

The Jared Box

Bishop Carroll students collect items for cancer children

By HUGH CONRAD
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Family tragedies provide parents with periods of intense pain and grief that often only time and spiritual beliefs can heal. The death of the 6-year-old son of former Cambria County residents has provided an impetus for a project that has now touches chronically-ill children in 11 states.

Jared McMullen, son of Craig and Ruth (Emerick) McMullen of State College, was diagnosed with Glioma, which is a cancerous tumor of the brain stem, in 1999 when he was 5 years old. The youngest of four children, he was treated at Geisinger's Medical Center in Danville, Montour County, putting up a courageous fight. He passed away shortly after his sixth birthday.

Enter "The Jared Box," a special project that has helped the McMullens, who are both graduates of Bishop Carroll High School in Ebensburg, as well as thousands of other young people.

"It has helped our whole family, my husband, Craig, and our children, through the grieving process," Mrs. McMillen said about the project early last week in a telephone interview. "It has been very heartwarming to see this (taking off). It helps encourage us to keep working to make more Jared Boxes to help the families who are experiencing what we went through. It helps bring smiles to the faces of the children, and that is very helpful."

What is a Jared Box? A little history will help explain what



Bishop Carroll students collected items for Jared Boxes that were distributed to Allegheny General Hospital. The students are (left to right) Emily Alex, Andrew Wolfe, Alex Wolfe, Stephanie Bukowski, Natalie Bukowski, Suzanne Kretschman, Valerie Bukowski, Rose Hege-mann and Chris Koren.

transpired. When the McMullens were going through the early stages of their grieving process, Cindy Kolarik of Port Mathilda, Centre County, approached Mrs. McMillen with an idea.

"We went to the same church as the McMullens, Our Lady of Victory in State College, and I knew when their son was diagnosed with a brain tumor that it was a parent's worst nightmare," Kolarik said. "I was trying, as a parent and friend, to put this in focus and make the best of the situation. After Jared passed away, I approached Ruth during

(Catholic Children's Camp) at Our Lady of Victory I said to Ruth that it would be a nice service project for the kids to make boxes to give to kids like Jared when they are having chemotherapy. We could put little things in the boxes like crayons, coloring books, card games, puzzles, toiletries, toothpaste—things to keep them occupied for the hours that they are getting treatments."

From that idea, Jared Boxes became reality, serving simply as a shoe-box or a similar one of that size. They are filled with toys for a small boy or a girl, with the contents varying depending on their ages. The boxes are delivered to hospitals that treat chronically ill children.

This idea of Kolarik's was originally conceived as a one-time project, making some boxes to deliver to a hospital in Jared's name. But, the idea caught on with many groups, including the Student Activities Council (SAC) at Bishop Carroll.

"Last year, in our first year of the project, we invited Jared's mom, Ruth, to come back to Bish-

op Carroll for a day and speak to individual classes about Jared and the project," Kristie Wolfe of Portage, moderator of the SAC, said. "She touched our hearts in a way we will never forget. She had stories and pictures of Jared, from before his illness and throughout it. Her faith and love were so evident and so strong. Everyone who heard her speak was moved, many to tears, and all of us to action. We will continue this project in Jared's honor, in honor of the faith and courage of his family. We continue to do it for all the families we don't even know who face extraordinarily difficult situations with their

children."

Valerie Bukowski of Hastings, a senior at Bishop Carroll, initially brought the idea to the SAC.

"Jared's grandparents, Jack and Dorothy Emerick, are friends of my family," Bukowski, daughter of Steve and Colleen Bukowski, said. "Mrs. Emerick told my mother about the project. I thought it was a wonderful project and asked Mrs. Wolfe if we could do this as a community service project for Student Activity Council."

The Bishop Carroll students gave up a free day on Easter Monday to deliver the boxes to Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh. Debbie Ziegler appreciates the Jared Boxes.

"The expressions on the children's faces have been priceless upon peering into the boxes and discovering a wonderful assortment of toys, stuffed animals, puzzle books, games, nail polish, body sprays—geared specifically for them," Ziegler, a Certified Child Life Specialist at Allegheny General, said.

"We serve a population of children and adolescents ranging in age from birth to 18 years of age. I have been overwhelmed by positive responses from the medical staff, the nurses, and the pediatric patients and parents regarding the presentation of the Jared Boxes from Kristie Wolfe and her students at Bishop Carroll High School."

Bukowski has been so touched by the opportunity that she hopes to take it with her to college next year.

"I think that the Jared Box Project is such a wonderful project that I would like to coordinate it as a service project at Juniata (College)," Bukowski said. "I would also like to say how courageous Jared's parents are. They lost a child in a very tragic way but they didn't let their grief overcome them. They are continuing a project that they know would make Jared happy."

The McMullens are the parents of three other children: Daniel, 15; Sara, 13; and Marc, 11.

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- Internet: www.the-jaredbox.com.
- E-mail: TheJaredBox@aol.com.
- Phone: (814) 353-9343.
- Address: Jareds Box, 129 Fenwick Drive, Port Mathilda, Pa. 16870.