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Joe Joe Bear Foundation gives comfort to children

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Jeanette Maurer and her husband, Albert, created the Joe Joe Bear Foundation to provide bears to children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. Their godson, Joseph David Ordaz, was undergoing treatment for Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia when he requested a teddy bear to hold for comfort. He did not want to be alone.

Sadly, Joe passed away on March 10, 2009, but Jeanette and Albert keep his memory alive by helping children in similar situations.

The Joe Joe Bear Foundation provides new teddy bears for hospitals and hospices all over the Houston area. The Texas-based 501 (C)(3) non-profit organization just celebrated its 10th anniversary, and in those years, over 30,000 bears have been given to critically ill children.

The first Joe Joe Bear was given just 10 days after Joe passed away. The recipient was a 12-year-old girl who was battling cancer at MD Anderson. She is now a registered nurse, and Jeanette and the foundation keep in touch with her even now.

All the bears are purchased in bulk to meet the growing demands. In January, Jeanette Maurer needed to purchase 6000 bears per year, but currently, the demand calls for 8000 bears to be purchased. Maurer anticipates she will need 25,000 bears by the end of the year.

“We are getting requests from hospital across the country,” Maurer stated.

The bears were specially designed for the foundation. Maurer was able to choose the styles and textures of the bears. She said, “I was given a few samples of the bears we were choosing from, and I took them to Starbucks. I started passing them around and asked people which bear they liked to hug best. We had a ‘hug-off’ to test out the bears.”

The problem the Joe Joe Bear Foundation is facing is a lack of funding. Donations keep the foundation afloat. In the past, new bears were accepted as donations. Unfortunately, after Hurricane Harvey, Maurer began receiving a surplus of used bears being passed off as new. Over 2000 bears were given to the Joe Joe Bear Foundation but were not acceptable to give away, because, once a bear is used, a child with cancer or any other life-threatening diseases cannot use them. Weakened immune systems make these children susceptible to complications, and these used bears would carry germs. Since then, the foundation cannot accept donations of bears and needs money to purchase brand new bears for recipients.

Also, since Hurricane Harvey, the demand for bears has gone up but monetary donations have gone down. Maurer explained, “A large number of nonprofit organization have gone out of business after Harvey, because they weren’t able to get donations.” She discussed that while organizations like the American Red Cross receive a substantial amount of donations, “People don’t often think of the other, much smaller organizations that need help too.”

The Joe Joe Bear Foundation also helps link people to educational resources on its website. “Families keep telling us they need someplace to find information,” Jeanette explained. She decided to reach out to Texas Children’s Hospital who shared their research information she

used to create her own online platform. The site gives people access to online webinars and resource materials to grasp a better understanding of many illnesses, assistance, care and grief. Should more funding become available, Jeannette plans to also create an online support group, moderated by professional counselors, for people who are bedridden and families who cannot travel to find support.

Maurer also remembers one recipient who especially stands out to her: a young girl named Ariel who suffered from Neuroblastoma. Ariel had lost her older brother to the same disease just five years earlier. She received her first bear while she battled the brain cancer. She went into remission, but the disease had returned. The Joe Joe Bear Foundation gave her a second bear to comfort her during her fight. Ariel passed away, and the foundation gave her a third bear to be buried with at her funeral.

Maurer keeps Joe's spirit alive through her work with the foundation, and reminds the community that, especially when it comes to battling cancer and other diseases, it is all about giving back and what people can do to help others.

On Friday, May 31st, the foundation will be hosting its first annual Joe Joe Bear Charity Skeet Shoot that will include an auction and gun raffle at the Westside Sporting Grounds located 10120 Pattison Road. The foundation will also be hosting the annual Joe Joe Bear Golf Classic on Monday, September 29th at The Club at Falcon Point at 24502 Falcon Point Drive. All the proceeds will go toward purchasing more bears to bring comfort to suffering children.

For more information on the Joe Joe Bear Foundation or do donate or volunteer, visit www.joejoebear.org.