



# Orlando Sentinel

## Wish granted: Teen visits president

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The moment Glenn Stepp III walked into the Oval Office he was struck by the room's brightness.

While he was trying to take in the magnificence of his surroundings, his brain also had to grasp that one of the most powerful men in the world was standing across from him.

Visiting the White House and meeting President Bush was a dream come true, and the Casselberry high-school senior had only about five minutes to soak it all up.

"The president was awesome," Glenn said. "When I walked in there, he said, 'Are you nervous?' I shook my head and he said, 'Well, don't be.' "

Glenn took a deep breath and had a memorable conversation with the president during his March 10 visit. They talked about the president's thoughts on home schooling and his plans after he leaves office.

"I asked him if he knew where he wanted to live," said Glenn, who is home-schooled through Circle Christian School. "He said he wasn't sure, but he had some ideas and his wife had some ideas."

They even talked about the rug they were standing on -- a floor piece that changes with each administration.

"He said his wife designed it," said Glenn, 18. "He told me he wasn't very good with fashion, so he left the design of the rug up to her."

The conversation was followed by a series of photo shoots with the president and U.S. Rep. Tom Feeney, R-Oviedo.

The brief meeting was the result of Glenn's wish, backed up by a lot of work and planning by a group of University of Central Florida student volunteers, a local nonprofit group called New Hope for Kids and Feeney's office.

Glenn's parents, Lisa and Glenn Stepp II, contacted New Hope for Kids last year to help make their son's wish a reality. Glenn lives with spina bifida, a birth defect that left his spinal cord incompletely developed. The Maitland-based organization grants wishes to children with life-changing illnesses, as well as grieving children and their families.

Glenn's name was picked by a group of UCF business students working on a service-learning project for class. The projects are part of a required course in the College of Business Administration called Cornerstone, in which students volunteer for a semester with area nonprofits and philanthropic government agencies. About 550 UCF business majors have helped raised more than \$180,000 for New Hope's wish program since 1993.

The five undergraduates working to fulfill Glenn's dream met their goal of \$1,200 for his trip by having a carwash, soliciting donations and hosting a dinner at a local barbecue restaurant.

They also enlisted the help of Feeney, who made arrangements with the White House and donated \$250 toward the trip.

"It was complicated getting everything organized, but worth it," said Sara Dykie, one of the students in the service-learning group. "You realize that there are so many people out there who deserve these wishes, that if you take a couple months and volunteer your time, you can change somebody's life."

Glenn asked to go to the White House and meet the president after he took a government class last year.

He and his parents were treated to a lot more than the presidential visit. They stayed in a hotel about 15 minutes' walking distance from the Capitol. Glenn said he could lie in bed and see the dome.

Their six-day trip included a 2 a.m. visit to NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md., where he watched the shuttle launch and met astronauts later that day. They also visited the National Archives, the Capitol and the Washington Monument and sat in on a congressional session.

He and his dad, a postal worker in Pine Castle, even took in a Washington Wizards basketball game.

"We were busy the whole time," Glenn said. "I mean we were on the go from 8 in the morning to 10 at night."

He added that the experience taught him a lot more than he expected.

"I gained the confidence to ask for things . . . to be bold enough to ask," Glenn said. "We didn't even know this was possible, but we had this dream, so we just asked for it and a lot of people helped it come true."

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