

# Making Spirits Bright

by

Raymond Mohler

**A**t the age of four, I was diagnosed with a rare hip disease that left me in a double leg brace for two years. Feeling fortunate that my illness was not life-threatening, I decided that I had to do something for the kids I left behind in the hospital.

To start, I took all my Christmas gifts and returned to the same hospital to give the presents to the kids who were still there. My goal was to lift their spirits since they weren't going home for the holidays. After I saw the joy on their faces, I decided to continue doing this kind of work. My next step was to go door-to-door asking friends, family and neighbors for donations so I could purchase new toys for sick kids.

My efforts became so popular that we created a foundation. At the age of six, with the help of my parents, the Little Saint Nick Foundation was born. My initial work for the foundation caught the eye of Charles Wang, owner of the New York Islanders hockey team. Mr. Wang generously sent NHL hockey players to accompany me to visit the sick kids in the hospital. We threw a holiday party, the players signed autographs and we handed out hundreds of toys. Then we went to the room of every sick kid who could not get out of bed and we took photos with them, signed autographs for them and delivered a very special hand-selected gift to each one of them. After every event

like this, we leave the hospital smiling, because we were so happy to help put smiles on the faces of those little kids.

From my connection with pro sports stars, I receive very kind donations of things like luxury suites at major sporting arenas. This allows me to also take sick or underprivileged children to games where they can meet a few players and have a very special day to remember.

I eventually expanded my efforts by creating mobile entertainment centers for hospitals in my area. The entertainment center included a rolling cart, flat screen TV, DVD player, video game system and lots of movies to watch. These mobile entertainment systems can be wheeled into the rooms of kids who are not able to visit the hospital's playroom.

After seeing how happy I made the kids in the pediatric unit, I learned that there are hundreds of kids every month who visit the emergency room, and I wanted to help them, too. Since the ER can be such a scary place, I decided to donate two mobile entertainment centers for each pediatric emergency room. These mobile entertainment centers are wheeled up to the children to help ease their fears and let them focus on something fun, such as their favorite video games.

From that effort, I also developed an emergency room gift bag program for the same hospital. In each bag, there is a Beanie Baby, coloring book and crayons. Every child who visits the emergency room receives one. The coloring book gives the child something to do while sitting in the waiting room. And the Beanie Baby gives the child a friend to hold on to while being examined and gives the doctor something to talk to them about.

The Little Saint Nick Foundation also grants specific wishes to some very special kids. One kid we worked with was severely handicapped with cerebral palsy and other medical issues that required him to use a breathing tube to live. I raised money to build him an \$80,000 home extension with all the modern amenities to improve the quality of his life.

One other program we have at the Little Saint Nick Foundation is called "Days of Giving." As the economy changed, I wanted to make sure every kid had holiday gifts to open and a family dinner to share. This program has helped more than 800 children to avoid feeling the economic hardships of their parents. The work I do today on behalf of the Little Saint Nick Foundation is truly a gift I give to myself every

time I have the chance to help another kid or family. I love to give back to sick and underprivileged children, because I am grateful that my illness all those years ago was not life-threatening.



*Raymond*

### **MAKE EVERY DAY A HOLIDAY!**

Raymond is the founder of the Little Saint Nick Foundation where every day is a holiday. The gift of giving isn't confined to a certain day or time of year. Learn more about how you can follow in Raymond's footsteps and give the gift of your time and a helping hand at [LittleStNick.org](http://LittleStNick.org).