

A work of heart: Kylie shops for kids with cancer

By HB Steadham, Executive Editor

COLONIE – Santa has a new helper this year in big-hearted 14-year-old Kylie Parslow of Schoharie.

Thanks to the charity Finding the Next Step Together—whose mission is to support families with children facing life-changing diagnoses—and the Colonie Target store, Kylie was able to pick out about \$500 in toys for children receiving treatment at Albany Medical Center (AMC).

Diagnosed with a cancerous brain tumor back in February, Kylie underwent surgery at AMC and made a friend while she was there—a little Amish girl, who had been kicked in the face by a horse. On the day Kylie was being discharged, the little girl couldn't get out of bed, even though there was an opportunity to build a teddy bear. Kylie wouldn't leave until she built her friend a teddy bear and took it to her in her hospital room.

"I heard about the Build-A-Bear," Finding the Next Step Together's Kristie Russitano said of meeting Kylie at a benefit earlier this year. "She is always thinking of others. After my first visit with Kylie and her family, I knew it would not be our last visit. She is a young lady that you immediately adore."

After hearing about Kylie's generosity and heart, Russitano and her foundation came up with an idea. They'd had a large motorcycle fundraising event in July with the American Legion Riders, and they decided they'd use the 50/50 money to take Kylie shopping for toys to give to children at AMC's the Melodies Center, which provides care for children and teens with cancer and blood disorders.

The winner of the 50/50 even gave back their take to go toward the shopping trip.

Finding the Next Step Together then coordinated with Kiley and her mom Celeste, and this past Saturday—in a big, black Lincoln Navigator provided by Adonis Avanti Transportation—the group headed to Target in Colonie.

And quite a group it was, too, including Russitano, Kylie, Celeste, Kylie's little brother Connor, and Kylie's best friend, Derek Wood.

"He goes everywhere with her," Celeste says of Derek. "Kylie has to be careful, as her chemo causes adverse reactions to sun exposure. Derek would stay with Kylie when all the other kids went out to play."

Derek even accompanies Kylie to her weekly chemo treatments, which she'll be doing for the next five years.

"He's everything you'd want in a best friend," Celeste said.

Also at Target on Saturday was Bullseye, Target's mascot. And—in another example of how great everyone involved in this day was—the man in the suit was Executive Team Leader John Scognamiglio, who came in on his day off to brighten up the spree.

At checkout, the Target team price-matched to their online store. If something was cheaper online, they gave Kylie the lowest price—meaning she could get more toys for the kids at AMC.

The Parslow family has had more than their share of hardships recently. Two years ago, Kylie's older brother Nate lost his dominant arm in a car accident—which Kylie was in. And, in addition to her cancer diagnosis, Kylie is blind in her right eye and has no peripheral vision in her left due to allergic reactions to her first two chemotherapy treatments. Kylie's hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows are now growing in white, and she has to undergo an MRI every three months to make sure the tumor, which is located on her pituitary, hasn't grown.

But when asked if there's a fund to donate to in order to support her family, Celeste points back to Finding the Next Step Together. "That's who you can donate to," she said.

And with random kids visiting Target running up to Bullseye and giving him a hug, and Derek hugging Kylie, and Kylie hugging a stuffed-animal Stitch from the Disney movie *Lilo & Stitch* (which Russitano had to convince Kylie was okay to get for herself), and Russitano watching it all with the widest smile, it becomes evident that while Kylie's heart is indeed a big one, she's not alone in that regard.

For more information about Finding the Next Step Together, visit findingthenextstepttogether.org.



