

Give Kids The World Village
210 South Bass Road
Kissimmee, FL 34746
PH: 800-995-KIDS (5437)
407-396-1114
Dream@gktw.org
givekidstheworld.org

facebook.com/gktwvillage
instagram.com/gktwvillage
twitter.com/gktwvillage
youtube.com/user/givekidstheworld
linkedin.com/company/give-kids-the-world
givekidstheworld.org/blog

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miracles & memories

Summer 2021

Purchase with a Purpose

Give Kids The World Jewelry

Our beautiful jewelry makes gifting purposeful! Our Hope Ring features fine silver plating and a genuine purple Swarovski® crystal, while the HOPE String Bracelet is made with silver plating and an adjustable stretch cord. Proceeds from the purchase of every item in our online Memory Market will help make wishes come true for critically ill children and their families.

To shop online, visit www.gktw.org/shop.



Help Drive Home Our Mission

Our Give Kids The World-branded specialty license plates are here! Anyone with a valid Florida driver's license can purchase a voucher for the new plate, with a portion of the proceeds donated to the Village. Companies, consider purchasing vouchers for your fleet! Purchase online at www.gktw.org/plate, or visit your local state tax collector's office.



Printed using environmentally-friendly, vegetable-based inks.





The ties that bind the Heinrich family together are battle worn but unbreakable. Their story is one of unimaginable trials and unstoppable love; a tribute to the power of faith and the strength of the human spirit.

Every story has a watershed mark, and for Tawnya and Nick Heinrich, theirs was 2008. The joy surrounding the birth of their son, Brody, was tempered by health complications beginning when Brody was just three days old. Recurring infections and headaches over the next few years led to a series of doctor's appointments, where the Heinrichs' concerns were met with skepticism. Two-year-olds, they were told, don't get headaches. "My mother's intuition knew something wasn't right," says Tawnya. "I kept fighting for my son."

In the midst of this nightmarish journey – the late-night ER visits, the endless tests – Tawnya was dealt a devastating blow. A chance exam led to a diagnosis of her own cancer, renal cell carcinoma. As one battle continued, another began.

Tawnya, an EMT, and Nick, a technical sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, continued their relentless search for the cause of Brody's pain. Their perseverance led them to Rady Children's Hospital San Diego, where they begged neurosurgeons to perform a CT scan of Brody's brain. Then came the news no parent wants to get: Brody had a severe case

of craniosynotosis, requiring emergency surgery. "That was the day the earth crumbled under our feet," says Tawnya. Just after his third birthday, Brody underwent the first of three major surgeries to reconstruct his skull in a series of 17 surgeries to combat various medical conditions. Two days later, Brody began having seizures and was sent to the pediatric ICU. A week later, he was able to return home – but the seizures and headaches persisted.

"Being in the trenches together has blessed us with a remarkable bond. Every challenge brought us closer as a family; I don't think there's anything we can't face now. We are grateful to everyone who helped bring us to this place with special thanks to Dr. Zach Woessner, Dr. Jesse Skoch, Dr. Brian Pan and Dr. Caitlin Hammond."

Two years later, after a move from California to Ohio for Nick's military service, Brody's headaches began to increase in severity and frequency. Testing at Cincinnati Children's Hospital revealed that his skull had closed back up, putting pressure on his brain as he grew. In January 2017, Brody endured an eight-hour cranio vault remodeling surgery. Soon after, the headaches returned – excruciating this time. An endless stream of doctor's visits and hospital stays resulted in a diagnosis of severe Ehlers Danlos syndrome, adding new therapies to Brody's growing list of treatments.

Through it all, Brody's radiant smile, infectious laugh and sweet, caring disposition melted the hearts of everyone he encountered. "He is the most fearless, loving and thoughtful person I know," says Tawnya. "He kept all of us going."

Brody was determined not to miss out on childhood. In between blood draws and surgeries, he pored through Harry Potter and Goosebumps books. Nestled in his hospital bed attached to feeding tubes and heart monitors, he drew, built LEGO's and watched his favorite shows: The Fast and the Furious, Cars and WWE NXT. And whenever he was able, Brody loved to play soccer and go fishing.

