

Wishful Thinking

By Pamela and Tony Ruben

The executive director of New Hope's "Wishes for Kids" is a real-life fairy godmother to hundreds of kids.

Rosie Wilder has been a real-life "fairy godmother," granting wishes for kids since 1999, when she became the director of the "Wishes for Kids" program for New Hope for Kids, Inc. based in Maitland and Fern Park. Wilder spends her days meeting with kids with life-threatening illnesses, offering support to their families and granting a special wish to improve the quality of life for the ailing child.

"I was serving as New Hope's volunteer manager when the opportunity to grant wishes was offered to me," Wilder says. "The prospect of helping children by granting their special wish had an appeal I couldn't resist."

Wilder knows firsthand that hope is essential, even in the most trying of circumstances. In 1989 Wilder lost her husband of 18 years, following a long battle with depression. The loss left her emotionally devastated, a single parent to two preteen children and the sole household breadwinner. Wilder grieved for a while, but then came to the realization that her family needed a new source of hope in order to heal. Wilder wrote in her journal, prayed and decided to return to school for a master's degree in mental health counseling. This fit in perfectly with New Hope's mission to help others in crisis. She was able to use her educational and personal experiences to help others.

"When tragedy presents itself we can make choices. I decided to use the reservoir of strength I had built to make a difference in the life of others who could draw from it."

Wilder holds a special place in her heart for each of the 550 kids she has served, and their stories moti-

vate her to grant wishes for every child in need. Wilder was especially touched by **Monica's** story. Monica was a typical 10-year-old girl. Then, she received the catastrophic blow of a cancer diagnosis. Monica lost her pituitary gland, which led to additional complications, including cirrhosis of the liver and blindness.

"When I met Monica, she was 17, and her young life had been turned upside down," Wilder says. "No longer able to attend school because she was in constant pain, I was amazed to find her pleasant and maintaining a positive outlook."

Monica wished for a temper-pedic bed to alleviate bruising and pain when she slept. New Hope for Kids was able to grant her wish and more. The University of Central Florida's Cornerstone program stepped in to help. They raised \$2,600 and also gifted Monica with new

linens and redecorated her room.

"I will never forget the courage of this young lady and the other New Hope kids I have met that inspire me with their bravery each and every day," Wilder says.

Granting wishes has changed not only the children's lives, but Wilder's life as well. "We all have days when our troubles weigh us down, when life is frustrating or disappointing. Every visit with these courageous kids reminds me to share fewer complaints and more appreciation." **L**



JOE BROOKS PHOTOGRAPHY

Rosie Wilder grants wishes for kids as director for the "Wishes for Kids" program at New Hope for Kids, Inc.

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