for a photograph in front of it, she disappeared inside.

"She said she wanted to sleep in it tonight," Kimberley Bell said. "She's extremely excited. We're all excited, but she really loves camping."

UAW-GM became a national sponsor of the Make-A-Wish Foundation in 1999 with the theme Making Smiles Standard Equipment for wish children. Besides providing funding to grant wishes, UAW-GM members, GM dealers and GM employees have an impact in their communities by volunteering for the Foundation, participating in chapter events, raising funds and lending their time and skills to wishes.

Stark Automotive Group represented the UAW-GM in Wisconsin for this wish, but Norm Johnson of the dealership said the Starks have been long-time supporters of the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Wisconsin. Bill and Ellen Stark served as chairs of Host Night 2004, the Wisconsin chapter's fundraising gala. Ellen has served on the Foundation's Board of Directors and continues to serve as a volunteer wish granter and with office assistance. All of the Stark dealerships have participated in past UAW-GM Make A Difference Day campaigns.

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"UAW-GM has made supporting the Make-A-Wish Foundation a part of its culture, and nearly 10,000 children have enjoyed memorable, magical wish experiences as a result," said David Williams, Make-A-Wish Foundation of America president and chief executive officer in a press release. "Regardless of the challenges the economy has faced during our decade-long partnership, UAW-GM has always made our wish kids and their heartfelt wishes top priority in its community outreach efforts."

Since the Wisconsin chapter was founded in 1984, nearly 3,500 families statewide can attest to the power of a wish. Last year, the chapter granted a record-breaking 276 wishes and currently 220 Wisconsin children are in the process of having their special wishes granted.

Some of the people who helped grant Lillia Bell's wish gathered Monday at the Stark Automotive Group dealership to present the family with the 2008 Cherokee Grey Wolf camper.