

Give Kids The World Village
210 South Bass Road
Kissimmee, FL 34746
PH: 800-995-KIDS (5437)
407-396-1114
dream@gktw.org
givekidstheworld.org

facebook.com/gktwvillage
instagram.com/gktwvillage
twitter.com/gktwvillage
youtube.com/user/givekidstheworld
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miracles & memories

Spring 2023



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Collegiate T-Shirt

With its classic varsity vibe, our Adult Collegiate Tri-Blend T-Shirt is the perfect way to share your love for the Village! Made from a premium blend of 50% polyester, 37% ring-spun combed cotton, and 13% rayon, this shirt offers exceptional drape and stretch, complete with a heather finish for a vintage look. Every purchase, including this shirt and other high-quality items from our Memory Market, helps make dreams come true for wish children and their families.

To shop online, visit www.gktw.org/shop.



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Few words more poignantly capture the life and legacy of Olivia Wampler than these: "She taught us how to love."

Infectiously joyful, Olivia defied the odds from the very beginning. At first thought to be a fibroid tumor, Olivia was discovered in utero reclining on the tumor. Her positioning, according to dad Joe, "looked just like angel's wings." The very faintest of heartbeats marked the start of a fierce battle for survival during a high-risk pregnancy fraught with complications. Then, at just 22 weeks, mom Angie's water broke while shopping in Walmart.

After two weeks in the hospital, Angie underwent an emergency C-section after Olivia became lodged in the birth canal. Born prematurely at 24 weeks weighing just one pound, six ounces, Olivia spent the first seven months of her life in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), enduring multiple surgeries and corrective treatments. Over the next few years, Olivia began to thrive. Despite development delays – including an inability to communicate verbally, Olivia lived each day to the fullest, signing 'I love you' to everyone she met.

"Olivia came into this world fighting for every breath; after slaying all those dragons, she was eager to bring love and beauty into the universe," says Angie. "She touched the hearts of those around her, with an innate ability to sense when someone needed comforting."

It was Joe, who cared for Olivia full-time, who most often witnessed Olivia's penchant for running up to strangers and surprising them with exuberant bearhugs. "The first time she did it, I can remember thinking, 'Stop! What are you doing?' But when I saw how she melted hearts...how

she embraced people no one would ever think to approach or touch with love and respect, regardless of their appearance, that's when I realized it was her mission to teach us how to love unconditionally. She was born with angel's wings, and she was determined to use those wings to spread sunshine and light."

At the age of four, the earth fell from beneath Joe's and Angie's feet. After participating in a fundraising run at her special needs school, Olivia collapsed. She was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, requiring emergency surgery. Three days later, Olivia underwent the first in a series of brain surgeries to remove tumors on her cerebellum and frontal lobe. Aggressive chemotherapy, radiation and other treatments followed, with seizures and brain infections leading to frequent ICU stays.



At the AFLAC Cancer and Blood Disorders Center at Scottish Rite Hospital in Atlanta, Olivia was one of the first children to receive a glass bead as part of the Beads of Courage program – a resilience-based intervention designed to support and strengthen children coping with serious illness which awards one bead for every procedure undertaken. Olivia's beads became a necklace, and then hundreds of necklaces totaling more than 1,800 beads. Purple beads were her favorite.

Two years later, with her cancer in remission, Olivia visited Give Kids The World Village with Angie and Joe – where she went in the pool for the first time, fell in love with the princess mirror in the Castle of Miracles and rode the train. She also spent endless time feeding napkins into the mouths of Auguste, the talking trash can clown, and Trunky, the talking trash can elephant, on The Avenue. After the first allotment of napkins, Joe and Angie went to the store and bought 500 napkins. "We didn't want to waste all of the Village's napkins!" Joe laughs.

