

An e-newsletter of the J. D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities

Gone, but not forgotten

McCarty Center loses long time volunteer

On Sunday, July 27, the McCarty Center lost a volunteer. A volunteer who invested 42 years of his time and talent to the children who have passed through the McCarty Center doors.

His name was Louis Edward "Tex" Raymond. Tex to everyone he met. He was 90 years old.

Tex was a member of the 40 et 8 of Oklahoma, a veterans group and the original founders of the McCarty Center.

Tex hosted monthly birthday parties for the inpatients, arranged for our kids to go to the Shriner's Circus and participated in all the 40 et 8 Christmas parties for the inpatients.

Tex would just come hang out with the kids, playing his harmonica and sometimes giving kids a harmonica of their own.

Tex was a horseman. He would give kids gold-painted horseshoes for good luck. Tex was also a horseshoe sculpturer, making many pieces for his family and friends.



Tex made sure that the kids at the McCarty Center got to go to the Shriner Circus when it came to town. Here, Aaron Atherton tries on Tex's Shriner's fez on the way to the circus.



This cowboy was made by Tex Raymond for Greg Gaston, director of marketing at the McCarty Center, .



There is no way to estimate how many of these golden horseshoes Tex handed out during his lifetime. It was his way of connecting with people and the kids at the McCarty Center.

Conquer the heat. Conquer the hills.

This has been the mantra of riders in the Bicycle League of Norman's (BLN) annual Norman Conquest Bicycle Tour for the last 18 years, and it hasn't changed as the BLN held its 19th annual event on Saturday, July 12.

The Norman Conquest, which benefits the Camp ClapHans scholarship fund, was named one of the 50 best rides in America by Bicycling Magazine in their September 2012 issue.

According to Jonathan Mullen, this year's Norman Conquest chairman, there were two significant changes made to the event from previous years. First, and foremost, was the addition of a fifth route for riders to choose.

In addition to the family-friendly town tour, the hilly 22-mile ride, the very hilly 46-mile trek and the seriously hilly 64-mile challenge, there was now a 10-mile "taste of the hills" route.

"This new route was developed in response to our less experienced riders' request for something more challenging than the town tour," said Mullen. "These riders didn't feel they were ready for the 22-mile ride, but wanted to sample a little more challenging route. Thus, the 'taste of the hills' was created."

Another change in the event was the start time. It was moved up from 7:30 to 7:00 a.m. As in past years, the start of the ride was staggered based on the ride route. The 64-mile riders started first followed by the 46, 22, 10 and town tour riders. There was a 5 minute delay between each start.

This year, there were 471 participants. Michael Painter from Princeton Junction, New Jersey traveled the farthest to participate. There were riders from Kansas, Texas, Arkansas and Indiana as well.

This year's event will put \$1,000 in the Camp ClapHans scholarship fund that helps qualifying families with camp tuition. This summer, 30 of the camp's 59 campers benefited from the scholarship fund.

The Bicycle League of Norman has been supporting the Camp ClapHans scholarship fund with their Norman Conquest bicycle tour for 7 years.



Riders of all ages participate in the Norman Conquest.



There were three opportunities to register for the Norman Conquest. One was online. The second was the night before the ride at O'Connell's Irish Pub and the third was the morning of the ride at the McCarty Center. Here, a rider registers at O'Connell's where riders could carbo load on a free pasta dinner.



And they're off. The 64-mile riders slowly make their way out of the McCarty Center parking lot for their tour of eastern Cleveland County.



Bicycles line the edge of the road in front of the McCarty Center rest stop. Taking care of the riders were: Sue O'Hare and Randi Wilke representing PT and SLP.

The Building Block

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On the road again with mobile screenings

Watonga bound

Families in western Oklahoma who have children with special needs had the opportunity to learn about the services to assist their children during a mobile screening program offered by the McCarty Center on Sept. 26 in Watonga.

