

Bear-ing their hearts: 190 kids help the ailing

By Dan Kraft

Yesterday's scene in the Cal State San Marcos cafeteria resembled a Disney movie as a song from "The Jungle Book" pumped through the speakers and more than 190 children did their best impression of the Seven Dwarfs diligently going about their work.

The event was a painting-and-pizza party to benefit TayBear Co. of Vista. TayBear is a nonprofit organization that buys teddy bears for San Diego County children who have cancer or chronic blood disorders.

The money for the bears is raised by selling hand-decorated hair clips, visors and sunglasses produced by area children.

TayBear is the brainchild of 7-year-old Taylor Crabtree, who started the company late last year.

Taylor began decorating hair clips on her own and sold them to the teachers at her school. But it was not long before demand was more than she could keep up with and she enlisted the help of her friends. Nine months later, TayBear has purchased more than 1,260 teddy bears for San Diego County children.

One of those children was 11-year-old John Wolf of Ramona. John was in San Diego Medical Center in Balboa Park when he received a teddy bear from TayBear. His doctor told him how it had arrived and John sent a thank-you e-mail to Taylor.

The two met yesterday and John arrived with "Teddy" held firmly to his chest. He had one word on the tip of his tongue to describe Taylor: "cool."

Taylor's efforts have left that word on the tongues of many young San Diegans.

The young CEO uses shrewd business practices, ordering her supplies and bears over the Internet at a substantial discount and soliciting donations whenever possible.

Kinko's has offered its printing services, Union Bank its financial services and, on this day, Domino's Pizza offered — what else? — pizza.

Domino's North County vice president, Jeffrey Morse, was the catalyst for this event, which was by far the largest decorating party TayBear had ever hosted.

Morse was inspired after hearing Taylor speak at a Vista City Council meeting in March.

"This is an unbelievable production," Morse said as he surveyed the children working in groups to decorate clips and tie ribbons around the necks of teddy bears. "I've never seen this many kids be so focused with so little horseplay."

"It's kind of a nice thing to do, to come down and help," said Cindy Deluna, a 12-year-old Vista girl.

Cindy found out about the opportunity through a science teacher at her school. Table-mate Kate Bernard, 15 of Vista, also found out about the event from a teacher and offered her help.

"I think it's pretty impressive," Kate said of what Taylor has been able to accomplish.

Taylor has a selfless attitude. She insists that the focus remain on the children and companies who offer their help and on the children who receive the bears.

"It's not my project," she said. "It's the project of 360 kids who have helped."

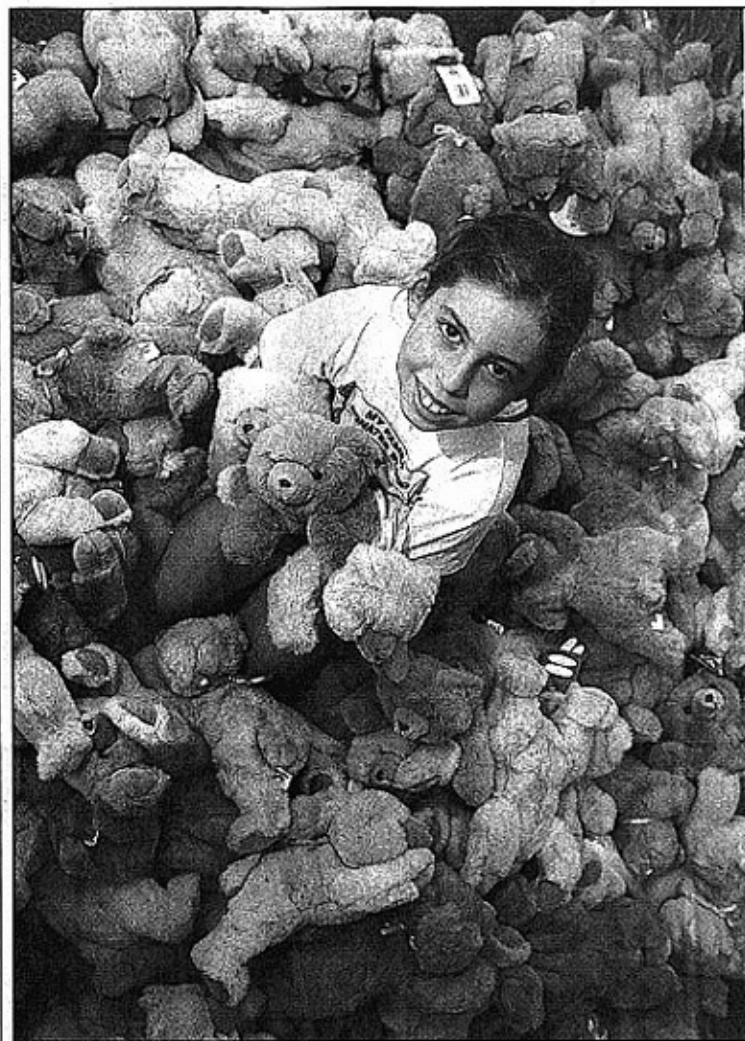
Taylor's empathy springs from an illness she endured at the age of 3. She contracted chicken pox, strep throat and scarlet fever simultaneously and her body began destroying platelets.

After treatment, it occurred to her how much more difficult it must be for children with cancer and chronic blood ailments to cope. TayBear was born when Taylor recalled a story about police officers who carry teddy bears to comfort children.

"My favorite part is passing the bears out and seeing how much the kids like them," she said.

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Top executive: Taylor Crabtree, 7, poses with some of the teddy bears her TayBear Co. gives to ailing youngsters.