"I've had the pleasure of getting to know Brody over the last six years and marvel at how capable he is of facing adversity and bouncing back after repeated medical setbacks," says Dr. Zach Woessner at Dayton Children's Hospital. "His ability to adjust to all of the things thrown at him while remaining positive, strong and resilient at such a young age is magnificent and inspiring. His zest for life and gregarious personality are also impressive. I feel privileged to have been able to learn, share, and be a small part of Brody's life. He is truly magical."

Just as things seemed to improve, Tawnya's cancer returned. Nine years old now, Brody understood what he hadn't during Tawnya's first bout with cancer. "It's my turn to take care of mom," he told Nick. And that's what he did, doing all of the things in the hospital for Tawnya after her surgery that she had done for him so many times before.



In October 2018, with Tawnya's cancer in remission, Nick – now a military contractor after 21 years in the Air Force – deployed to Iraq for a fourth time. Two months later, Brody's health took a turn for the worse; and this time, Tawnya and Brody were in it alone. Recurring seizures and trips to the ER led Tawnya and Brody to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, where tests indicated that his intracranial pressure was in the fatal range. More battle plans were drawn: another surgery would be needed. Doctors drained fluid from his brain to temporarily decrease the pressure as he waited.

In December 2019, the Heinrichs learned that Brody's wish to visit Give Kids The World had been granted. Two days later, on Brody's 11th birthday, he endured his most complex surgery yet – as well as the most painful recovery. "Knowing he would be going to Give Kids The World gave him something to look forward to...a reason to push through recovery," says Tawnya. At last, the seizures and headaches stopped.

In early March 2020, Brody and his parents arrived at the Village. "This was an adventure of a lifetime for all of us," says Nick. "Brody was overjoyed, he was able to be a kid with no worries in the world – something he fought so hard for. Brody will never forget the unlimited ice cream; the rides; the caring staff and volunteers; and the chance to meet his favorite wrestler, Tommaso Ciampa, at a WWE NXT event. The Village is truly a magical place for these children who fight big battles."

Brody's medical battles continue. Recently diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disease, Brody is recovering from surgery to remove a tumor in his foot. "He continues to inspire us every day with his tenacity and optimism," says Tawnya, who recently graduated from nursing school with the goal of becoming a pediatric critical care nurse.



A Story of Serendipity

It was serendipity that brought SNA Displays Executive Vice President Jason Helton to...Serendipity – Give Kids The World’s brand new themed pirate ship stage, recently unveiled at the Village’s Park of Dreams pool. The happy coincidence began as the Village was researching state-of-the-art LED screens for the ship, and happened upon the SNA Displays website. Jason was intrigued to see that the Village had browsed the site, and reached out to the organization that held such a special place in his heart. Twice before, it turns out, Jason had been to this magical place.

In 1992 at the age of 14, Jason was excited to become a big brother with the birth of his first sibling, Jessica. Jason eagerly took on many of the responsibilities helping to raise Jessica. The family’s bliss was broken nine months later when Jessica was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer in her brain stem and spinal cord. “Hearing there was a 97% mortality rate for that type of cancer slammed us like an earth-shattering force,” says Jason. “It’s difficult to describe the intensity of emotion when first hearing this news.”

The diagnosis led to three critical brain surgeries, followed by several years of chemotherapy. “The work of her neurosurgeon, Dr. Frederick Sklar, and her neurooncologist, Dr. Arlynn Mulne, was nothing short of miraculous,” says Jason. Still, the experience took its toll. “As a big brother watching my younger sister fighting pediatric cancer, there is a feeling of desperation and a complete lack of control over the situation,” he says. So it was extra special when the whole family was gifted with a trip to Give Kids The World. “The fact that I was included in this amazing experience meant the world to me,” says Jason.

In 1995, Jason and his family spent a memorable week at the Village, where Jessica celebrated her third birthday. “Give Kids The World brought us hope, a welcome escape, and a glimmer of happiness during what was otherwise a dark and hopeless time,” says Jason. “I remember watching as Jessica signed her star and had it placed in the Castle of Miracles; hers was one of the first stars to be placed there. The rides, the unlimited ice cream... the entire experience was very special.” Against the odds, Jessica won her battle. She is now 28 and has been cancer-free for 25 years.

In 2010, Jason’s previous childcare experience came in handy when he became a father for the first time with the birth of his daughter, Avelyn. Two years later, his son, Preston was born. In 2016 while on a Disney cruise, Jason and his wife discovered a lump on Preston’s neck which they believed to be an insect bite. After several visits to infectious disease specialists and treatments with antibiotics to no avail, the Heltons visited an ear, nose and throat doctor, who ordered a biopsy. “It was difficult to see my son in scrubs in a children’s hospital about to undergo surgery; it brought back a lot of hard memories from my sister’s cancer,” says Jason.

