

Birthday Boy Shares Gifts and Smiles

By Stacey Bomser

Many people believe your birthday is "your" day. It's the day when family and friends shower you with attention and gifts. This is particularly true for children who often leave their parties with bags full of new toys and games. But one Weston youngster is turning the tables on this so-called tradition and teaching children the importance of sharing and caring for those less fortunate.

Paxton Terris is encouraging children to give away their gifts (or at least one of them) to a sick child. In fact, he has started the What's Mine Is Yours Foundation to distribute these donated birthday presents to pediatric patients in area hospitals.

The project started a few months ago following Paxton's 7th birthday party. He selected one of his brand new birthday presents to bring to Plantation General Hospital. He gave a Star Wars Lego set to a 10-year-old boy. "It's good that I picked that one (gift) because the boy was really good at Lego's," said Paxton.

Supporting sick children is a cause that is

near and dear to the Terris family. Paxton's father used to play professional baseball and visited many children's hospitals to meet young fans. "That had a profound effect on him and he always wanted to share that feeling with our children," says Michelle Terris, Paxton's mother. "We've always tried to instill values in our children; to teach them to think of others before themselves."

She says it was no surprise to her that Paxton announced he wanted to share one of his birthday presents with a sick child. "He has a real understanding of how these children feel because he had been hospitalized several times when he



Paxton Terris shares one of his birthday presents with a sick child at Memorial Hospital West.

was younger," explains Michelle.

Apparently it was these thoughts that motivated Paxton. "I thought about sick children

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in the hospital and thought what if I was one of them. What would I be doing?" He says he would want a new toy to play with and keep him busy and happy, so he wanted to share one of his new birthday gifts. When asked how this selfless act made him feel, Paxton replied, "I felt proud of myself. It made me feel good to see him happy and smiling."

In fact, according to Michelle, Paxton told her he felt such pride and power from what he did that he wanted to give away all of his birthday gifts to sick children. She says she told him that was a lovely gesture and that he could go back another day and share a few more gifts. That is exactly what Paxton did and from this the What's Mine is Yours Foundation was formed.

Paxton says he gave away about four or five of his gifts to children in area hospitals. And his younger sister, Peyton, has already pledged to donate some of her presents on her next birthday. The two are now encouraging other children to do the same. "I told my friends what I did and talked to them about why they could maybe do it too," says Paxton.

The What's Mine Is Yours Foundation is

now collecting donated birthday gifts to give to young patients at Plantation General and Memorial Hospital West, with hopes of adding Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital and Jackson Memorial in the near future. "Paxton is committed to delivering these donations to the sick children on a monthly basis," says Michelle. She says any child who is interested is welcome to accompany them on these visits. Presents can also be left at one of the area drop-off sites, including: Imperial Martial Arts at 1375 Shotgun Road near Weston; Dr. Abby Wilentz's office at Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics, 7400 NW 5th Street in Plantation; Dr. Mark Stavitsky's office at Children's Medical Association, 8430 W. Broward Boulevard in Plantation; or Dr. Bruce Miller's office at Pediatric Ophthalmology Consultants of South Florida, 220 SW 84th Avenue in Plantation.

Michelle says Imperial Martial Arts has embraced the project. "Paxton was honored in his karate class for demonstrating leadership skills and being a good role model." As part of its Random Acts of Kindness program, Imperial Martial Arts will give any child who donates a birthday gift a star to wear on their karate

uniform or a free 30-day membership.

Paxton has also rallied the support of classmates at Indian Trace Elementary School. "At school we are decorating gift bags to give to the sick children," says Paxton. As part of the school's Friday Fun Day project, classes are decorating plain gift bags with cheerful images. The gift bags, imprinted with the foundation's name, were graciously donated by Riven Distribution in Miami.

The What's Mine Is Yours Foundation is still in the grass roots stage, and Michelle says much help is needed. She is currently collecting tax-deductible donations to help purchase arts and crafts supplies. If you would like to donate or volunteer to help with hospital visits, call Michelle Terris at (954) 605-9297 or e-mail her at michterris@aol.com.