Families get to meet with the hospital's screening team to find out about resources available through the McCarty Center and through state and federal programs.

The hospital's team offered free screenings to children, including autism spectrum disorder screenings, to determine what services are available at the hospital and throughout the state that could benefit them.

Screenings take place from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Watonga Public Library.

The mobile screening program aims to reach more families in the state who have children with disabilities. Typically, a family must travel to Norman for a screening. Now, the mobile program brings that service to them.

"We want to create opportunities for more of Oklahoma's children with special needs to be reached and served by our staff," said Vicki Kuestersteffen, director and CEO of the McCarty Center.

The hospital's mobile screening team members are a nurse, social worker and psychological clinician. During the screening, the team meets with



Director of Social Services Darcie Ware, right, checks out a toy with a child who visited the hospital's mobile screening program earlier in the year. The screening team visited Watonga Sept. 26 to offer information about center services and state and federal programs that can assist children with special needs.

parents and their children to talk about the child's medical, social and behavioral history. Team members also share information about the hospital's comprehensive inpatient evaluations, inpatient respite care and outpatient services and programs available throughout the state.

Reaching out to more families

The hospital started the mobile screening program in 2012 to reach out to more families, including those who live in counties that have not received hospital services within a year. Last year the McCarty Center provided services to children from 64 of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

Watonga marks the sixth stop for the mobile screening program. The screening team also has visited Holdenville, Tishomingo, Okmulgee, Perry and Atoka.

A goal with the program is to provide information to families in areas of the state that may have limited access to services for children with disabilities, said Darcie Ware, the hospital's director of social

services and a member of the screening team.

"As the only hospital of our kind in Oklahoma, reaching out to these areas through the mobile screenings has allowed children to receive services that might otherwise remain unavailable to them," Ware said.

"The program can also help save families time and transportation costs since they can meet with the screening team in a community near them, instead of traveling to the hospital's location in Norman," Ware said.

"The mobile screenings help the families save time and resources that may be challenging to come by when there is a child with special needs involved," she said.

Families who have participated in the mobile program said they appreciated getting to meet with the screening team and receiving information about services that can assist their children.

Cindy Barnes, of Milburn, came to visit the team in Tishomingo to learn about resources for her son, Tucker, who is autistic.

Tucker, 13, came to the hospital as an inpatient last year, and Barnes said she has noticed improvements in how he listens and communicates. He has also shown more independence when it comes to feeding, bathing and dressing himself.

Patient gets help from McCarty Center on his path to college

Team helps with training, resources for Little Axe graduate

Ashli Velez and Dalton Blevens became friends through a shared sense of humor, the same taste in music and movies and hours spent battling each other at Guitar Hero.

The two met when Velez worked with Blevens when he was a preteen and a patient at the McCarty Center.

Now, instead of watching Blevens hit the right notes on the Guitar Hero video game, Velez is seeing him segue into college life.

And she gets the opportunity to help him in the process.

Velez, a social worker, is part of the team of hospital employees working with Blevens, 18, as he enters his freshman year at the University of Oklahoma.

Blevens, who has cerebral palsy, said he is excited about going to college and grateful to the hospital staff for their help and encouragement.

"I've got a heck of a team," he said.

Velez and other team members say that working with Blevens has been a highlight, given his motivation, positive attitude and willingness to work hard.

"It's so exciting to see his independence and how much

he's able to do for himself and how much he wants to do for himself," Velez said. "He's incredible."

Getting started

Blevens graduated from Little Axe High School in May and knew he wanted to go to college, not just for the degree but also for the experience. He applied and was accepted to OU.



Blevens, right, hangs out with his friend and fellow Sooner T. J. Turner. Turner was transitioned from high school to college with the help of the McCarty Center staff last fall. Turner is now a sophomore majoring in broadcast journalism.

Blevens knew the McCarty Center employees could help him make the transition to college. He had watched a friend -- a former McCarty Center patient -- attend OU last year after getting training and assistance from the hospital staff.

