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Organization, donators team up to provide bicycles for children

By DEBRA LANDIS
CORRESPONDENT

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CHATHAM - Last Christmas, Frank Brummer told his son, Nick, and his three other children that each of them would receive \$1,000 as a Christmas gift from him but that the money was to go to a charity of their choice.

"He said, 'I want you to feel a part of something,'" recalled Nick Brummer, a special education teacher at Ball Elementary School.

Brummer made his choice, donating his \$1,000 to the St. Joseph, Mo.,-based Mark Reynolds Bike Fund. The organization works with bicycle distributors, schools, churches and other groups across the country to provide bicycles and helmets to children identified as low-income or others as having special needs.

On Saturday, about a dozen students from Ball Elementary and Chatham Elementary received new bicycles and helmets through the Mark Reynolds Bike Fund, Brummer's donation and an additional \$2,500 donated by central Illinois residents and businesses. Three-wheeled bicycles also were provided to a special education classroom that includes children with autism.

"This is awesome," said Nick Brummer, an avid bicyclist, who, along with his father, participates in competitive bike races.

The Ball-Chatham students were presented their new bicycles and helmets in a ceremony Saturday and allowed to ride the bikes around the Ball Elementary cafeteria.

Bikes ranged in size and style depending upon a student's gender, age and size. Some included "training wheels."

Among the students was first-grader Jacob Moore, who is autistic.

"Did you see the look on his face? It was one of joy," said Dona Reynolds.



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Reynolds said she and her husband, Gary, started the Mark Reynolds Bike Fund in memory of their son, Mark, and to continue their son's desire to see as many children as possible enjoy the benefits of safe bike riding. Mark Reynolds was 35 years old when he was attacked and killed in 2004 by a mountain lion while riding a bike in a state park in southern California.

Prior to 2004, Mark had, for years, raised money to buy bicycles and helmets for children who otherwise may never have experienced the joys and health benefits of bicycle riding, Dona said.

Even as a boy with severe asthma, Mark rode a bike, Dona said, adding that she believed the physical exertion from the exercise helped build up Mark's lung capacity.

In addition to promoting the joys and health benefits of bike riding, the Mike Reynolds Bike Fund also stresses bike safety, said Dona.

"Always wear a helmet while riding your bike," Dona told the children Saturday.

Becky Moore on Saturday watched her son, Jacob, pedal his bike around the Ball Elementary cafeteria. The bike was equipped with a larger seat than typical to accommodate larger-than-average children.

"Jacob loves to ride bikes," Becky said. "It offers him exercise and fosters independence."

Children with autism, as with other children, benefit from bicycling, said Ball Elementary special education teacher Shelly Phillips.

"Bike riding allows them to do the same thing other children do. It provides some freedoms and it gives them wings to fly," Phillips said.

Dona Reynolds recalled a child with Down syndrome who was "very non-verbal" but began talking after he received a bicycle through the Mark Reynolds Bike Fund.

"When he rides his bike, he talks. When he doesn't, he doesn't talk. The first time he rode a bike, his first three words were 'Mark, bike and ride.' He had seen Mark's picture," Dona said.

Prior to Saturday, 6-year-old Sean Robinson had only ridden an old, rickety bike, said his mother, Marcy Godeia, adding, "He is so excited."

Assisting Nick Brummer with fundraising and organizing Saturday's event were Glenwood Middle School teacher Natalie Piscia and Matt Saner, owner of the Wheel Fast Bicycle Co. in Chatham.

Saner and other bicycle distributors who work with the Mark Reynolds Bike Fund provide bikes at-cost, assemble the bikes, and make sure the bikes fit the children receiving them.

For more information about the Mark Reynolds Bike Fund, see www.markreynoldsfund.org.

Debra Landis can be reached through the metro desk at 788-1519.

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What a great story! wrote at 4/15/2007 9:02:52 AM

Great story and inspiring legacy of Mark Reynolds!