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JAMIE SCOTT LYLE / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Clips for a cuddly cause

Taylor Crabtree, 7, left, works on her hair clips with Austin Foster and Amanda Wright at Monte Vista Elementary on Friday. Taylor is selling the clips to raise funds to buy teddy bears for young cancer patients. **See story, Page A-7.**

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VISTA — Taylor

Merchants hug girl's project to give cancer victims teddy bears

CLAUDIE WALBERT
FOR THE NORTH COUNTY TIMES

VISTA — Taylor Crabtree, 7, had been thinking about her grandmothers. One died from cancer, another was treated for it. And she remembered the teddy bears that law-enforcement officers sometimes carry. "You know, a lot of kids that are hurt, the police have teddy bears in their cars to make them feel better," Taylor said.

In October, while she and her mother, Patricia, were decorating hair clips in their Vista home for Taylor, three ideas merged and blossomed in Taylor's mind: cancer, teddy bears, hair clips.

Taylor wanted to decorate hair clips and sell them. Crabtree recalls asking her daughter if she wanted to do this to earn a little money for Christmas presents.

Taylor told her she wanted to do something that would help people in need. Since then she has become a familiar figure outside two Albertsons stores in Vista where her hair clips sell a little faster each weekend.

Friday, she told her classmates at Monte Vista Elementary School the history of the project, including how specialists at the University of California at San Diego Cancer Center told Taylor patients receiving CAT scans were calmed by holding a teddy bear inside the tight confines of the machine.

Taylor gave her specifications for the teddy bears. They should be about 9 inches tall, and they had to feel right, "the way that they hug, and hug us back."

And people shouldn't buy just any teddy bear and donate it, cancer specialists have told her.

"They have perfume smells that make people sick," Taylor

said.

Now more than 90 children at the school have participated in the teddy bear project, and a dozen Vista businesses have joined in.

Besides Albertsons, some of the businesses that have helped with money and supplies are Office Depot, Wal-Mart, Kinko's, Home Depot and Union Bank, which has opened an account for donations. The address is ToyBear Company, c/o Union Bank, Vista, CA 92084.

Now that the project has become a sophisticated business project, Taylor keeps meticulous computer records of expenses and income.

She also provides public relations, sells each weekend, and makes the products with the help of her schoolmates. Somehow she still finds time to be a championship cross-country runner and a star on the No Mercy wrestling team.

The names of her helpers, at school and in the business world, are being placed on a poster so everyone can get credit.

Taylor's initial goal was to supply teddy bears to 500 San Diego County children with cancer. She estimated the cost to be \$2,500.

She has already cleared more than \$900 and has 1,000 clips and barrettes ready to sell this weekend. Now she's beginning to think about supplying teddy bears to cancer patients in a wider area.

The first inkling of how well the items might sell came when Taylor put up a display in the teachers' lounge at Monte Vista Elementary School, where she is a second-grade student in Carolyn Candarella's class. The teachers liked her work and bought some.

Then Taylor set up a display of her homemade barrettes and decorated hair clips outside a discount store and was told no ped-

diers were allowed, her mother said.

She went to a second store. This time Shaye Vander Schaaf, an Albertsons store director, listened to what Taylor planned.

Not only did Schaaf allow Taylor to stay, she invited her back every weekend. Albertsons began making store announcements whenever Taylor was selling, and the store put flyers about the project in shopping bags. Schaaf told a district meeting about Taylor's project, and 20 stores made donations.

Soon Taylor's friends were gathering in the afternoons to make clips and barrettes at her kitchen, because Taylor alone couldn't keep up with the demand. Each weekend the sales increased. By Tuesday, Taylor and her helpers had sold 401.

A special education class at her school, then a sixth-grade class, helped her manufacture clips and barrettes. Both items require three or four steps before being ready to sell on special cards, also made by volunteers, that tell about the project.

On Friday, her own class became part of the assembly line, manufacturing about 100 basic parts for the barrettes and painting 100 hair clips.

Taylor has already begun buying the bear hair clips on the Internet because she found a cheap source, and she plans to wait until after Christmas to buy and distribute the teddy bears.

She doesn't want to offend any children who don't celebrate Christmas. But there's another reason.

"You know how some companies don't sell everything at Christmas," she said. "Then they're stuck with them all year."

Taylor figures stores with a surplus of bears may be willing to sell them inexpensively to a good cause.