



Just 34 Minutes to a Life-Changing Moment

EVERY CHILD HAS HOPES, dreams and fantastic notions. Children with life-threatening medical conditions are no different, but they also harbor a simple wish of wellness. While that wish may take time or may never materialize, other very important and enchanting wishes do, and they happen every 34 minutes across the United States through the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Make-A-Wish is a nonprofit organization with a vision to grant a wish for every child diagnosed with a life-threatening medical condition. With legwork from wish granters, powerlifting from behind-the-scenes wish managers and generous donors, there is a powerful genie effect in the air that creates potent experiences to spark the imagination and power hope.

Every child's wish experience begins with a referral from a caring individual, such as a guardian, parent or medical professional, who possesses specific and detailed information about the child's medical condition. To be accepted into the program, a recipient must be between 2½ and 18 years old at the time of the referral, and they must have a documented life-threatening condition. Once the vetting process takes place, the child is placed on an online waiting list. Approved volunteer wish granters then can peruse the list and select a child whose wish experience they want to help realize.

Jerry Donahue of Yantis is a veteran wish granter, having arranged more than 20 wishes so far, with three more in progress. To earn the title and the right to grant wishes, he first

completed a small amount of homework that included online training, an interview and a background check. After that, he undertook his first wish assignment with help from a seasoned wish granter and mentor who worked with him from the beginning of his assignment through the "wish reveal."

Donahue's job as wish granter, he readily admits, is all fun and no work. After he selects the child he wants to work with, he visits the home to interview that child and other household members. The purpose of this visit is to learn as much as possible about the child to ensure that the wish delivered is tailored specifically for them.

"The wish experience is for the child," Donahue says. "It's not about the parents. It's not about the family. The goal is to grant the child their wish."

But family members do get to participate. This allows families to feel like a family, which many don't get to experience often due to medical obligations.

Once the wish granter identifies a direction for the wish, they formulate a wish outline and relay it to a wish manager, who is an employee at the foundation. "The wish manager does all of the legwork," Donahue says. "The first thing they do is get the attending doctor's permission. That's the first hurdle. Once they do that, they go into the feasibility of the wish." Cost, physical or illness limitations, and treatment schedules of the child are prime considerations.

Next, the manager works through complex logistics. For



OPPOSITE: Jerry Donahue, a veteran wish granter at Make-A-Wish North Texas, thoroughly enjoys his role and encourages everyone to give it a try.

ABOVE: Wish recipient Spencer Jones says he will, all his life, treasure his Make-A-Wish experience and the guitar that he bought on the shopping spree that made his wish come true.

example, if a child requires special medical equipment such as an oxygen tank or anything else at a wish site, all is arranged by the manager. The manager also works through travel arrangements to secure the travel mode best for the child. Once the manager is done planning, the wish granter's real fun begins.

During that first interview with a child, Donahue usually asks what their favorite foods and restaurants are. Then, he'll set up a surprise reveal party at that restaurant. This is a top-secret mission; even the parents are asked to keep it a secret from the child. At an appointed time, the child will be brought to the reveal party location, where friends, family members, neighbors and sometimes donors shout out the surprise, such as, "You're going to Disney World!"

Then, Donahue says, "Once the party is started and things calm down, I sit down with the parents and show them the packet and go over the whole itinerary page by page."

He says every small detail is taken care of and explained in the packet. For example, on a trip, plans would include transportation to the airport or a per diem for mileage, airline reservations, a rental car at the destination, lodging, meals, special medical arrangements, all tickets for the destination spot and even souvenir money.

What can a child wish for? They can wish to go somewhere, to be something, to meet someone, to have something, or to give something. And, sometimes, a few of those come together. Donahue tells of one little girl who adamantly expressed her love for Disney and its princesses. During their interview, she ran away, then returned minutes later, twirling about in a princess dress. She wanted to meet a real princess and one day be a real princess. She and her parents were sent on a seven-day trip, all

expenses paid, to Walt Disney World Resort. There, the 6-year-old walked and talked with Disney royalty, and even became one of them. Wish granted.

Because each is built from the imagination of a child, the possibilities for creating wishes are almost endless. Many want to travel to their favorite theme park, a beach or a place with snow. Others want to be someone for a day, such as a police officer or a fireman. Some kids want to meet their heroes, such as athletes, superheroes or singing stars. Others wish for something that they have always wanted, such as a computer or guitar, which begets a shopping spree. And then there are those kids who don't wish for themselves but wish to help others, like remodeling a playroom at an often-visited hospital. Just as every child is unique, so is every wish.

