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High schoolers grant a wish

Sarah Horner Duluth News Tribune

Published Saturday, December 16, 2006

Ana Senarighi doesn't have to worry about telling Santa Claus what she wants for Christmas this year; a group of students from Duluth Central High School already took care of it.

The 12-year-old from Hermantown wanted one thing: a trip to Nintendo World in New York City.

"I love playing video games. I do it whenever I can," Ana said.



Ana Senarighi, 12, of Hermantown holds a stuffed toy dog as she recalls her recent trip to New York while visiting Duluth Central High School on Friday morning.

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Ana's tumor shrank 90 percent, from the size of a walnut to pea-sized, said Ana's dad, Peter.

"My mama was crying like a little baby," Ana said.

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She has gotten extra practice lately. Ana was diagnosed with a brain tumor in June and travels to Children's Hospital in the Twin Cities once a month for chemotherapy. The treatments are exhausting, and playing Nintendo keeps her entertained without having to exert too much energy.

The tumor, called brain stem glioma, was discovered after Ana complained of headaches and double vision. Her parents also noticed a droop starting in the left side of her face.

"We thought maybe she had a lazy eye or something," Ana's mom, Sara, said.

Doctors found the tumor lodged in the middle of her brain and started treatment immediately. So far, it seems to be working.

On Nov. 15, the family got their first Christmas wish. An MRI indicated

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"The doctor said he loves making mothers cry about stuff like that," Ana's younger sister, Anneissa, said.

Ana's second wish came true on Tuesday when she and her family boarded a plane and landed in New York City, home to Nintendo World.

"It was just amazing," Ana said.

She and her family returned Friday from their adventure, which included buying eight games at the two-story Nintendo World; making a stop at the American Girl store; and shopping at Macy's.

Ana's wish was granted by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an international organization that grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions.

The organization depends on donations, or sponsors, to finance wishes. Central High School's Key Club, a student-run service organization, stepped up to the plate for Ana.

Key Club publicist Nick Pascuzzi is a former recipient of a wish granted by the foundation. He has a blood disease called hypogammaglobulinemia, which means his blood lacks a protein that helps fight infections. The organization made his wish, a trumpet and handmade Monnete mouthpiece, come true his sophomore year.

Nick now serves as an ambassador for Make-A-Wish and encouraged the Key Club to sponsor a child.

"Since my illness hasn't been as debilitating, I am more able to give back than some of the other wish recipients," Nick said. "I wanted to take advantage of that and give back to the organization that gave so much to me."

The Key Club held penny wars, a competition between grade levels to garner the most penny donations, to raise money for the trip. It also gave some of the proceeds from the school's homecoming dance.

Ana visited the school with her family Friday morning to personally thank her sponsors.

"I would like to say thank you, Key Club, for making my wish come true. I really did have fun inside New York," she said.

She told the students Nintendo World definitely was a highlight, but she was particularly mesmerized by her trip to Macy's.

"It was just amazing. They had all of these little scenes, like an underwater one and a dragon one and Santa was there. It was really cool," she said.

Key Club president Delaine Wendling said it was an honor to sponsor Ana.

"Actually getting to meet the person who was affected by our wish, and seeing her talk about it and smile is so cool," she said.

Ana's family, while incredibly grateful for their first two unexpected gifts, is still holding out for a third: a full recovery for Ana.

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