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Nonprofit group rolls to new Tarpon location

Photos



WHEELCHAIRS 4 KIDS

The Tarpon Springs-based nonprofit Wheelchairs 4 Kids held a ribbon-cutting event at its new location on S. Pinellas Avenue last month.

By Eric Horchy | Suncoast News
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TARPON SPRINGS - After nearly two years helping disabled children gain sorely needed access to equipment and services, Wheelchairs 4 Kids was quickly outgrowing its original home, according to Madeline Robinson, its executive director.

That home was Robinson's house.

"It was getting a little crazy and had spread to the living room, dining room and kitchen," she wrote in a Wheelchairs 4 Kids press release announcing the group's relocation to an office at 1976 S. Pinellas Ave.

The organization, which helps improve the lives of children with physical disabilities by providing wheelchairs, home and vehicle modifications and other assistive devices, officially celebrated the grand opening of its new location late last month. At the ribbon-cutting Wheelchairs 4 Kids received the key to the city from Mayor David Archie.

According to a press release by Christopher Lehman, a blind, wheelchair-using volunteer with severe juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, about 60 people attended the Feb. 21 ceremony sponsored by the Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce.

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"He's an amazing young man," Robinson said of Lehman. "I don't know how he does it. He's got the best sense of humor and has such a sharp wit. He comes in here and works so hard. I just love him."

Along with "toe-tapping, head-bobbing tunes" played by the local band The Beachbillies, magician Ted Brodene entertained throughout the day for guests — including U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor — who noshed on food provided by local restaurants.

Getting settled into the new office should benefit the small operation as it expands its reach throughout the area, Robinson said. During Wheelchairs 4 Kids' first full fiscal year, it served 17 individuals ages 21 and under.

Robinson said she, the Wheelchair 4 Kids board of directors and volunteers aim to assist 40 youngsters during the current budget year. Her personal goal is to aid from 50 to 100.

February's office grand opening served double-duty as a fundraiser. Along with grants and donations from individuals and civic organizations, fundraising events are how Wheelchairs 4 Kids is able to provide its assistance.

The group's next event will be a "Jail and Bail" April 12 at Charlie's Steakhouse in Tampa. It will feature mock arrests of prominent residents for silly, lighthearted reasons.

For example, former defensive end Chidi Ahanotu, whose well-traveled NFL career path included time with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, will be nabbed for allegedly using his NFL contacts to get ahead in fantasy football.

While the rapid stream of requests for assistance to Wheelchairs 4 Kids means plenty more work ahead for Robinson and the organization's staff of one and dedicated volunteers, successful results make everything worthwhile.

"The response has been overwhelming, and we have plenty of children looking to participate," Robinson said.

"We kept seeing children in chairs that were falling apart, duct taped, too small," she said.

"I started doing some research and found certain things like Medicaid and most insurance will only replace a chair every five years.


"Kids grow up faster than that and it causes all kinds of problems health-wise and for comfort, obviously.

"It's just something that you don't think about unless you're faced with it."

Robinson said Wheelchairs 4 Kids is always looking for partnerships to help with the operation, be it with donations, services or supplies.

Wheelchairs 4 Kids can be contacted by calling (727) 946-0963 or going to its website, www.wheelchairs4kids.org.

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5/30 7 PM First: The Story of the London...
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