Donahue says he cherishes every wish experience, but a few stand out. One, he recalls, involved a young boy who knew exactly what he wanted: "A trip to LegoLand, to stay in a private hotel room, to ride in a limo and to eat pizza." That happened, but Donahue tells of how the event was enhanced by the unexpected generosity of the Mineola Walmart. When Donahue ordered the cake, he told them it was for a Make-A-Wish child.

"The baker said, 'I'll make the cake myself,' and she made a wonderful LegoLand cake," he says. "She also got Walmart to donate \$100 worth of Legos. Then, she and her co-workers came to the reveal party at Braums."

Another memorable wish was for a teen who wanted a guitar, which led to a special stay at the Dallas Omni Hotel and a shopping spree. On sprees, the wish granter gets to tag along. In a limousine, Donahue, the young man, and his parents and sister traveled around Dallas to buy a guitar and accessories and a

computer, eat sushi and end the day with an armload of games from GameStop.

A wish can help the children forget their discomfort for a while. But also there's empirical data from studies that back up a stronger and longer-lasting phenomenon: Children who have had a wish granted gain confidence and energy, and are more willing and able to fight through life-threatening medical conditions. These kids, along with their parents, also experience more happiness and less fear. Whole families are strengthened through the experience. Ultimately, all of those things together can even mark the turning point of a child's recovery.

Wish recipient Spencer Jones from Mineola was 17 when he was diagnosed with central nervous system vasculitis. His diagnosis came after a prolonged illness with debilitating headaches, vision problems, brain swelling and bouts of confusion. At one point, he was so gravely ill that emergency brain surgery was required, followed by months of chemotherapy.

"The whole time, it was like a flash of being on rock-bottom and then on top of Mount Everest in a whole single year," Jones says. "I was one of the happiest people at that time [of the wish granting]. I felt that through this hardship, I finally had something to look forward to."

Remember one of Donahue's favorite wishes, about the kid with the guitar? That was Jones. He's 18 now and still undergoing treatment, but he is heading off to college in the fall, and you can bet his guitar is going with him.

WISH NIGHT—AN EVENING OF WISHES

September 14, 6:30 p.m.

**Hollytree Country Club
6700 Hollytree Drive, Tyler**

An Evening of Wishes is a business-casual event featuring dinner, cocktails, a silent auction, fare from Cake & Cork, a surprise wish reveal and more! For tickets or more information about supporting Make-A-Wish, contact:

**Amy Pearson, Development Officer
Make-A-Wish North Texas
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(903) 206-4405
ntx.wish.org**

"This year, we are on track to grant more than 650 wishes," said Amy Pearson, a development officer with Make-A-Wish North Texas. "The average cost of a wish is about \$10,000." She adds, "Currently, we have 46 trained and registered wish granters in the region; we need 95, based on the number of projected wishes we are granting. Anyone over the age of 21 who enjoys making magic happen for children and who can clear a background check can become a wish granter."

Without quotas or required time commitments, some wish granters choose to work on one wish per quarter or one a year, and others have several ongoing at a time. Wish granting is flexible, and a person can devote as little or as much time as they want. Need another reason to consider becoming one? Studies show that these volunteers gain feelings of renewal in humanity and become more optimistic.

From this second, the clock is ticking down. In just 34 minutes, a wish granter's lamp will be rubbed, and magic will release and enfold a child with love, hope and strength that lasts forever.

Donahue, a member of Wood County Electric Cooperative, lives in Yantis with his wife, Leigh.

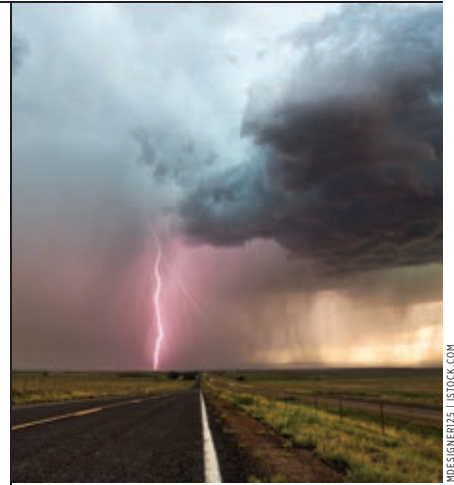


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK.COM

Lightning Safety

IT ONLY TAKES ONE STRIKE of lightning to change a person's life forever. Lightning can cause serious injuries and death. Unfortunately, lightning can be unpredictable. It does not have to be raining for lightning to strike, and you can be injured even if you are inside.