The Wamplers returned a few months later as part of the Village's Welcome Back Family program, where Olivia rediscovered the Enchanted Carousel. Elated that she could ride over and over without getting off, Olivia chose her favorite horse and rode all day long. She became so infatuated with the carousel that when they returned home, Joe drove for four days to pick up a hand-carved carousel horse he'd purchased on eBay and mounted it on the front porch of their home. Olivia would hop on the "carousel" each morning waiting for the school bus and dreaming about her next visit to her favorite place on earth.

Olivia's cognitive function remained eternally at the blissful, wonderfully uninhibited age of six, the result of 13 brain surgeries and continuing seizures. Determined to continue spreading love and joy wherever she went, Olivia began knocking on doors and asking homeowners if she could sit on their couch. No one ever refused, and after spending a few minutes with her new friends, Olivia would give the sign for love and scamper off.

By 2021, Olivia's seizures had become more frequent. On the evening of December 13, Olivia gave Joe a hug, slipped a beaded necklace around his neck, and went to bed. Later that night, she suffered a catastrophic seizure and could not be revived. She passed away the next day at the age of 17. Hundreds of family members, friends and more than 40 healthcare workers attended her funeral, where Angie and Joe were approached by dozens of strangers with a similar story: they were having a bad day when Olivia's surprise hug brightened their spirits; or they opened the front door to find Olivia, smiling radiantly and asking to sit on their couch.

"Olivia accomplished an amazing number of 'purposes' she was sent here with, and we are still discovering, almost on a weekly basis, how she touched people with a message, or a hug, or another instrumental memory for them to carry with them," says Joe.

During the funeral, the Wamplers requested donations to the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation. In a twist of serendipity, the same foundation had secretly paid for Olivia's service. Neither party was aware of each other's gift until it was announced at the beginning of the funeral. Thousands

of dollars were raised in Olivia's memory to help other families facing pediatric brain cancer. But Angie and Joe wanted to do more.

The opportunity presented itself just as the one-year anniversary of Olivia's passing approached. Unaware of Olivia's story or her connection to Give Kids The World, a colleague of Angie's in the massage equipment industry reached out to see if Angie could help source equipment for a spa being developed at the Village for wish parents, caregivers and adult family members. When Give Kids The World President & CEO Pamela Landwirth heard Olivia's story, she decided to name the spa in her honor.

As a result of Angie's efforts and with support from a private donor, Olivia's Oasis is under development with plans for an early spring opening. Just some of the generous equipment manufacturers and supporters who are making the project possible include SolaJet; Infinity Massage Chairs; Scrip Companies; Core Products; Benefect; Harmony Salt; Oakworks, Inc.; Himalayan Secrets; Hand & Stone; and Amy Perrault. Staffed entirely by volunteers, the spa will be open seven days a week to provide adult caregivers with a tranquil, peaceful respite throughout their stays at the Village.

"I feel I have been called by a Higher Power to be involved in this project, and I feel like my daughter is my acting foreman from above," says Angie. "Olivia's Oasis is for the fearless grown-ups trying hard to keep the faith...a place to rejuvenate the spirit so these beautiful parents can continue to be there for their children. As the flight attendants always say, you must put on your own oxygen mask before you can help others."

In December, on the anniversary of Olivia's passing, Joe and Angie visited the Village to honor her memory and discuss plans for the spa. As they drove away, Angie's assistant, April, noticed something twinkling in the road. Inexplicably, it was a collection of purple glass beads.

"Olivia – I called her my Wee-Small-Sweet-Smoochable-Portable-Person – was pure joy," says Angie. "She was sent to us to teach us about love and the strength of the human spirit. Those beads were God's wink; they were his way of telling us, 'I'm gonna leave this angel with you and I'll be right back. She's not gone...she's just not here.'"





An Unbreakable Bond

As the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, Dina and Dovi Meles' connection to the Village transcends the ancestry they share with Give Kids The World Founder and Holocaust survivor Henri Landwirth. Late last year, the Meles family had the opportunity to experience the legacy Henri created first-hand during their son, Rafi's, wish trip.

