

Toy drive benefits pediatric cancer patients, siblings

SUBMITTED

"Stuff the Sleigh of Katy" welcomes the Spirit of Christmas with its third annual all-volunteer holiday toy drive benefiting pediatric cancer patients treated at Texas Children's Hospital (TCH) - West Campus, and their siblings.

Santa Claus will present the children with toys collected in his Santa's Sleigh at Firethorne at a family holiday party at Firethorne. The community toy drive is accepting donations to purchase holiday gifts now through Wednesday, Dec. 12.

"As the parents of three healthy young children, we want to do something to help kids who may be hospital-bound this holiday season and provide them with as joy-filled, meaningful and worry-free a Christmas holiday as possible," said Garrett Ashmore, who founded "Stuff the Sleigh of Katy" with his wife, Kelli, in 2010. "We want to support young cancer patients and their families by helping ease their financial and emotional burdens during the holidays."

Those interested in sponsoring a child's Christmas gift may stop by the Firethorne Community Center to select a 'sleigh' gift card with a wish list item on it from a young cancer patient or their brother or sister. Individuals or companies may purchase one or more of these gifts to fulfill that child's holiday wish.

Katy mother Meagan Henderson, whose 9-year-old Zack has been undergoing treatment for leukemia since age 3, expressed her heart-felt appreciation to "Stuff the Sleigh".

"I just wanted to say thank you to everyone that helped me and my family last Christmas," said Henderson. "If it



Photo by GINNY LUND

Heading up Stuff the Sleigh are (back row) Firethorne HOA Manager Katie Sparkman, Troop 1829 Scout Leader Rob Lund and his son, Josh, 15, who created the Stuff the Sleigh gift collection sleigh for his Eagle Scout project; Stuff the Sleigh co-founder Garrett Ashmore, with his daughters, Kiersten, 3, and Erika, 5; and Pastor Gary White of The Commons United Methodist Church. In front are Troop 1829 Boy Scout Michael Lund, 11, who assisted his brother, Josh, on the construction of the sleigh; and Stuff the Sleigh co-founder Kelli Ashmore, holding her baby son, Brock.

Christmas my kids would have had. With five kids, and only one of them being sick and diagnosed with cancer, it puts a strain on the entire family. I can't thank you guys enough for everything that you did. My entire family finally saw some joy, in times when we had no hope."

Zack was in remission for almost two years, when he became very sick in July of this year. He is "back in cancer treatment and is stable.

The "Stuff the Sleigh" toy drive and holiday party have received a generous outpouring of community support. Sponsors (to date) include: Texas Children's Hospital, Firethorne, Keller Williams Premier Realty Katy, Country Park Portraits, Try Andy's Tri, Burrow Construction, Capital Benefits, The Com-

mons UMC, DEA, Master-Word Services, Inc., Chuy's Mexican Food, Chick-fil-A-Pin Oak Location, H-E-B, Ray and Jamie Wolman Elementary School in Firethorne, Boy Scout Troop 1829 and 'Santa' Tom Gibbs. Thanks to book underwriter Keller Williams Premier Realty Katy, each child will receive a personally autographed copy of the book, "Wanda and the Oblahlahs".

Katy High School sophomore Josh Lund, a member of Boy Scout Troop 1829 in Katy, designed and built two "Stuff the Sleigh" gift sleighs as his proposed Eagle Scout project. The bright red collapsible wooden sleighs, be decked with holly, will serve as collection points at Firethorne and Wolman Elementary. Lund, a resident of

Firethorne, created the idea for the project, its budget and action plan for securing the needed materials and tools and leading a team of helpers to build the sleighs for the all-volunteer organization.

After purchasing toys for all the children on the list, "Stuff the Sleigh" organizers will apply any additional funds towards grocery gift cards or gas cards to the children's families.

For individuals and companies that would like to participate in the toy drive, donations may be made to "Stuff the Sleigh", 28128 N. Firethorne Rd., Katy, Texas 77494, or call 281-693-0003. One hundred percent of the toys and monetary donations will go directly to benefit the TCH - West patients and their families.