

## **A Short History of the MWG Toy Program involvement with the Children's Hospital Snowpile Program**

The Children's Hospital Snowpile program is a patient and family centered care model of gift giving for children and teens who are hospitalized during the holiday season. Anxieties and stresses related to illness, separation from family and medical encounters can take quite a toll on children and families alike. Throw in recent events such as Covid 19 and you can easily understand how this could affect a patient's response to treatment. Whether battling a life-threatening illness, recuperating from surgery or just in for a routine check-up, children need to relax and be children. And that includes playtime.

Toys, games and the like help children engage their imagination and create a diversion during stressful times. The Children's Hospital staff within this Child Life program is trained to use developmental interventions and play to help not only the child patient but their families adjust to and understand the hospital and medical situation.

There are many recommended toys, both purchased through normal channels and handmade, that are donated on a regular basis. However, we must remember that our handmade toys must meet certain standards for safety and cleanliness. All these standards are well documented in our website.

The donated toys are distributed through the holiday season to child patients as gifts. Toys are also distributed to the many clinics and patient waiting rooms throughout the Hospital Complex as a means of engaging a child while waiting for treatment or to see a specialist. Some toys are also given to siblings of a child patient. All this helps to reinforce the therapeutic function by bringing a sense of joy and normalcy to the life of a hospitalized child who may really need a reason to smile.

### **Beginnings of the MWG Toy Program**

MWG first became involved in toy making in the mid 1980's when toys were donated from the Guild to the Salvation Army. In 1988, under the organization of Dave Wilson, several hundred toys were donated to Children's Hospital, Utica Lion's Club and the Rochester Neighborhood House. By 1990, the program expanded even more under the organization of Dave Wilson, Stu Falls and Tom Kearns. In that year toys were distributed to the Wellness House and Children's Leukemia Foundation along with the aforementioned organizations. Starting in 1991, Tony Pieterzak became involved with the toy program along with his brother Richard, members Stu Falls, John Amiot, and

Jim McCann. These individuals organized the distribution to Toys for Tots, Capuchin Soup Kitchen and other charities.

### A More Organized Effort towards Toy Production

During the mid 1990's, Tony Pieterzak became totally committed to the toy program and would work long days to build toys to assure the guild had several hundred toys to deliver in early December. Despite Tony's efforts to get other members to build and donate toys he ended up producing a high percentage of the toys himself. Guild leaders became concerned that Tony was overworking himself so in 1997, members Ken Wolf and Richard Boulard were asked to assist in the production of toys and help share some of the program duties and contacts necessary to continue the program.

During the next few years more members became involved in building toys, with Tony leading a toy building team of about 5-7 members which greatly improved the ability to build more quality toys more efficiently. During this time, guidelines for toy builders were developed which improved toy quality and consistency of manufacture and finish.

Ken eventually became the sole toy program leader helping to expand the program to include memory boxes and multi-purpose boxes which are still part of the program to this day. Ken has also maintained many demo toys, supplies and development of jigs to help in the production of toys.

### MWG Efforts to Support Children's Hospital

Over the years MWG members have stepped up to help the hospital meet their needs/requests. These projects include bookshelves, picture frames, a pedal airplane to transport from one location to another and a toy sized MRI so that children could be comfortable when time came to have an actual MRI performed. At different times MWG has assisted in hospital fund raising events (golf outings & shooting sports club events) where members manned a booth with guild toys along with donating toys to silent auction events. Some of the member made and donated toys for these auctions were large and quite elaborate. Reportedly, a former Detroit Tiger's player bid \$1000 for one of our donated toys.

A very special achievement occurred in 2012 when the Guild entered a Minwax nationwide contest for organizations that met a "Do Good with Wood" theme and won first place in the nation. The prize included \$5000, a supply of their finishes, small mementos for guild attendees and a special presentation to our guild by a Minwax VP and finishing. This award was largely based on our support of the hospital and MITES.

## Our Current Toy Program, Supplies and Contacts

About 2017 Ken expressed that it was time for the toy program to be passed on to other members for leadership. Ron Ross agreed to become toy chair with the assistance of Dan Holowicki. Ken continued to guide the program for a couple years as these two learned the ropes, yet his expertise and insight is still drawn on to this day. The hope is for the toy program to continue to thrive, getting involvement from additional members and provide the hospital with 400+ toys and boxes every year.

As has always been the policy, the Guild will provide wheels (1", 1 ¼" or 1 ½" dia), nylon washers and wheel pegs free of charge to any member who wishes to make toys for this program.

For further information, wheel and axles requests or to arrange to drop off toys, please contact

**Ron Ross** - 734- 812-5531 - [ross1508@gmail.com](mailto:ross1508@gmail.com)

**Dan Holowicki** - 313-702-5836 - [dan56laura@att.net](mailto:dan56laura@att.net)