At just six months old, Rafi began experiencing frequent infections and high fevers which took weeks to resolve. His parents' worst fears were confirmed when genetic testing revealed an extremely rare, life-threatening disorder called X-linked lymphoproliferative syndrome (XLP) with a median survival rate of six to 10 years – and the only known treatment a potentially dangerous bone marrow transplant. As the disorder only affects boys, the Meles' other two sons, Joey and Akiva, were tested for the disease. Thankfully, neither tested positive; but two-year-old Akiva was found to be an exact donor match! Shortly after, Akiva donated his bone marrow to save his brother's life.

Following six weeks in the hospital, one year in near total isolation and extensive therapy, Rafi and his family embarked on what his parents describe as "the thrill of a lifetime from beginning to end" at Give Kids The World Village.

"When Rafi was in the hospital, the idea of having his wish granted was a real motivator for him to push through. It gave us something positive to talk about that was going to happen in the future and put him in the right frame of mind," says Dina. "We knew the Village would be special, but

we didn't realize just how special until we visited. Every child is made to feel special, not just the child who has the illness. Rafi is not the most adventurous of our sons, but on this trip he pushed himself to experience new things. Given how much he has been through in his young life, he is now unafraid to try anything."

"It was joyful to watch not just Rafi but all three of our boys feel like normal, happy, carefree children again, without the stresses that illness places on family life," says Dovi. "Rafi's story could have ended differently, but a combination of faith, medical expertise and parental perseverance have given him a second chance at life. Our week together at the Village helped all of us heal; it was a week of family bonding, respite and closure on that difficult chapter in our lives...it provided medicine that doctors and hospitals cannot."

After missing his entire year of kindergarten due to isolation and recovery, Rafi is now back in school and thriving socially, emotionally and educationally. Congratulations, Rafi and family!



When A Wish Becomes A Star

Among the myriad of magical experiences enjoyed by wish families at Give Kids The World Village, the most treasured of all is the opportunity for every wish child to customize a gold star and have it placed permanently within our galaxy of stars in the Castle of Miracles and the adjoining Star Tower. To make this special moment even more unforgettable, the Village engaged SteamLabs Design Group to completely reimagine the star experience – transforming it into a highly interactive encounter featuring cutting-edge animation, fully-integrated audio in four languages and charming new characters.

Joining the Castle's resident Stellar The Star Fairy in bringing this deeply personalized experience to life, Franko the giant and fairies Glitter, Dusty and Willow take wish kids on a fantastical journey as their stars are lovingly placed and their stories become woven into the rich history and legacy of the Village.

"Seeing our son's star among so many others rendered us speechless," said one recent wish mom. "To know that his star will be here even when he is not, and to feel like we are not alone in our journey...I have no words for how meaningful that is. Give Kids The World was a bright spot during a very dark time, and we are forever grateful for that priceless experience."

Madison's Caring Heart

Madison Welsh was happy and healthy until the age of three, when she woke up one morning with a paralyzed right arm and hand. Rushed to the emergency room at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, Madison was found to have aggressive lesions in her brain, ultimately leading to a diagnosis of pediatric multiple sclerosis. With the help of an incredible medical team, Madison began a course of monthly infusions and treatments that have put her in remission. In 2019, Madison and her family visited Give Kids The World Village on her wish trip and have since returned twice as part of the Welcome Back Family program.

"Our week at Give Kids The World Village was extraordinary and so magical. It helped us get through the darkest time in our lives and create the most cherished memories. As the family of a wish child, that is simply irreplaceable," says Madison's mom, Lisa. "Madison's carefree and fun personality was back during our wish trip. That was something that had faded when she became sick. To see her filled with so much joy and excitement gave our family a lot of hope and happiness. It was the break we didn't know we needed. Madison was able to be a kid again and after many difficult months, that feeling is one that sticks with you long after the trip is over. After experiencing the love and magic of the Village, our family pledged to do everything we could to help other wish families relax, reconnect and regain a sense of normalcy at the place that brought us so much joy. We were overcome with the urge to give back."

