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Business donation supports horse camp

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Camp Casey, a horse camp program designed for children fighting cancer, reaches out to those in need every month during the summer.

When founder Molly Melamed was in need of a trailer for the program, her charitable efforts came full-circle.

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Just two days after letters were mailed out, Doug Vandenberg, owner of Joe's Trailer Mfg., Inc. in Livonia, responded.

"They're program sounded really good," said Vandenberg. "We thought we'd help them out."

His small company donated a 5-by-8-foot trailer worth \$1,600 to the program. It is enclosed and water-proof, he said, and being used to transport saddles and horse equipment to farms where the camps are offered.

Molly Melamed founded the camp three years ago. At the time she was a journalism student at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Melamed worked as a horseback riding instructor at a horse farm in the nearby town of Haslett.

There, she met a young girl named Casey Foote, who shared her love for animals. Casey suffered from bone and brain cancer.

"No matter how sick she was when she was around the horses she felt great," Molly Melamed recalled. "She had a huge impact on everyone at the barn."

Casey died in August 2002. In an effort to create something special in her memory, Melamed established Camp Casey to bring joy to children who were battling the disease.

"This is a huge passion of mine," said Melamed, originally from Farmington Hills.

Some children first time.

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She worked with barn owners, veterinary and nursing students from MSU, and staff members at Sparrow Hospital, to create the first volunteer-run camp. Children with cancer and their siblings were invited to spend a day riding horses, creating arts and crafts and enjoying themselves. Since its start, the program has only continued to grow.

"This year there has been such a response from all the hospitals, we're taking the show on the road," said Melamed.

The new trailer allows the program to move into the metro Detroit area, and reach children referred by the University of Michigan Hospital, William Beaumont Hospitals and Children's Hospital of Detroit.

"For something so small, we're able to reach so many more children," she said.

Now a full-fledged non-profit operating on a small budget, Camp Casey will be offered at area barns. Owners have volunteered their horses and property for the day.

"You really do get to see the good in people," said Melamed.

The camps are tailored to the children who attend, though most are between 6- and 13-years-old. Volunteers are trained to work with children who have cancer, and safety procedures are in place, Melamed said.

Camp Casey will be offered three times this summer: June 24 in Davisburg, July 8 in South Lyon, and Aug. 26 in Lansing.

For more information about the non-profit Michigan program or to donate to the cause, visit www.camp-casey.org.

scasola@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2054

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