

# Best Wishes

FALL 2023



*I wish to go to a  
wolf sanctuary*

Deshon, 17  
cancer

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*Fall is in the air (finally). It's crisp and fresh, full of new possibilities. New ideas. New beginnings.*

*Like many of you, I just sent my two kids back to school and the year feels full of new opportunities. But many of our wish families are still experiencing more of the same- hopes that are often unfulfilled, a slew of appointments and more uncertainty of the path ahead.*

*One of the programs that makes a huge impact in our ability to provide life-changing wish experiences is Kids for Wish Kids. This program support schools and youth organizations as they fundraise for wish kids and let me tell you...these kids are inspiring! We've seen schools collect coins, sell baked goods, and host spirit days all with the goal of granting the wish of another child. Sometimes that child may even go to the same school.*

*I believe the desire to be a part of something bigger than ourselves is instilled in us when we're very young. And you can see that amazing spark in these kids. Their generous acts of supporting wish kids can be transformative in who they become. It truly is inspiring.*

*As we all step into fall, remember that there are new opportunities all around us. And some of those just may lead us to new possibilities and new hope, much like a wish experience.*

*Best Wishes,  
Casey Tansey, President and CEO*



Wish kid Hadleigh's wish celebration with sponsor Greene County Tech Primary School



Wish kid Evie celebrating her wish with sponsor West Collierville Middle School

# From the Cover



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## *Into the Wild: A Tale of Family, Resilience, and Love*

In July, a community witnessed a heartwarming tale of courage, family, and the indomitable spirit of a young man named Deshon, better known as DJ. DJ, a witty and cool 17-year-old, has a passion for the arts, pro wrestling, and nature...specifically wolves. But what truly sets DJ apart is his steadfast love for his family, whom he affectionately calls his “wolf pack.”

DJ's life took an unexpected turn when doctors diagnosed him with cancer. This battle separated him from his family, as DJ spent much of his time at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. It was a trying time for DJ and his family, as they faced the challenges of the disease and the emotional toll it took on their close-knit bond.

“There were times when both of us had to be with DJ in the hospital and his siblings were with his godmother. We couldn't do it alone, we had to do it together,” Tanisha, DJ's mom, shared at his wish celebration.

Throughout this challenging journey, DJ's siblings stood by his side, offering their unwavering support and love.

Enter Make-A-Wish Mid-South. DJ's wish was simple yet profound: he wanted to visit a wolf sanctuary. It was a wish that symbolized his love for nature and his desire to break free from the confines of a hospital room.

In a unique and touching wish celebration hosted by long-time wish sponsor Paragon Bank, DJ took a moment to honor his siblings. He presented them with medals, a heartfelt gesture to acknowledge their strength and support they gave DJ during his battle. The act brought tears to his youngest brother's eyes, as he proudly accepted his medal from his older brother.

DJ's act of gratitude was a testament to the unbreakable bond of his “wolf pack” and the resilience they had shown through their challenging journey.

This summer, when DJ spent his wish trip surrounded by the majestic creatures he had longed to see; he was in awe. The experience allowed him and his family to unwind, to escape from the harsh realities of a hospital and appointments, and to revel in the beauty of nature uninterrupted. The wolf sanctuary provided a backdrop for DJ and his family to reconnect, laugh and create lasting memories. As nature often offers, it was a sanctuary not only for the wolves but also for DJ's family. The sanctuary's serene environment reflected the resilience of DJ and his family, who had weathered the storm together.

DJ's journey is a testament to the power of a wish granted and the transformative impact it can have on a young person's life. It allowed him to escape the confines of his illness, to embrace the beauty of the natural world, and to strengthen the bonds with his beloved “wolf pack.”

# Make-A-Wish loves Chi-Omega!



"It's life changing to see over 500 girls come together to make a difference in the life of a child. The joy that the child brings to the house radiates through the walls even after they leave." Lauren Hord, Chi Omega at Ole Miss

Chi Omega is not just a sisterhood; it's a powerhouse of generosity, excitement, and joy. With a rich history of community engagement and philanthropy, Chi Omega has been making a remarkable impact on the lives of countless children through its philanthropic partnership with Make-A-Wish.

Make-A-Wish Mid-South has witnessed firsthand the incredible passion and dedication of Chi Omega members. These chapters have become wish granting heroes, embracing the mission of Make-A-Wish, and going above and beyond for wish kids. Their efforts have brought smiles, hope, and healing to children and families.

"We always hear how much Make -A-Wish can change a child's life, but it has truly changed all of our lives as well. The joy when we grant a wish is one like no other, and it's a feeling you remember for the rest of your life." Hallie Perry, Chi Omega at UT-Martin





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

needs to be encouraged the most. And she ensures that someone is supporting them the whole way, even to TSA check-in.