Since their wish visit, the Welshes have supported the Village by raising funds the past two years as part Coasting for Kids. Most recently, seven-year-old Madison and her parents raised nearly \$4,800 to make wishes possible by setting up their own DIY fundraiser, Madison Mae's Gift of Hope

Drive, and sharing it on social media every few days. In addition, in honor of Madison, her elementary school raised \$538 by hosting a dress down day in which students donated \$1 or more to forego wearing their school uniforms. Lisa and her husband, Mike, also collected donations at their workplaces, with one of Mike's co-workers – former Pittsburgh Pirates catcher Michael McHenry – hosting a baseball clinic for donations and then matching the amount raised.

"We are humbled and honored to have crushed our goal of \$1,000! Our hearts are bursting and we are happy to instill the importance of giving back to Madison at her young age. She was so excited with each donation that trickled in! We are extremely proud of her empathy and caring heart. We look forward to hosting our next fundraiser and encourages other wish families to do the same!"

To learn more about creating a DIY fundraiser for the Village, visit www.gktw.org/help/fundraise/.



Village News

COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE HAPPINESS AND HOPE

Give Kids The World is made possible by the support of countless generous donors, corporate sponsors and volunteers.

GALA IN NEW ORLEANS

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 20, when the Kern family and Mardi Gras World in New Orleans host the 2023 Give Kids The World Gala: an elegant evening celebrating the magic and mystique of one of America's most vibrant cities. Pass a good time with us as you savor Cajun, Creole and Southern delicacies in a grand Southern mansion; listen to soulful jazz; explore larger-than-life props and Mardi Gras floats; bid on eclectic auction items; and dance the night away, all while making wishes come true. To explore ticketing options and for additional details, visit www.gktw.org/gala/.



GINGERBREAD RUN – VALENTINE’S DAY EDITION

In February, hundreds of fundraisers converged on Give Kids The World Village to run, roll or stroll a 5K past snoring trees, an enchanting castle, and the world's largest game of Candy Land as part of the 2023 Gingerbread Run – Valentine's Day Edition. In addition to the festively dressed donors, alumni families and reality TV stars who participated on-site as wish families cheered them on, hundreds more created their own unique challenges and participated in the event virtually. In all, more than 1,000 supporters raised \$180,000 to make wishes come true for critically ill children and their families. To learn more about upcoming fundraising events, visit www.gktw.org.



HELP DELIVER HOPE

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the Village. Each week, caring groups and individuals fill up to 1,800 volunteer shifts orchestrating virtually every aspect of the storybook resort – from operating the rides, serving food and helping out at parties and celebrations, to assisting the Gift Fairy and scooping ice cream. With a goal of making every single guest feel special, volunteers lend their time, talent and passion delivering magical experiences for wish families as they create unforgettable memories of their own alongside others who share their devotion to giving back. Volunteers of all ages and abilities are needed in order to fulfill our mission. To learn more about rewarding volunteer opportunities at The Place Where Happiness Inspires Hope, visit www.gktw.org/volunteer/.



DAVIDSON SERVES WITH LOVE

For more than 30 years, Davidson Hospitality Group has made Give Kids The World Village an authentic and vibrant part of its corporate culture. Since 1989, Davidson properties and team members in communities nationwide have embraced our mission, orchestrating diverse fundraising events with a common goal: to make a positive, life-changing impact on the lives of critically ill children and their families. From hosting galas, golf tournaments, charity runs, bike rides and other fundraising campaigns to volunteering at the Village and raising funds through employee giving, Davidson teams have gone above and beyond giving back and changing lives. Along the way, Davidson Hospitality Group has made an indelible – and delicious – impression on the Village! In 2019 and 2020, the company raised an additional \$200,000 to support the building of Henri's Starlite Scoops...and each year hosts Ice Cream For Breakfast and other ice cream fundraisers. In 2022, 70+ properties in the Davidson Hospitality Group portfolio raised \$425,000 for Give Kids The World, with nearly \$4 million contributed to date. Thank you for your caring hearts and giving spirit, Davidson Hospitality Group!



