

# Family starts toy drive for kids with cancer

BY HALA ABOUDAHER  
habouda@hcnonline.com

## MORE INFORMATION

Firethorne Community Center  
28128 North Firethorne Road  
Katy, Texas 77494

## DONATIONS

"Stuff the Sleigh"-C/O Firethorne Community Association,  
4707 Ingersoll, Houston, TX 77027

The first ever Katy/Fulshear "Stuff the Sleigh" toy drive to benefit Texas Children's Hospital pediatric cancer patients and their siblings is underway.

Kelli and Garrett Ashmore founded "Stuff the Sleigh" six months ago when they decided they wanted to do something to benefit cancer patients during the holidays.

"As the parents of two healthy children, we wanted to

do something to help those who may be hospital-bound this holiday season and provide them with as joy-filled, meaningful and worry-free a Christmas holiday as possible," Garrett said.

"We welcome those interested in supporting 'Stuff the Sleigh' to stop by the Firethorne Community Center

to select a 'sleigh' gift card from the life-size Firethorne sleigh. Each 'sleigh' card will have one wish list item on it from a young cancer patient or their brother or sister for donors to purchase."

"Stuff the Sleigh" has garnered a huge amount of community support from area schools, organizations and

businesses.

The goal of "Stuff the Sleigh" is to continue to grow, and grow more specifically at the new Texas Children's Hospital in Katy as it continues to open more of its facility.

One-hundred percent of all donations go directly to benefit Texas Children's Hospital patients and their families.



FILE PHOTO

Connie Gray gets her blood drawn during a routine checkup at Methodist Hospital earlier this year. Gray, who was waiting for a lung transplant and was profiled in a series of stories in the Sun, passed away shortly before Thanksgiving.

## GRAY

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Connie was diagnosed with bronchiectasis, an obstructive lung disease, in 1995 and was on oxygen for two years.

Several weeks ago, she had a malfunction with her oxygen and slipped into a coma at CHRISTUS St. Catherine Hospital in Katy.

In a series of stories by the Sun, Gray talked about what it was like to await a new set of lungs, and the challenges of being on the donor list.

"The waiting is horrible. You just sit and wait by the

## ON THE WEB

Hala Aboudaher's stories about Connie Gray can be found at [www.katysun.com](http://www.katysun.com).

phone," she said.

Gray made regular visits to Methodist Hospital to monitor her health. Bronchiectasis inflames the airways, making them more susceptible to collapse.

The disease made life burdensome for Gray.

"Lung disease is miserable. I went from being a normal functioning person. I sang in a band for 10 years. I loved doing things with my grandkids.

All of a sudden I had to be on oxygen," she said.

"You feel like a prisoner. Your whole life changes completely. You are so restricted in so many ways that it's depressing. You can't do the things you used to do."

Meanwhile, Gray and her family had to navigate the bureaucratic maze of the health care system to pay her bills.

Gary was laid off from her job more than a year ago, due to her health. She was covered by Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Texas at her job and stayed with them using Cobra insurance. She also has Aflac supple-

mental insurance.

"It is complicated. They (insurance companies) don't really make it where you can understand it all," Connie said. "You talk about being scared."

Connie was a longtime Katy resident of Katy, a singer and a vocal advocate for organ donation.

Her son and daughter-in-law plan on forming an organ donation organization in her honor.

A memorial service was held on Monday, December 6 at Lakewood Church in Houston.

## GROWTH

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"As a district we are seasoned and know how to deal with over capacity to make sure it doesn't have a negative effect on students," said Steve Stanford, director of communications for Katy ISD.

District officials said several schools in the district are over capacity, but the growth over the next school year, is not substantial enough to impact the schools in a significant way.

The two elementary schools expected to see the most growth during the next year is Stanley and WoodCreek Elementary. Stanley has 1,188 students this year and will have 1,491 for the 2011-2012 school year. WoodCreek will go from 1,267 to 1,482. The capacity of an elementary is 1,030.

In order to have room for more students, the district is adding more portable buildings.

"Really the portable cost is the primary area we see any impact. It is a direct result of student growth," Stanford said.

"We use portables more as a management tool. They help us manage the growth."

Katy ISD is purchasing 30 portables for the coming school year a cost of \$2.55 million.

"Stanley and WoodCreek each have seven portables, and they may get one or two more," Stanford said.

"At Stanley the entire fourth grade is in portables right now," Stanford said.

The major impact for schools facing overcrowding is organizing lunch schedules and other facilities that were built to accommodate a specific amount of students.

"From operations to curriculum we are accustomed to dealing with situations that we have to make sure has minimal impact," Stanford said.

"Where we find impact is in scheduling lunches. When adding portables we are not adding capacity to the lunchroom, bathrooms, etc. That's probably where a bigger challenge comes. Scheduling those types of facilities."

The district had approximately 40,000 students in 2003 and now they have about 60,000.

Katy ISD has been a fast

## GROWING FAST

Several schools in the Katy school district will experience growth between this year and the next. A look at six schools and their projected increase in enrollment:

### Elementary schools (Capacity: 1,030)

**Stanley**  
This year: 1,188  
Next year: 1,491

**WoodCreek**  
This year: 1,267  
Next year: 1,482

### Middle schools (Cap. 1,403)

**WoodCreek**  
This year: 1,517  
Next year: 1,889

**Beckendorff**  
This year: 1,491  
Next year: 1,562

**High Schools**  
**Seven Lakes**  
This year: 3,461  
Next year: 3,632

**Taylor**  
This year: 2,710  
Next year: 2,885

growth district for more than a decade, and officials are experienced in finding every option to make student's education run as smooth as possible.

On the junior high level WoodCreek and Beckendorff will see the most growth next year.

A junior high's capacity is 1,403. Beckendorff has 1,491 students this year and will have 1,562 next year. WoodCreek has 1,517 now and will have 1,889 next year.

Taylor and Seven Lakes will see the most growth compared to the other Katy ISD high schools.

Seven Lakes will expand from 3,461 students to 3,632, and Taylor will go from 2,710 to 2,883.

Even though schools have a specific capacity, it isn't practical for a school to use every classroom with the maximum number of students. Special programs may require smaller class sizes, for example, for kids with special needs.

This explains why some schools meeting capacity may still require the use of portables because each class doesn't necessarily have the 22 student cap.

The three new elementary schools and one junior high are projected to open in 2012, ready to open for the 2012-2013 school year, and the new high school will open in 2013.

## WELL

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hold an informational meeting to answer homeowners' questions on Monday, Nov. 29.

Bob Begbie, president of the Green Trails Estates Homeowners Association, said he understands homeowners' concerns.

"There are about 10 to 15 homeowners that are really concerned and want the well somewhere else, and I don't blame them but it is the best option we have," he said.

"The bottom line is we need a new well."

The process began when the Green Trails Municipal Utility District approached the board about buying a portion of the neighborhood's recreation center land in order to build a new water supply well.

The Green Trails MUD has a backup supply contract with another nearby MUD that will expire in September. Because that contract is expiring they need an additional water supply.

The MUD is requesting to buy 0.1917 acres, a temporary construction easement that is 0.1217 acres, an underground waterline easement and easement for an underground electrical conduit.

The total recreation center land is 2.4 acres, and the well would only take up a portion of the land.

The MUD has also agreed to pay \$100,000 for the .1971 acres and \$6,780 for the .1217 acres.

The homeowners association plans on using the earnings as a reserve for unexpected costs and also to keep homeowners assessments at lower price.

The Green Trails Estates HOA board of directors is waiting to receive the results of the ballots sent to its 131 voting members in order to proceed with selling the land to the Green Trails MUD.

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