On a wish trip day, sometimes before dawn, Kim arrives at the airport with a contagious smile that puts the wish kid and their parents at ease. Her commitment to making wish trips memorable and fun goes far beyond the call of duty.

She has not only learned the names of TSA agents but also has included them in wish celebrations, announcing in line that a wish kid is traveling, creating a celebratory atmosphere in a typically stressful environment.

One moment that has resonated with Kim the most was when she was escorting a wish family who were on their way to the famous Georgia Aquarium.

"He's a seventeen-year-old teen boy who loves fish and is nonverbal. I turned to him while we were in line and asked, 'You excited to see the fish?'"

He promptly responded, "Yes!" Shocking not only Kim but his family as well and bringing tears to his mother's eyes.

From sending off wish families on birthdays to celebrating other moments, the joy she witnesses in the eyes of wish kids and their families as they go on their dream trips is the driving force behind her commitment.

It's the indescribable sense of giving back and "wishing it forward" that fuels her.

One remarkable aspect of Kim's volunteering journey is her openness in encouraging others to get involved. She firmly believes that acts of kindness and compassion can be contagious.

"Just ask if you see us! Just get involved wherever you can and jump right on in!"

In a world filled with hustle and bustle, Kim's unwavering commitment to Make-A-Wish Mid-South serves as a beacon of hope and a reminder of the power of kindness. Kim's work at the airport is more than just volunteering; it's a labor of love and a reminder to parents that hope is never far.

"When a child finds out their wish is being granted, it gives them hope. Hope makes life better, no matter who you are."

## Jet Set Compassion: One Volunteer's Inspiring Journey as a Make-A-Wish Airport Greeter

In Northeast Arkansas, a gregarious and warm-hearted volunteer by the name of Kim Carlton has been brightening the lives of wish families for years. Kim's dedication to Make-A-Wish Mid-South has turned her into a beloved figure at the local airport where she ensures that wish families embarking on their trips have a smooth journey, even before the sun rises.

Kim's journey as an airport greeter began in 2018, but her story is rooted deeply in personal experience. Her inspiration to volunteer the first time was because of her sister, who was a volunteer first.

"I just thought it looked so fun," Kim shared. Hearing about her sister's volunteer memories inspired Kim to sign up for training but what kept Kim was her adult daughter's fight with cancer.

Witnessing her daughter's resilience and the support they received during that time ignited a desire in Kim to make a positive impact on the lives of other and to be a support system for them, especially for parents.

"As a parent, you feel guilty sometimes because you can't take the pain away, it's [diagnosis] supposed to be, not my child," Kim said.

A critical illness effects an entire family and Kim knows that that's a time when a parent



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
**Cameron, 6**  
lymphoma

# Wish



*I wish to have electronics*  
**Samuel, 3**  
cancer



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
**London, 8**  
leukemia



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
**Sawyer, 9**  
brain tumor



*I wish to have a shopping spree*  
**Cayden, 17**  
lymphoma



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
**Jonah, 10**  
leukemia



*I wish to have a golf cart*  
**Harrison, 11**  
nervous system disorder

# Kids

*I wish to go to the beach*  
Luke, 5  
cancer



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Zkareon, 9  
kidney transplant



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Hewitt, 11  
brain tumor



*I wish to have a backyard playset*  
Corbin, 3  
brain tumor



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Nicole, 14  
lymphoma



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Zoe, 7  
leukemia



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Bylie, 4  
leukemia



*I wish to go to the Star Wars Galaxy Cruiser*  
Evelyn, 17  
nervous system disorder



*I wish to go to Maui*  
Nancy-Marie, 17  
blood disorder



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Carleigh, 8  
kidney transplant



*I wish to go to Walt Disney World Resort*  
Valerin, 7  
cancer



## REFER A CHILD FOR A WISH

Referring a child for a wish takes only a few minutes and you only need basic information. A child can be referred by themselves, a family member, or a medical professional.

Start the process today at [wish.org/refer](http://wish.org/refer)

# Calendar of Events



Mick Maggi (back) with Evening of Wishes sponsors and legacy donors Dr. Rhonda and Ken Dick

**Wine for Wishes**  
Memphis, TN  
**February 2**

**Have A Heart Wishathon**  
Jonesboro, AR  
**February 16**

**KTCS Make-A-Wish Radiothon**  
Fort Smith, AR  
**April 4-5**

**Walk For Wishes NWA**  
Arvest Ballpark | Springdale, AR  
**April 13**

**Dishes for Wishes**  
Memphis, TN  
**April 28**

**Volunteer training dates:**  
Tuesday, November 14  
6-8:30 p.m. | Virtual

Saturday, January 20  
2-4:30 p.m. | Little Rock office

## Save the date:

**Make-A-Wish Golf Classic**  
Memphis, TN  
**June 2024**

**Logan Kirksey Memorial Golf Tournament**  
Malvern Country Club | Malvern, AR  
**July 2024**

Learn more about these events and more on [wish.org/midsouth](https://www.wish.org/midsouth)



## ***Empathy in Action: An Interview with Traci Adams, Social Worker at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital***

Traci Adams has been transforming lives one wish at a time. As a social worker at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, she has referred numerous of children for Make-A-Wish Mid-South.