“The kindest souls I have ever met are those who share a smile and retain hope even when they are feeling at their worst. Thank you to everyone at Give Kids the World for supporting my family twice and allowing me to help provide unforgettable experiences to wish families.”

What came next was even more difficult; Preston was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and was hospitalized immediately. He spent his fourth birthday undergoing heavy chemotherapy treatment and fought diligently through the next three and a half years.

In 2019, Jason returned to Give Kids the World Village, this time not as an older brother of a childhood warrior but as a father of one. “The staff was absolutely amazing and the volunteers are always exceptional. Preston loved the idea of staying in a community with other children who were battling cancer,” he said.

Jason describes the wonderful but surreal experience of being back at the Village for a second time: “Preston had the most amazing week of his life. Give Kids the World provides not only an amazing trip for the wish child, but a much-needed escape for the entire family. Preston loves to play and imagine by battling enemies and we fought the Imperial forces, dark wizards, and a wide array of other characters that week.

“Preston and all of us have memories for a lifetime. Preston loved that he could eat all of the ice cream he could eat and went back for fourths on pizza. He was off the heavy doses of chemo by then and regained his appetite. He was able to ride the same carousel my sister rode 24 years earlier. It was very impactful to watch him sign his star in the same Castle of Miracles where his aunt has her star, and to see her star on the ceiling from 1995. As a brother and parent of a loved one fighting pediatric cancer, it is incredibly powerful to see so many stars together in one place. Each star represents a child’s battle with a serious illness and a family’s struggles with the constant hurdles and unknown difficulties ahead.”

In early May, Jason returned to the Village to help oversee the installation of the SNA Displays LED screen on Serendipity accompanied by his family, who enjoyed a Welcome Back Family visit. “It was extraordinary being back at the Village,” says Jason. “This was my opportunity to give back to the Village by providing the highest quality technology possible, below cost, to support the Serendipity project. The Village has been an extraordinary



beacon of hope for my family, and it’s an honor to be able to contribute something to the property.”

Jason continued, “The kindest souls I have ever met are those who share a smile and retain hope even when they are feeling at their worst. Thank you to everyone at Give Kids the World for supporting my family twice and allowing me to help provide unforgettable experiences to wish families.”

The Serendipity project was made possible by a \$1.5 million grant from the Don and Lorraine Freeberg Foundation. We are also grateful to Jason and SNA Displays, as well as SteamLabs Design Group, Icarus Exhibits Orlando and Electrosonic AV Design for their outstanding design and craftsmanship. The spectacular new pirate ship stage will serve as a wonderful centerpiece to the Village’s popular Once Upon A Village party featuring pirates, princesses and mermaids.

Thank You Kindly, Sugar-Booger

Tami O’Brien has been “lovin’ on” wish families since before the Village was a Village! Hired by Henri Landwirth as Give Kids The World’s very first employee, Tami’s radiant smile, sweet southern charm and infectious warmth have made an unforgettable impact on thousands of guests over the past 35 years. “I can’t imagine doing anything else,” she says. “It gives me a purpose for living – I feel blessed every day to be able to make a difference in the lives of these precious families.” As a member of the Village’s Guest Services team, Tami helps to ensure every wish family enjoys a remarkable customized experience. Tami also helps alumni families reminisce about precious moments and create magical new memories by spearheading GKTW’s Welcome Back Family program. It wouldn’t be a day at the Village without hearing, “What’s up, sugar-booger!” or “I hope y’all are havin’ a great day!” from Tami. You’re a peach, Tami – that’s for darn tootin’!



Village News

COMING TOGETHER TO CREATE HAPPINESS AND HOPE.

Give Kids The World is made possible by the support of countless generous donors and corporate sponsors. Through exciting events and fundraisers, they help make wishes come true for some very brave families.



WELCOME BACK FAMILY PROGRAM

We are overjoyed to begin welcoming GKTW alumni families back to the Village for one-day visits as part of our Welcome Back Family program! Reservations are required in advance, and visits are based on availability. To relive magical moments and create new family memories, visit www.gktw.org/pre/alumni.