A DREAM COME TRUE

After months of testing and blood transfusions to determine why her red blood cell counts were so low, six-year-old Sloane Stadt was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML) – requiring several rounds of chemotherapy and numerous hospital stays. In the summer of 2020, Sloane underwent a bone marrow transplant with her sister, Charlotte, as her donor. In November 2022, Sloane, Charlotte and their parents celebrated nearly two years of remission with a trip to Give Kids The World Village with support from Dreams Come True of Jacksonville.

"Sloane never could have imagined the dream trip she was gifted. It was more magical and spectacular than any of us expected. Give Kids The World is a place of miracles, bringing family together, and giving kids the absolute best experiences of their lives!" says mom, Ashley. "The happiness we felt is immeasurable. We laughed. We cried happy tears. We LIVED. As a family, we celebrated; Sloane beat cancer! The lengths the staff and volunteers go to in order to make the Village phenomenal is astounding. It's hard to find the words to properly thank Give Kids The World and Dreams Come True for the magical, most joyous, momentous week of our lives."

ONE COURAGEOUS KID

"Our visit to Give Kids The World was way more than we could have imagined," says Nadia Ahee, whose son, Jordan, has cerebral palsy and recently underwent surgery to relieve pain and help him learn to walk. "During his two-month hospital stay, we bribed Jordan to re-learn to use his legs by telling him we were sending his progress videos to Mickey Mouse...and during our wish trip, he was able to show Mickey Mouse that he had learned to stand on his own! The Village was so accessible; he loved the arcade games, the never-ending train and carousel rides, the accessible playground, and I personally loved the accessible washroom and shower! After being spoiled with gifts, parties and ice cream, we joke that Jordan has no idea what a real vacation is like after GKTW. Following six months of not being allowed to be a kid, he really deserved this special experience." We appreciate the partnership of the Starlight Foundation of Canada for helping to make Jordan's wish possible.



PLAYING FORE WISHES GOLF CLASSIC

Play a round to help wish kids play around – away from hospital stays and medical treatments! Join us for a day of great golf, delicious food and good friends at Give Kids The World's Playing Fore Wishes Golf Classic, scheduled to take place on Saturday, May 6, at Celebration Golf Club. Scratch golfers and novices alike are welcome to participate in this fun-filled family event. Proceeds will help Give Kids The World create happiness, optimism and hope for critically ill children and their families during magical week-long wish vacations at our whimsical nonprofit resort. To learn about entry and sponsorship opportunities, please visit www.gktw.org/golf/.

LIFELONG MEMORIES

Diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) in December 2018 at the age of three, Cameron Gular endured two and a half years of treatment before visiting the Village with his family in November 2022 with support from Toby's Dream Foundation. "Give Kids The World Village is a beautiful tribute to the youngest fighters of life-altering diseases and critical illnesses," says Cameron's mom, Catherine. "Our family felt special from the moment we arrived, and that magic lasted for our entire stay. The Village itself has all the comforts of home and is more than just kid-friendly; it is perfectly kid-centered. The memories we made at the Village and all the theme parks will last a lifetime. We are so thankful." Cameron is now a happy, healthy first grader in his hometown of Yorktown, Virginia.



STELLAR'S STAR SHOW

At Stellar's Star Show, every child's a star! Every Tuesday night, Julie's Safari Theater comes alive as wish children and their siblings showcase their unique talents on stage. Accompanied by music they select themselves with a custom backdrop created by the Village's Entertainment team, every performer enjoys the chance to express themselves however they'd like as wish families cheer them on. From hula-hoopers, singers, dancers and gymnasts to artists and light saber warriors, every show brings something new and joyful – with Village characters Reme, Rugby, Murphy, Sprinkles, and Stellar The Star Fairy often making an appearance, and Entertainment Coordinator Eric Villalobos warming up the crowd with magic. Stellar's Star Show is just one of the many parties and celebrations designed to make every stay at the Village magical.