Blevens also knew from personal experience that hospital employees were ready to rally with him to accomplish his goals. He started using hospital services when he was 3 years old and "over the years, I just kind of fell in love. It's like my second home."

Blevens believes his experiences as a patient have helped him improve his mobility and become

more outgoing and social.

"It's given me a lot of friends and helped me form a lot of bonds," he said. "I think I made a lot of progress by coming to the McCarty Center."

Blevens came to the hospital this summer as an inpatient and started working with the transition team. Team members included social workers, occupational therapists, a physical therapist, psychological clinician, speech-language pathologist, direct care specialists and nurses.

The employees have worked with Blevens on a variety of tasks, including making transfers from his power wheelchair to the bed and bathroom in his dorm, using public transportation, managing money, cooking and strengthening and exercising.

Employees also have offered training on the dictation system he will use in class for taking notes and given him advice on how to handle the stress he may experience as a college student.

Velez said employees from OU's Housing and Food Services and the Disability Resource Center were a big help in the transition process, such as when it involved modifications to Blevens' dorm room and with his accessibility on the campus.

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Blevens transitions to the Sooner Nation

Team members also found other resources for Blevens through programs and agencies in the state. He was able to receive financial assistance for tuition and books from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services and is using computers that he received on loan from Oklahoma ABLE Tech, Velez said.

Blevens will also have help with personal care from aides with HealthCare Innovations and has received financial assistance from Ability Connect for campus parking passes for those aides, Velez said.

A bright future

Velez has a card on her desk from Blevens with a photo of them together. He signed it, "Your JD son."

Velez said she does feel like Blevens is one of her own. "It's so exciting that we've been able to watch him grow up and help him grow up."

She met Blevens in 2007 when she was a direct care specialist. The specialist's work one-on-one with patients and provide supervision and assistance.

The two had fun watching movies, listening to music, making each other laugh and taking strolls around the hospital campus.

Last month, Velez was helping him unpack and rearrange furniture in his dorm room

and joining him for lunch in the Oklahoma Memorial Union.

She is excited to see Blevens in college and said he's a smart guy who is a self-starter.

"He's got such an amazing attitude about his abilities," Velez said. "He's unstoppable and he's going to go so far."

Velez isn't the only team member who admires Blevens.

Alyse Leshar, a social worker, said she is impressed with his people skills and his persistence.

"As much as he can do for himself, he wants to do for himself," Leshar said. He's just really easy to work with and work for."



Team Dalton: Blevens' transition team consisted of (l-r) Alyse Leshar, social worker; John Every, occupational therapist; Patrick Grose, psychological clinician; Nancy Bettes, COTA; Ashli Velez, social worker; and Brittany Houck, physical therapist.

John Every, an occupational therapist, said Blevens is "one of the most motivated young men I've worked with."

Other team members say Blevens can be a source of inspiration for other patients who may want to attend college or live on their own one day.

Blevens' family members also

are delighted to see him pursuing his goal.

Lanell Blevens, his grandmother, said he's been talking about going to college for the last three years. She knows he is excited about the experience.

"I think he's going to be fine venturing out on his own," she said.

Blevens' dad, James, said he is proud of his son and seeing what he has achieved. Currently, he is helping his son with personal care needs in the evenings and is impressed with how Blevens has handled settling into a new environment.

"He's working the jitters out and I think he going to do great," James Blevens said.

Blevens said last week that he is still getting adjusted to college life, but, so far, is enjoying his classes and getting to meet new people.

College poses new challenges, tests and tasks for him, but Blevens is fine with that. "I'm not afraid to meet them," he said about challenges. "I'm not afraid to try."

"I've always been really self-motivated," he said.

He also doesn't let his disability limit him. "I've never let this wheelchair define me."

Blevens said his hope is to graduate from college and become a social worker so he can help others.