

# Detroit Area Attorney Heads Caps for Kids

By Naseem Stecker

Sometimes, the simplest gifts are the best ones. A regular cap for instance, especially if it's signed by a sports personality or celebrity, can touch a very responsive chord in even the most gravely ill.

Dr. Stephen Heinrich, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon in New Orleans made this observation in 1993 after he saw how happy he made one of his cancer patients, Lee J. Richeaux III, by giving him a cap autographed by the coach of his favorite college football

team. Richeaux died that year, but his reaction to the gift inspired the doctor to form an organization called Caps for Kids that provides hats and scarves to children with cancer who have lost their hair.

When Bloomfield Hills attorney C. John Holmquist Jr., found out about this group five years ago, he decided to get involved. "I was reading a newspaper article on Dr. Heinrich and thought what a great thing to do—it's something I'm interested in, the mission of the program is so neat. I contacted him and it spun off from there."

A longtime collector of sports memorabilia focusing on hockey and the Detroit Red Wings, Holmquist is now national president of Caps for Kids. The first thing he did for this nonprofit organization was to get Detroit area hospitals to join. His biggest success has been at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, which now has the most active program in the country. Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit has a chapter and Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit has also signed on. Caps for Kids programs can be found at over 40 hospitals in the United States and Canada.

Holmquist was elected to the two-year term as president last year. "I'm taking the program to the next level and expanding it," he said. "We've hired a new executive director and are getting more hospitals involved. I'm helping to oversee a committee to see if we



*John Holmquist, left, the national president of Caps for Kids, drops off a cap intended for a patient at the cancer center of Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak. Accepting the cap are hospital social worker Linda Caurdy-Bess who coordinates the Caps for Kids program at the hospital and Dr. Charles Main, chief of the Division of Pediatric Hematology-Oncology.*

can expand the program without sacrificing the simplicity of the mission."

He says every year 5,000 autographed caps are shipped to hospitals and cancer centers nationwide. The caps are displayed in glass cases. After chemotherapy begins, children are given the opportunity to choose a cap from the selection. If the child would like a different cap, the request is circulated among the Caps for Kids volunteers around the country and every effort is made to secure it.

Timing is often critical since many of these cancer

patients are in the terminal stages of the disease. Holmquist recalled that it took some work to come up with an autographed cap from baseball home run king Mark McGwire. Soon afterwards, the patient who had requested it was buried with the cap.

Until last year, the organization had relied solely on donations of hats from individuals, hat manufacturers, and sports teams. A Massachusetts-based headwear company called Lids became Caps for Kids' first and only sponsor last December. The company will be donating hundreds of caps to the organization each year. The Caps for Kids volunteers will continue to seek autographs and deliver requested hats to children around the country.

"This is such a good program, and there are no strings attached. No one seeks anything in return," Holmquist said. "It really does make a big difference in the lives of these children and it is so positive."

Other than getting a display case and agreeing to an inventory system where the caps can be kept securely, there is no cost to the program. Holmquist says people can also help if they have access to celebrities and can get caps signed for the organization. Holmquist can be reached by phone at (248) 433-7508. His e-mail address is cholmquist@dickinson-wright.com. ♦

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