



WARWICK BEACON

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DUO: Renee Whelan and her son, Zack. (*Warwick Beacon photo*)

Renee Whelan has tried to instill positive values in her 9-year-old son Zack since he could barely walk. She has always been concerned with him being too spoiled or bratty but nothing could have prepared her for the role reversal she has experienced.

"I can tell you that because of his unselfishness and his constant ideas on how to help others, I am able to take a step back at times and appreciate what I have," she says.

Two years ago, a friend of Zack's died from Meningitis, which launched a series of good deeds that has become a part of daily life in the Whelan household.

"One night he asked me how we could help because he felt bad for the sick kids," Renee recalls. That year, Zack ran his first lemonade stand outside his mother's place of work and teamed up with Ronald McDonald House Charities for their annual walkathon. In the past, he participated in their bike run as well, which prompted them to invite him to be part of the check presentation at the event. At the race, held at the Seekonk Speedway, Zack was ecstatic to be invited on stage mostly because he thought the attention would motivate his classmates to do their part.

"I said to my teacher and my whole class I was going to be on stage for helping them," he said, smiling. "I was nervous."

Since then, Zack's fundraising efforts have raked in over \$1,100 for Ronald McDonald House. Part of the non-profit organization's vision is that, "when you change a child's life, you change a family's, which can change a community and ultimately the world."

That vision is also Zack's. Renee found out just how much when Zack decided to give up the \$70 he had been saving for an electric scooter.

"He told me the sick kids need that money more," she said. "I think I cried – there are no words. I was just proud beyond belief."

Renee's coworkers were touched when they heard the story and ended up buying Zach his scooter after all. That's one luxury he loves having but when it comes to his toy box, Zack is constantly going without to help others.

"I want to help other kids," said the fourth grader, who not only bought a few new toys during a drive this past Christmas, but also donated some of his own to needy families he and his mother connected with through craigslist. "I gave away some of my old toys because I knew there were kids who didn't have a lot of toys and I didn't need them all."

Renee says their family has been affected by the economy just as countless others have. She wishes they could give more but Zack is often coming up with creative fundraising ideas.

"Sometimes I just sit down and think of ideas," he says with a shrug.

"Especially in this economy we can't do much financially but we try. We have what we need and I know there are people out there who don't," added Renee. "When I feel myself getting upset over things I don't have I sometimes catch a glimpse of Zack and am reminded of his views and caring ways and start being grateful for the things I do have."

On Friday, April 24, Zack will run his third annual lemonade stand in the lobby of the Jack and Jill On the Hill Learning Center, located at 300 Centerville Road, Summit East. Then, on May 3, he'll hit the road for the Ronald McDonald House walk. At school, he loves to join in fundraising efforts for Pennies for Pasta and collecting canned goods and box tops. When he sets his mind to something – especially a good cause – Renee says there's no stopping him and she and his father, Bob Ingram, couldn't be more proud.

"He's just always been a giving child; he's never been one to want a lot," she said. "I'm actually quite amazed."

For his part, Zack wants to be a magician when he grows up but next on his volunteering list is doing something good for animals. Since he has four cats between his parents' houses, he's come to love animals and wants to help them just like he helps "the sick kids."

When asked why he does it, Zack can't quite put his finger on it. He hopes other people will get involved when they hear about what he's done but all in all, it's just about doing something nice for people who need it.

"I do it because I feel happy. I like doing this and it just keeps me busy," he said. "It makes me feel good about myself."

To donate to Zack Whelan's efforts on behalf of Ronald McDonald House Charities, visit his personal fundraising Web site at www.firstgiving.com/zackarywhelan1.