Lightning can strike up to 10 miles away from a thunderstorm. If you can hear thunder, you are within striking distance. It is best to plan ahead so you are not caught outside in a storm. However, if you cannot take shelter in a building, you can follow these tips to lessen the chances of a lightning accident:

- ▶ Take shelter in a vehicle with a solid metal roof. Close windows and avoid contact with electrical-conducting paths, such as the steering wheel, gearshift or radio.
- ▶ Avoid water, high ground and open spaces.
- ▶ Do not seek safety in open-frame shelters or vehicles, such as golf carts.
- ▶ Do not stand near poles, metal fences or bleachers, trees or even other people. Groups of people should spread out at least 20 feet apart.
- ▶ Wait until 30 minutes has passed without lightning or thunder until you return outside.

Even indoors, lightning requires safety precautions. If lightning strikes your home, it can travel through electronics and plumbing. It is safest to stay away from electronics, outlets and plumbing during storms.

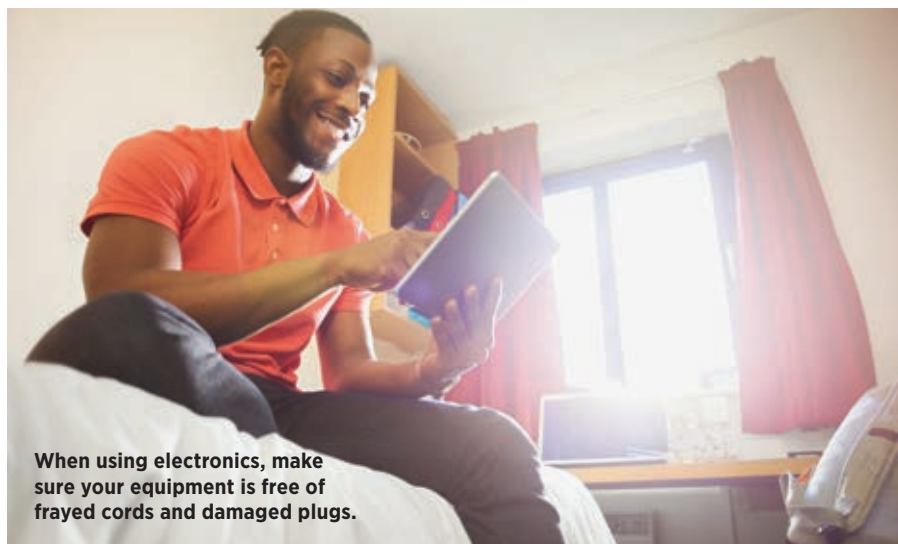
Keeping Safe at College

DO YOU HAVE KIDS RETURNING—or headed for the first time—to live in a college dorm? Among the many things they learn, make sure safety is at the top of the list.

Today's college student uses many electronics for school, work and play. When used improperly, these helpful gadgets can become electrical hazards. Wood County Electric Cooperative has the following tips for college students to prevent electrical accidents in the dorm:

- ▶ A dorm room might not provide enough outlets for all your gadgets at once. If you must use extension cords, make sure to unplug them when not in use. Extension cords are only for temporary use, and overloaded extension cords can start fires.
- ▶ Consider purchasing power strips with an over-current protector, which will shut off power automatically if too much current is drawn.
- ▶ Use lightbulbs with the correct wattage for lamps. If no indication appears on the fixture, use a bulb that uses no more than 60 watts, or the 9-watt LED equivalent.
- ▶ Never tack, nail or staple an electrical cord to any surface, or run cords across traffic paths, or under rugs or furniture.
- ▶ Keep all electrical appliances and cords safely away from bedding, curtains and other flammable materials.
- ▶ Discard or repair damaged electronics. It might be tempting to save money by using an appliance with a frayed cord or damaged plug. However, damaged electronics should not be used because they can shock or electrocute users.
- ▶ If your lights flicker, electronics shut off unexpectedly or circuits trip, notify campus staff immediately.
- ▶ Use only laboratory-certified appliances and electronics. Check for tags or packaging for the UL symbol or similar ones.
- ▶ Watch out for overheated outlets. If an electrical outlet becomes so hot that you cannot leave your hand on it, there is potential for a fire. Unplug everything from the outlet and notify your landlord or dorm officials immediately.
- ▶ Know what to do if there is a fire, including having escape and meeting plans.

There are more than 3,500 fires on college campuses every year. Help prevent some of them by understanding electrical safety and sharing what you know with loved ones.



When using electronics, make sure your equipment is free of frayed cords and damaged plugs.



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