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Teen hailed as a hero for teddy bear project

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By Sherry Saavedra
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

November 3, 2006

VISTA – Since the fourth grade, Taylor Crabtree's nonprofit has raised more than \$100,000 to purchase teddy bears for 23,000 young cancer patients at 300 hospitals throughout the nation.

This week, the Rancho Buena Vista High School junior was honored for her good deeds through her TayBear Co., when *People* magazine named her one of its top five heroes of 2006. She was featured on "The Early Show" on CBS and has been contacted by "The Oprah Winfrey Show."



SEAN DuFRENE / Union-Tribune

In her family's Vista home, Taylor Crabtree has more than 2,500 of the teddy bears that she will send to young cancer patients. She lacks the funds to mail the bears.

Taylor's nonprofit raises money by recruiting youth volunteers to paint hair clips. Taylor then sells the clips and uses the profits to pay for the bears. She has been doing this since age 7, when she was inspired after her grandmother was diagnosed with colon cancer, from which she recovered.

Taylor, 16, said she's unsure whether she's deserving of the hero title, but is excited about the recognition.

"TayBear has just become a part of who I am," she said. "If I didn't have TayBear I'd feel like I was letting our society down. Starting at a young age

has made me less self-centered, and I think it would be great if everyone was a little more that way.”

Taylor has recruited about 1,300 young volunteers during the years from churches, schools and youth groups such as the Girl Scouts. They paint the hair clips, put the TayBear tags on the stuffed animals and give each bear a hug.

PERSON

During the years, Taylor has sold the hair clips online, in front of supermarkets and at school for \$2.50 a pair. Today, she sells them after giving speeches about her organization to churches and community groups. She has spoken twice before the Million Dollar Round Table, an international association of financial professionals. Taylor also accepts donations online.



SEAN DuFRENE / Union-Tribune

Taylor, 16, has been sending bears like this one to young cancer patients for more than nine years. She and other youths paint hair clips, which are then sold to buy the bears.

“TayBear is so much a part of who she is, it's almost like honoring her for walking,” said her mother, Tricia Crabtree.

According to *People* magazine, the heroes selected were ordinary citizens who donated their time to charitable causes. On “The Morning Show” on CBS, those who knew Taylor praised how long she had stuck with her cause. This was no passing hobby or summer project.

At school, Taylor earns A's and B's and has a schedule packed with advanced placement and honors classes. She is also passionate about volleyball and plays on her school's varsity girls team and for a selective Southern California girls team, on which she has been nationally ranked.

Joanne Pastula, president and CEO of Junior Achievement of San Diego, in which Taylor was active when she was younger, said Taylor is a role model for other children.

“They learn from her that anything's possible,” Pastula said. “If they have something they want to do, they can do it as long as they have a goal and drive.”

The biggest challenge with TayBear is raising money for shipping costs, which are paid for through cash gifts and business donations. Taylor has about 2,500 bears in her home office, which is the garage, waiting to be shipped out, but doesn't have the money to send them.

More information is available by visiting www.taybear.com.

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