"I talk with the patients about what's important to them and their interests and how these interest can be incorporated into a wish," Traci said.

For years, Traci has been the bridge between medical care and emotional well-being. By connecting families to Make-A-Wish, Traci is sharing the power of a wish and the profound impact wishes have. From trips to Hawaii, to Walt Disney World, or to ride in luxury sports cars, the medicine Traci recommends includes hope.

A wish isn't merely a moment—it's a transformative journey that connects a child's family, their medical team, their friends, the community, and Make-A-Wish. It has the ability to ignite hope, bolster spirits, and provide a source of strength during the most challenging of times.

Traci understands this and by making referrals to a local chapter or getting involved as a volunteer, anybody can share the power of a wish.

"My patients just light up when we discuss their wish."

Traci's involvement in wish granting at St. Jude showcases the power of compassion and determination. Even in the midst of medical challenges, it's possible to create moments of pure joy.

The joy of riding in a luxury sports car may not be a feeling that everyone is familiar with but one of Traci's patients wished to ride in a Bugatti. Traci's efforts touched not just the wish kid but his family, she helped create a memory they will never forget.

"I saw how important it was to the child and family to make lifelong memories and to give them something positive to focus on while going through treatment," Traci shared.

Through her work, Traci has become an integral part of the Wish Community. Her dedication goes beyond the medical realm and as a social worker Traci brings Make-A-Wish and families together. Traci is transforming lives one wish at a time.

***To join Traci and others in sharing the power of a wish, head to [wish.org](http://wish.org)/refer to learn how you can refer a family for a life-changing wish.***





Make-A-Wish<sup>®</sup>

# WALK FOR WISHES<sup>®</sup>

Walk For Wishes NWA 2023 was all pomp and circumstance - with festivities galore! Wish Alumni gathered for a celebratory breakfast in the morning, the U of A marching band kicked off the walk, and together we celebrated Hewitt's wish! He was completely surprised to learn his wish was granted- live on stage! A huge thanks to our amazing Northwest Arkansas Regional Board, Walk for Wishes Committee, the many committed sponsors, all of the community supporters, and the many wish families who joined us this year. We can't wait to see you again in April 2024!

Walmart 



*Kellogg's*

## A huge fundraising milestone...

Congratulations to the **Sam's Club Walk For Wishes team!** The Sam's Club team was named the **number one corporate fundraising team in the entire country!** Way to go, Sam's Club! We're so proud to have you on the team!



This year marked the 20th Anniversary of the Make-A-Wish Golf Classic! The Sunday Soiree featured an impactful performance from wish kid Mia, who wished to meet her favorite violinist, and a live auction stacked with great items! It was a great day on the course Monday as well- complete with Pronto Pups, MemPops, wish kid lemonade stands and a sold-out tournament! Thank you to our event committee for making this banner year a special one!

# Celebrating 20 years KTCS Make-A-Wish Radiothon

The River Valley made a HUGE impact for wish kids at this year's 20th Anniversary of the KTCS Make-A-Wish Radiothon! This incredible fundraising effort wouldn't be possible without our committed partners at KTCS and Gray Brothers Equipment. The mower giveaway was a huge hit as always! Thank you to the incredible volunteers and donors who are bringing wishes to life for River Valley Kids through the radiothon!





**Memphis**  
1780 Moriah Woods Blvd.  
Suite 10  
Memphis, TN 38117

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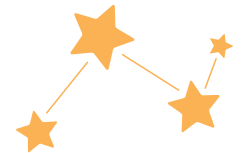
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Mandy Macke, Danyelle Mussleman and Jo Cope with wish kid LA at her wish celebration.



## *Wishes are* **WAITING**

Thanks to generous support from the Willard & Pat Walker Charitable Foundation, every donation will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$500,000 in 2023-2024.

The robust campaign also offers donors the opportunity to enjoy exclusive social events and other benefits as they connect directly with the wish kids they're helping to serve.

FOR MORE INFORMATION EMAIL  
[ESCHROEDER@MIDSOUTH.WISH.ORG](mailto:ESCHROEDER@MIDSOUTH.WISH.ORG)