

NORTHAMPTON HERALD

December 1, 2015

Vol. 18 No. 11

TIMES PUBLISHING NEWSPAPERS, INC.

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'It's easy to make someone smile'

Churchville's Katie Trojak (right) recently founded The Stuffed Animal Rescue, an organization that collects used, no longer wanted stuffed animals, sanitizes them and then donates them to people in need of comfort and love. Pictured with Katie, from left, are her brother Michael, sister Kristy, and Heather Giampapa, Director of Public Advocacy with A Woman's Place. See story on page 8.

Please welcome our **NEW** featured columnist

Kate Fratti

*Warm & friendly,
insightful & entertaining*

Local News & Happenings

*Seasons
Greetings*

Katie Trojak establishes 'Stuffed Animal Rescue'

by June Portnoy

Churchville's Katie Trojak, a 10th-grader at Council Rock High School South, recently founded The Stuffed Animal Rescue, an organization that collects used, no longer wanted stuffed animals, sanitizes them and then donates them to people in need of comfort and love.

Katie's idea for her organization was the result of her family's visit to a yard sale early last year.

Her sister, Kristy, wanted to buy a stuffed animal, but their mother preferred that she didn't buy one there, not knowing how clean it was.

"I began thinking about how many stuffed animals must go to waste because parents are concerned about buying previously-owned stuffed animals," explained Katie. "I realized that many of these stuffed animals must ultimately end up in landfills, which hurts our environment."

As a result, Katie began researching ways to disinfect and sanitize stuffed animals.

Ironically, she didn't have to look far because she discovered that her own washing machine had a setting to disinfect them.

With that knowledge, Katie went to work creating a flyer, asking people to donate stuffed animals they no longer wanted.

Last spring, she distributed these flyers to her church, her youth group and to Starbucks in Southampton.

"This collection lasted around six to eight weeks," said Katie. "We expected to collect 200 to 300 stuffed animals, but ended up with 2,000!"

After Katie finished her collection drive, the work really began.

She recruited Kristy and her brother, Michael, to help her sort through all the animals.

"We repaired them, colored in eyes, and replaced stuffing," described Katie. "We took out any electronic components because they would not survive in the washing machine. To date, we have not thrown away one stuffed animal."

The sanitation process required that they wash the stuffed animals for three hours and then place them in the dryer for two.

Since they could only fit approximately 25 of the animals in a load of wash at once, the process required a lot of time.

To Katie, part of her organization's purpose was about renewal. Therefore, once the animals were sanitized, she groomed each one and then created a nametag that she placed on a necklace around each animal's neck.

Each nametag included the animal's name, which Katie created, and its birthdate, the date each specific animal

was sanitized, and therefore, reborn.

Katie credited Jake Evans, also a student at CR South, for helping her create these nametags, under the guidance of the school's Industrial Technology teacher, Mr. Fred Bauer.

This past September, Katie made her first donation of stuffed animals to A Woman's Place's shelter, which serves as temporary housing to abused women and their children.

Katie's most recent endeavor took place at Neshaminy Manor, a nursing home in Warrington.

This location was particularly meaningful to Katie because it was the last place her grandmother stayed before she passed away two years ago.

"I knew from my grandmother that the elderly need as much comfort as any child," said Katie.

At Neshaminy Manor, Katie set up an "adoption."

The premise of the event was that Katie brought the animals to this location to find them good homes, and if the residents took good care of them, the animals would take good care of the residents.

Katy described how careful the residents were when deciding which animal to "adopt," asking specific questions about different ones and requesting particular animals to make sure they chose a good match.

"It was obvious from their smiles that these residents were happy to have the comfort of a stuffed animal, and that is precisely the tagline of The Stuffed Animal Rescue, which states, "It's that easy to make someone smile."

Katie recently called a men's homeless shelter about donating animals to them.

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Do hospital falls equal medical malpractice?

submitted by Michael C. Ksiazek,
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The question of whether a slip and fall that occurs within a hospital constitutes medical malpractice, rather than ordinary negligence, has been a much debated topic.

The distinction is important because, in Pennsylvania, there are a number of procedural hurdles - which do not apply to an ordinary negligence case - a plaintiff must first tackle in order to successfully file and pursue a medical malpractice case.

There has been some inconsistency among Pennsylvania courts, as well

as courts in other states, on this issue.

This makes it very difficult to determine or predict whether a hospital fall case will be deemed a medical malpractice and, therefore, subject to the medical malpractice procedural requirements.

In Texas, which has tough medical malpractice requirements similar to those in Pennsylvania, doctors and hospitals have historically used those requirements to have "slip and fall" cases that occurred in hospitals dismissed on procedural grounds.

Recently, however, the Texas Supreme Court effectively put a stop to this.

In Texas, a plaintiff must obtain opinion from a medical expert confirming that medical negligence occurred before the case can proceed.

If the plaintiff fails to obtain the requisite medical expert opinion, the Court can throw the case out.

In two decisions that came down this year (*Ross v. St. Luke's Hospital and Reddic v. East Texas Medical Center*), the Texas Supreme Court held that there must be a "substantial nexus" between the fall and the provision of health care before the state's medical malpractice procedural requirements in a hospital fall case should be applied.

In *Reddic*, the Court stated there must be "a substantive relationship between the safety standards the visitor alleged the hospital breached and the

provision of health care" for the case to be considered medical malpractice.

The Court concluded that the record did not demonstrate such a substantive relationship.

This continues to be an evolving area of the law in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, as tort reform efforts designed to weed out frivolous claims are still relatively new.

If you've been injured from a slip and fall in a hospital, you should definitely seek experienced legal counsel.



STUFFED ANIMAL RESCUE

Continued from page 8

Although the person taking the call initially assumed that men wouldn't want stuffed animals, when he asked the residents for their opinion, they all expressed interest.

"There is a certain comfort in holding a stuffed animal, no matter who you are," said Katie.

Katie is currently completing paperwork to establish The Stuffed Animal Rescue into a non-profit organization.

As a nonprofit, this foundation will be eligible for funding, enabling Katie to pay the cost to ship animals to those in need throughout the country and beyond.

She is also conducting research to find scientific proof that her sanitation process

eliminates all bacteria so she can donate her animals to sick children in hospitals.

Although Katie's motivation to establish her organization was completely altruistic, she discovered prior to her animal collection that her project qualified her to attain her Silver Badge for Girl Scouts, which she was awarded this past September.

Katie said, "Naturally, I was thrilled to receive this recognition, but I feel even more fulfilled every time I see the smile on someone's face who receives comfort and love from one of my stuffed animals because that's when I know I've really made a positive difference in somebody's life."

For more information about The Stuffed Animal Rescue, visit www.thestuffedanimalrescue.wordpress.com.

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