



## Source of wishes

**Make-A-Wish®** Central & Western North Carolina is one of 61 chapters nationwide— together they grant the wish of a child diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition every 38 minutes in the U.S. and its territories. Our local chapter's service area includes four major medical centers: Levine Children's Hospital, Novant Blume Clinic, Brenner's Children Hospital and Mission Hospital.

"We have granted the wish of every eligible child," said Stephanie Leeper, Marketing and Communications Manager. The chapter is turning 30 next year and has granted more than 3,500 wishes.

## Wish granters

The chapter is equipped with 14 staff members and a volunteer army of 300 throughout the region. When a local child is referred and deemed medically eligible to participate in the program, two volunteers are assigned as that child's wish granters. They meet with the family to learn what that child's wish is. That information comes back to the office, where the staff makes the arrangements and matches the funding. Overall, the wish process takes an average of seven months to get from start to finish, with

each wish costing an average of \$6,000.

During the last stretch of the process, wish granters go back to the child and tell him or her that the wish has been granted. "That's the really cool part about being a volunteer," Leeper said. More than 240 wishes will be granted locally this year.

Leeper herself is volunteering with a friend as a wish granter for a 6-year-old named Bobby, who had a heart transplant. "He wants to meet Mickey," she said. "That's it. There is nothing else in the world for him."

## A society for wishes

Now in its second year, the **W.I.S.H. Society**—which stands for Women Inspiring Strength and Hope—is a group of diverse women who, individually, take on the challenge of raising \$6,000 to fund one wish. Last year, 21 women committed to the cause and raised over \$140,000. This year, the Society expects to have 25 women with a goal to raise \$150,000. "One of the biggest benefits of being in the W.I.S.H. Society is the chance to network with other professionals and women outside of your normal group," Leeper said.

For the first time, a junior honoree is participating: 10-year-old AnneLeigh Twer. By August, she had already raised \$4,000 through her lemonade stand. Twer is in competition with last year's highest fundraiser and Woman

of the Year, Robin Smith-Salzman, Owner and Marketing Director of Lake Norman Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram. Smith-Salzman raised \$21,000, so, naturally, Twer said she would raise \$22,000.

Luckily, the women who participated during the inaugural year and have returned are assuming mentorship roles for the new fundraisers. For example, Smith-Salzman arranged a day for Twer to set up her lemonade stand at the Lake Norman dealership. "There are strong women in our community," Smith-Salzman said. "Everybody is extremely busy but they make time for things like this."

Though the thought of raising \$6,000 solo may be daunting, Smith-Salzman made a discovery once she started reaching out for donations: "There are a lot of people with big hearts that just don't know how to give, and they just are waiting for a reason and for it to make sense to them on why they should write that check, whatever it is, whether it's \$5 or \$1,000. They just need to feel good about it."

What makes Smith-Salzman feel especially good is that she throws parties at her dealership for the wish kids she has worked with. She is in the process of granting her fourth wish and preparing to throw her fourth party. And she is ready to get her fundraising fired up for this year's W.I.S.H. Society season.

She said: "I want to send the message: It's pretty simple. Don't let it stop here." She encourages others to spread the word. "That's how all this magic happens," she said. ■

## Impact of a wish

**98%** of parents surveyed said the wish made them feel like a normal family.

**92%** of volunteers surveyed felt a deeper commitment to philanthropy and volunteer work.

**89%** of medical professionals surveyed believe a wish experience can positively influence a child's health.

"A wish come true helps children feel stronger, more energetic, more willing and able to battle their life-threatening medical conditions," Leeper said. "For many of them, it marks a turning point in their fight against their illnesses. For their doctors, nurses and other health professionals, the wish experience works in concert with medicine to make their patients feel better, emotionally and even physically."