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PHOTOS BY JONATHAN E. COLEMAN / JCOLEMAN@INDEPENDENTTRIBUNE.COM

ABOVE LEFT: Katie Greene carries a bag of toys purchased with money she saved during the year for gifts to be delivered to children at the Jeff Gordon Children's Hospital. **ABOVE MIDDLE:** Greene loads boxes of toys onto a cart outside the hospital. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Lisa Yates, the child life coordinator for the Jeff Gordon Children's Hospital at CMC-NorthEast, gets help from Greene and Santa wheeling in the boxes of toys. **BELOW:** Greene chats with Yates and Santa about some of the toys she purchased.

Katie's Kidz

Local girl helps bring happiness to sick children

By Robin L. Gardner

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Three years ago at Christmas, Katie Greene had a revelation while shopping with her parents.

"I was in a store and I picked up a toy and had this idea," said Greene, who is now 8 years old.

She thought if she could give a sick child one toy, it would help them feel better and they would have a great Christmas.

It's a simple wish, but one that has motivated her for nearly two years.

Greene understood, even at such a young age, there are children who can't go home for the holidays — those who are too sick to travel or from families who can't afford to come home for Christmas because of daunting medical expenses.

She decided these children would be the target for a project that has since become known as Katie's Kidz.

Greene's mother, Liz, explained she could start simply by saving her own money in a jar. That first year, she saved \$162 to buy presents.

She has worked hard each year raising money for her special wish.

This year she launched her own Web site, www.katieskidz.org to reach a greater audience.

She gives PowerPoint presentations at churches, elementary schools, craft fairs and to family and friends, outlining her intentions.

The 8-year-old runs the meetings and talks to the hospitals to organize donations, her mother said.

Greene raised \$2,600 last year, and this year her goal was \$8,000.

"I actually blew that away," Katie said.

The total she raised for this year was \$9,339.

"I like the shopping and getting the presents, but the best part is giving the presents," Greene said.



KIDZ

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By surpassing her goal, Katie was able to buy gifts for six different hospitals — CMC-Union, CMC-Cleveland, Levine Children's Hospital, Mission St. Joseph's, Presbyterian Hemby and CMC-NorthEast.

On Wednesday, Greene appeared at the Jeff Gordon Children's Hospital to present the gifts, but because of the respiratory risks to the patients, she was unable to give the gifts directly to the children.

"We have 13 kids in the pediatric unit. All but three are under the age of two," said Lisa Yates, the hospital's child life coordinator.

Greene and Santa helped place the gifts under a big Christmas tree in the hospital lobby.

"I'm not allowed to give it

to them, but I know they will smile," she said.

Greene talked about a friend who was inspired by her actions.

"Riley, who is at Long Creek Elementary, is raising money to go buy toiletries for the moms and dads while they are staying with their children at the hospital," she said.

It all starts again for the second-grader once the new year begins.

So what's her goal for next year?

"I don't really know. I take it a step at a time," she said.

She already has some speaking engagements lined up for January.

Does she have a special gift she'd like Santa to bring her for Christmas?

Greene would love a puppy. "But my Mom has allergies," she said.

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