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Wintery scene and a Warm heart



Special effects company steps in to brighten day for ailing woman

By KELLY SAXTON LINDNER
Special to the Leader

In November, 52-year-old Janice Towery was referred to hospice care after a long battle against breast cancer.

Soon after, she decided to make what she refers to as her "bucket list," inspired by the movie "The Bucket List" with Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. In the film, two patients escape from their cancer ward to check off items on their list of things they'd like to do before they "kick the bucket."

One of the things on Janice's list was to see snow in Texas, a rare occurrence in her hometown of Austin. Yet when she saw her front lawn on Dec. 21, it was covered in snow. Actually, only her lawn was covered in snow, while her neighbors' lawns were untouched, as if someone had answered her wish directly with a mysteriously aimed blizzard.

The incident traces its roots to Janice's good friend and Round Rock resident Shelly Fischer, who pondered the thought of bringing snow to Janice.

She ran this idea by Amanda Towery, Janice's 28-year-old daughter, and they both searched the Internet for companies that specialized in creating snow scenes for the holidays.

Soon Shelly came across, snowintexas.com, the Web site of Snow in Texas, a branch of special effects company Wolf Stuntworks. Started in 1992, Stuntworks makes services usually only available to Hollywood movie directors – such as pyrotechnics, stunts and snow – available to the public.

After Steve Wolf received an e-mail from Fischer, inquiring about prices for a delivery of snow and explaining her friend's special wish, he called her back within five minutes and told her that someone would be there the next day to create a snow scene for Janice.

He also wouldn't charge Fischer his normal fee of \$1,200 for the first load of snow, but would instead accept whatever she and Amanda could pay. They later put an undisclosed amount in an envelope that he deposited without opening.

"I didn't feel good about making a profit in this situation," said Wolf.

A one-residence winter wonderland

So the afternoon of Dec. 21, when friends, family, including Janice's 4-month-old grandson, and some former students of Amanda's first grade class escorted Janice to her surprise, she opened the door to a windy wonderland and a gray sky.

There was snow blown all over her lawn and trees and at that moment Janice thought it was real. It was really Snow in Texas's special snow recipe – one-part MovieSnow concentrate, 100-part water and 3,000-part air – but that made no difference to Janice's wish come true.

"I was completely blown away," said Janice. "It was the nicest thing those people could've ever done for me. It was amazing. Extraordinary."

The occasion certainly wouldn't be the first time that Wolf has brightened up someone's day with a little snow. In 2000, Snow in Texas started the Winter Wonderland Project, aimed at bringing snow to anyone who needs it.

In late December Wolf was still creating winter wonderlands in the Galveston area for children who lost their homes to hurricane Ike; he created 12 of these in 2008.

He also recently created one at Fort Hood in Killeen for children of soldiers serving overseas. Last year he created a winter scene for the Austin Children Shelter and the Ronald McDonald House.

And every year he creates a wintry version of Dell Diamond in Round Rock called "Christmas in July," where children can enjoy sledding down its steep hills.

Wolf half-jokingly added that you can lay down snow just about anywhere and have children spontaneously show up and play in it.

"I am so grateful that the Lord put the idea in my head and that Mr. Wolf was a kind man that made it happen," said Fischer.

Janice can't say enough about the snow.

"My mom has talked about the snow since that day," said Amanda. "She has a story to tell everyone who calls and everyone who visits. I love that it gave her something to be excited about and that it continues to bring a smile to her face."



Photos courtesy AMANDA TOWERY, SHELLY FISCHER

Far left: Amanda and Janice Towery enjoy their afternoon in the snow on Dec. 21. A special effects team helped fulfill Janice's wish to see snow before she passes away. Left: Children play in the "snow," a mix of MovieSnow concentrate, water and air.

Girl Scouts out in force with cookies starting Jan. 21

Here come the Thin Mints, Peanut Butter Patties and other Girl Scout cookies.

Cookie sales in Central Texas, including Round Rock, officially begin Wednesday, Jan. 21, the Girl Scouts of Central Texas recently announced.

The area council hosted a one-day cookie blitz Friday, selling cookies to customers in their cars after they pulled up to four drive-through booths in Austin, Brownwood, San Angelo and Waco.

According to girlscouts.org, the sale of Girl Scout cookies as a way to finance troop activities began in 1917, five years after Juliette Gordon Low started Girl Scouting in the United States.

The earliest mention of a cookie sale found to date was that of the Mistletoe Troop in Muskogee, Okla., which baked cookies and sold them in its high school cafeteria as a service project in December 1917.

Cookies, which sell for \$3.50 a box locally, may be purchased from area Girl Scouts. To find out where

sales will be at, call (800) 733-0011 or visit gsctx.org.

The biggest sellers, according to girlscouts.org, are Thin Mints, which account for 25 percent of all sales. Samoas account for 19 percent and Peanut Butter Patties another 13 percent.

Girl Scout officials said licensed bakers can offer up to eight varieties of Girl Scout cookies, but only three types are mandatory: Thin Mints, Peanut Butter Sandwiches and Shortbread. The national Girl Scout organization reviews and approves all varieties proposed by the bakers. Any of the five optional cookies can be changed every year.

Girl Scouts of Central Texas serves more than 20,000 girls and nearly 12,000 adult volunteers in 46 Central Texas counties. Headquartered in Austin, Girl Scouts of Central Texas has program centers in Brownwood, Bryan, Killeen, San Angelo and Waco.

— Marcial Guajardo

