

CHS student gets lessons in 'phundraising'

BY RONALD R. BLAIS
Staff Reporter

CUMBERLAND - While attending a summer leadership training program at Nichols College in Dudley, Mass., last June, Kayla Wilcox decided to bring hope and a smile to seriously ill children.

During one of the camp's workshops, Wilcox was introduced to the children's book, "The Jester Has Lost His Jingle."

Written by David Saltzman while he was battling Hodgkin's disease, the book offers a message of hope and joy to seriously ill children. The book's message to "try and find the bright side of things" no matter how dark they may seem touched Wilcox deeply.

"It's a very inspiring book,"

she says.

So when she returned to school last September, Wilcox, a Cumberland High School junior, decided to conduct a Read to Give program to fulfill her community service requirement.

With the money raised, she planned to buy copies of Saltzman's book and jester dolls from The Jester and Pharley Fund, founded by the author's family after his death in March 1990 at the age of 22.

The "Phund" is designed to spread the late Saltzman's message of hope, love, laughter and charity to children around the world who need to find their smiles, according to Barbara Saltzman, David's mother and Phund executive director.

To raise funds, Wilcox decided to conduct read-a-thons from Oct. 4 to 22, 2004 for incoming

CHS freshmen and third through fifth-graders at the John J. McLaughlin Cumberland Hill Elementary School. Participants would be paid one penny per page read. She also organized a campaign to collect change during each lunch period at the high school.

Besides raising money, Wilcox also intended to reinforce the importance of the gift of giving as part of her project.

She planned to donate the books and jester dolls acquired through her fund-raiser to the Hasbro Children's Hospital in Providence.

"It was stressful at times. I knew it was going to be a difficult task, but it would be well worthwhile," she says.

To generate enthusiasm, Wilcox conducted assemblies at CHS and Cumberland Hill to explain her project and her ultimate goal of helping sick children.

Her spirit plunged, however, when only one CHS freshman signed up for the read-a-thon.

Disheartened, but not discouraged, Wilcox gritted her teeth and continued forward.

Her spirit was bolstered by the "very enthusiastic" response she received from Cumberland Hill and the change collection "was a great success," she says.

Her efforts produced \$400. "It was a good surprise that I made that much money, especially since the read-a-thon here (CHS) didn't go so well," she says of the results.

Wilcox, the daughter of Ernie Wilcox and Mary Waddington, was able to buy 13 books and 11 dolls with the money she raised, which she donated to Hasbro on Friday, Feb.

4. Besides bringing a smile to seriously ill children, Wilcox also learned about herself through her project.

"I grew through the disappointments and successes," she says. "I grew as a person with my communication skills, how to present myself to elementary schoolers and how to make my idea appeal to them."

Furthermore, "I learned I have a lot of self-determination to do this on my own."

Helping a sick child also is



Submits Kayla Wilcox, right, a Cumberland High School junior, presents jester and children's books to boost the spirits of sick children at Hasbro Children's Hospital to Lisa Cantore, Child Life Specialist for the hospital.

gratifying. "It's not every day these kids get to smile," she says.

The setbacks this year, however, also has prepared her for a similar project she plans to conduct next school year for the Pharley Fund.

"The disappointment gave me more determination to do a better job next year," she says.

Wilcox also proved a pioneer by tackling her project alone.

"The Jester and Pharley Fund has sponsored literacy and outreach

programs at more than 45 schools nationwide since its origin four years ago. However, this is the first time a high school student has single-handedly taken on the responsibility to see a read-a-thon through from start to finish. Kayla was professional in every detail," Barbara Saltzman writes in a Jan. 27 letter of appreciation to

CHS Principal Stephen R. Driscoll.

Wilcox' efforts impress Saltzman.

"We want to commend for her initiative, diligence, perseverance and dedication. executive director also writes she is an indication of the of students Cumberland Hill produces, your are also to congratulate on what every young people you are sent out into the world. If the students like Kayla at every school in the country, we have great faith in what the future holds for us."

Saltzman concludes, "efforts have resulted in a number of Jester and Pharley and dolls being donated to Hasbro Children's Hospital. A remarkable achievement student."

For further information on the Pharley Fund, go to www.thejester.org.

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Neighbors photo/Ronald R. Blais

Kayla Wilcox holds one of the jester dolls she donated to Hasbro Children's Hospital, Providence, W.I. by conducting read-a-thons at Cumberland High and the John J. McLaughlin Cumberland Hill Elementary schools.