HENRI'S STARLITE SCOOPS

When Give Kids The World hosted the March 7, 2021 grand opening of its space-themed accessible ice cream parlor, Henri's Starlite Scoops, it marked another remarkable milestone in the charity's storied history. Designed by Walt Disney Imagineering in collaboration with Universal Creative, with support from community partners and individual donors, every aspect of Henri's Starlite Scoops was created with accessibility in mind – including custom-built 28-inch tall ice cream chests, lower counter tops and an accessible toppings bar. Historic photos and NASA memorabilia help pay tribute to the life and legacy of Give Kids The World Founder Henri Landwirth.



MAYOR CLAYTON'S WONDERLAB

Opening later this year, Mayor Clayton's WonderLab is a fun, interactive learning center with an emphasis on crafts and technology. The whimsically-designed venue will serve as a focal point for creativity and exploration, featuring a state-of-the-art creation lab and an immersive gaming center with innovative accessible technology (AT).

A FUNDRAISING SLAM DUNK

Thanks to the generosity of donors nationwide, GKTW's 35 Years of Hope campaign raised nearly \$98,000 to make magical wishes come true for critically ill children like Cole from New York (pictured.) The campaign challenged every state to raise a minimum of \$3,500 in a March Madness rivalry-themed contest. It's never too late to spread joy, promote optimism and change a life!

www.gktw.org/donate



VILLA RENOVATION RE-BOOT

Extreme Village Makeover is back! During a two-phased renovation, 142 of GKTW's 166 wish family villas will be completely renovated. From new carpeting, paint and fixtures to electronics, décor and furniture, every aspect of the villas will be reimagined and upgraded. Thank you to Holiday Inn Club Vacations, Central Moving & Storage, Kellex Furniture, Simmons Mattress and Sherwin-Williams for their generous support.



JURASSIC-THEMED TRAIN EXPERIENCE

The Village's beloved JJ's Express accessible train is in the process of being replaced by an exciting new Jurassic-themed train experience. This spectacular new attraction will take visiting wish families on an immersive journey through prehistoric caves, paleontology dig areas and more. We are grateful to Crafted AV, Scenario, Updike Creative, Aye-Five Attraction & Entertainment Development, Color Reflections, Eric Williams Creative, Pachinko Media, TheStory LLC and Stefan Rules for their exceptional design and craftsmanship.

GINGERBREAD RUN RETURNS

Give Kids The World's popular Gingerbread Run will be returning to the Village on Saturday, November 6, 2021. Participants can immerse themselves in the childlike wonder and whimsy of our magical storybook Village as they run, roll or stroll a 5K through our 89-acre nonprofit resort – past snoring trees, an enchanting castle, the world's largest Candy Land game, and more. Participants can join in the fun on-site at the Village, or create their own unique challenge and participate virtually, from anywhere in the world. To register or for more information, visit www.gktw.org/gbr.



BLACK & WHITE GALA WITH A BROADWAY TWIST

For the first time ever, Give Kids The World's Black & White Gala will be held under the stars at the Village on Saturday, September 18, 2021, enabling guests to experience the magic of our whimsical nonprofit resort. Immerse yourself in the enchantment and wonder of the Village during an elegant evening of breathtaking décor, exquisite dining and dazzling entertainment – featuring performances by five of Broadway's brightest stars. Nik Walker (Hamilton, Ain't Too Proud), Jen Sese (Hamilton, Hair), Roberto Sinha (Hamilton, Kinky Boots), Sasha Hutchings (Hamilton, Oklahoma!) and Jevon McFerrin (Hamilton, Motown The Musical) will headline what promises to be an unforgettable night. For reservations and more information, visit www.gktw.org/gala.



DIS FAMILY REUNION

Scheduled to take place September 9-11 at Walt Disney World®, the DIS Family Reunion 2021 is a one-of-a-kind expo celebrating all facets of the wonderful world of Disney – from Disney, Marvel and Pixar animation to film, television, theme parks, music and memorabilia. Presenters will include iconic Wheel of Fortune host Pat Sajak; Celebrity Chef Art Smith; Jodi Benson, the voice of Princess Ariel from Disney's The Little Mermaid; Walt Disney World Resort President Jeff Vahle; and more. An exclusive private party will also be held on September 11 at Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge at Disney's Hollywood Studios, with proceeds benefiting Give Kids The World. For tickets and more information, visit www.gktw.org/disfam.

