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## Local family makes girl's wish come true

By Cathy Cobbs  
For The Crier

Even when cancer patient Margaret Hurt was ill and weak from her treatments, she wanted to go to the Equestrian Reserve stables and ride Hoochie, her favorite horse.

Diagnosed with acute lymphoma leukemia in October of 2007, Margaret, 13, is undergoing two and a half years of chemotherapy treatments, and the first eight months were the worst, according to her mother.

"Even when she was too sick to see her friends, she still wanted to go to the barn," said Margaret's mother, Mary. "Her sister would lead her around on the horse if she couldn't ride."

However, the horse was for sale, and a deadline was approaching for it to be sold or returned to its owner. The Hurts were in no position to make the purchase, so it seemed that Hoochie and Margaret would be parted soon.

That's when the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Dunwoody resident Preston Byers stepped in to make Margaret's dream come true.

More than a year ago, the teen had considered a variety of options for her wish, but always, Hoochie was in the back of her mind.

"We thought about a trip to Hawaii or Australia, but I always kept coming back to the horse," Margaret said.

Byers, who is a board member at Camp Sunshine, met Margaret at one of the organization's events, and then was asked to help grant her rather unusual wish.

"Usually it's a trip or an experience, so this was more unique," Byers, president of ClearBridge Wealth Management. "Once a year, my family grants a wish, but we were asked to help with this one too, and we really felt we needed to do it."

Many people, including Byers, were involved in the acquisition of the horse, which also comes with a year of food, room and board at the Equestrian Reserve.

Even the "grant party," as they are typically called, was different from the usual private affairs involving the patients and the wish granters.



Margaret and her Horse thanks to Make-A-Wish and the Preston Byers Family.

Hurt was picked up in a limousine on December 12 and taken to the Alpharetta stables, where she was met by 60 or more friends and family, and of course, Hoochie, front and center.

"There was a lot of excitement and of course, a good amount of tears all around," Byers said of the celebration, which he and his family attended. "This was one of the most special and unique gifts we have ever granted."

"This makes such a difference to a child who has cancer," said Mary. "It gave her something to look forward to and think about during treatment. Margaret said she loves being with her horse on the weekends and each Wednesday for her riding lessons.

"I look forward to being with him," she said. "I'm very grateful to all the people who made it happen for me."

Byers said his family has benefited as well.

"It's a real lesson in giving," he said. "It's what it's supposed to be about."