



Executive director Judy Youngs, center, with wish coordinator Rachel Jones, left, and office manager Lesley Irwin. They moved the nonprofit into its new Fort Worth home mid-December, painting the front door bright red and adding special signage.

Dream Team

A Wish with Wings celebrates 30 years with a new home in Fort Worth and the continued mission of bringing a little happiness into the lives of sick children and their families.



A Wish with Wings board president Greg Kalina

Photos this page by Mark Graham

By Meda Kessler

Making wishes come true doesn't require fairy dust or a magic lantern. For the three-person staff of A Wish with Wings, it requires long hours at the office, the tenacity to pick up the phone and make something wonderful happen for children with life-threatening conditions, and the ability to enjoy the happy outcomes as well as move past the sad ones.

For 30 years, the homegrown organization worked out of a little house in Arlington. But with more and more support coming from generous donors and benefactors in Fort Worth, it now has a Cowtown address. With the help of Larry Anfin, president of Coors Distributing Co., who donated the services of a big truck, the staff moved mid-December into their new home — a nearly move-in ready bungalow with light-filled rooms and a parking lot — just off Interstate 30 near the Cultural District.

"One of our board members alerted us to this place," says current board president Greg Kalina, the general manager of Del Frisco's Fort Worth and an active Wish with Wings supporter. "We jumped on it quickly."

"It puts us closer to Cook Children's Medical Center and Ronald McDonald House, two groups we work very closely with," says Judy Youngs, executive director of A Wish with Wings. Youngs previously served in the same position with Rocky Top Therapy Center, an equine-oriented rehabilitation facility for physically, mentally and emotionally challenged individuals. Having seen A Wish with Wings grow its mission from 36 granted wishes in 2010 to 52 in 2012, Youngs is satisfied she made the right move. "I've found my passion."

A mouse and much more

"I'm going to Disney World!" More than half of Wish applicants asked for a trip to Florida's Magic Kingdom in 2012. (Referrals typically come from doctors or hospitals or even Wish families who know of other children in need of an emotional boost.) The Wish staff works closely with the Give Kids the World Village in Kissimmee, a nonprofit resort near Disney World and other attractions that caters to sick children and their families. The typical Wish consists of a weeklong stay plus theme-park passes. Youngs has volunteered at Give Kids the World, witnessing firsthand the special powers Mickey Mouse has over children, especially those suffering from cancer or other illnesses.

"But some of the requests are as unique as the kids," says Youngs. "One young man wanted to be in a Batman movie; a girl wanted to meet chef Mario Batali. A little boy with Down syndrome and suffering from acute leukemia traveled with his family to San Diego to watch his brother graduate from the Marine Corps boot camp."

To replicate the experience of being in a Batman movie, A Wish with Wings staged a crime-fighter adventure involving the



A Wish with Wings helped Kye be in his own Batman movie. Arlington Police and Fire departments, along with local actors staged a few crimes at city hall. Kye ("Little Batman") helped save the day and earned a key to the city for all his hard work.




Arlington police and fire departments. With their assistance, a 7-year-old boy with leukemia successfully stopped a "purse snatcher" and foiled the Riddler.

Sometimes the requests are more matter-of-fact: Computers and iPads are common requests, as they give the hospitalized patients a way to stay connected with the real world.

"One of the more challenging — and rewarding — parts of our job is dealing with emergency wishes," says

Youngs. "These requests usually come from Cook's or Children's Medical Center in Dallas when doctors feel a child doesn't have much time left. Our first wish of 2012 was an emergency situation. We make it happen within 24 hours."

While dealing with very sick children can have its emotional toll, Youngs and her staff try to focus on the positive. "We focus on the joy and happiness. These memories will be with the families forever. That gets us through the day." 



Carlos wanted a special birthday/costume party to celebrate turning 6. Everyone went to Cook Children's Medical Center, and all of Carlos' family — more than 60 — were bused in for the event along with many of his friends.

Photos this page courtesy of A Wish with Wings

THE DETAILS

A Wish with Wings The nonprofit organization was founded in 1982 and serves children from around the state. Fundraisers include the Butterfly Wishes gala, the Kitchens Tour, Santa Land in Arlington's Lincoln Square shopping center and donations from sales of souvenir cups at all area Fuzzy's Tacos. The new office is located at 3817 Alamo Ave., Fort Worth. For more information, call 817-469-9474 or go to awishwithwings.org.