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Katie raises the goal as she lifts spirits

The 9-year-old's Christmas charity for sick children is now aiming for \$15,000.

BY DAVID PERLMUTT

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Katie Greene, the big-hearted Union County girl who's raised thousands to buy gifts for sick children at Christmas, is at it again.

This time, she wants to raise \$15,000 and hand out presents to children – and toiletries like shampoo, toothpaste and lotion to their parents – in eight Carolinas hospitals.

A heady venture for a child so young: She's 9, a third-grader at Covenant Day School.

Except it's familiar territory for Katie, CKO (Chief Kidz Officer) of Katie's Kidz, the name she gave her yearly effort to bring smiles to sick kids.

She's been doing it since she was 6.

At that age, Katie and her father were walking through Wal-Mart when she spotted a Care Bear, which hatched her project. Her parents told her she'd need to raise the money.

Soon, she was carrying \$160 worth of gifts into the Levine Children's Hospital at Carolinas Medical Center.

In three years, she and a small band of Kidz have raised enough money to buy between 6,000 and 7,000 toys, wooden train sets, iPods, Hot Wheels, bubbles, puzzles and footballs.

Last year, she raised \$11,628.80, her offerings going to children in six hospitals.

Now she's increased the challenge:

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KATIE

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"Sure we can do it," Katie said as she counted pennies and dimes at her Weddington home. "It's a lot of money and a big challenge, but we'll get there. I just feel I should do it. Sorting out pennies and dimes is really fun.

"Helping kids is awesomer."

To get there, she's been on something of a speaker's circuit – going before more than 30 church groups, civic clubs, schools and youth groups with a PowerPoint presentation to pitch the project.

"Up front, she doesn't ask for a thing," said Liz Greene, Katie's mother. "About every time, there've been people who made some type of donation."

She started fundraising on Jan. 1, and so far has taken in \$8,100.

The money's come from second-graders at Ellenboro Elementary School in Rutherford County, who jammed milk cartons with pennies and other coins. It has also come from individuals, civic clubs and church groups.

Several organizations and businesses have agreed to conduct toy drives – including the Little Otter Swim School in Charlotte.

Others have organized toiletry drives, including Katie's dentist.

In the Greene's house are hundreds of tubes of toothpaste, toothbrushes, dental floss and travel-sized containers of shampoo.

Now parents of hospitalized kids will get a bag with toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, razor, shaving cream, tissues and a comb.

Her mother said Katie never loses an ounce of passion for her project.

"This is very important to her," Liz Greene said. "There is never any: 'I don't want to do this. I don't want to count coins. I don't want to write thank-you notes.' She's very willing to do whatever it takes."