

Invest In Others Matching Gift Program Used for Holiday Miracle

Invest in Others

Three years ago, about the same time Preston Byers joined LPL Financial, he started a relationship with the

Make-A-Wish Georgia and Alabama Chapter. Typically he has helped the organization grant one major grant per year, and it looked like 2009 would be no different.

"We had granted one wish in 2009," says Preston, founder and president of ClearBridge Wealth Management in Atlanta, Georgia. "A girl named Tabatha wanted to go to Hollywood, go to various show tapings, and she really wanted to be on The Price is Right. She got to meet Drew Carey and do all the behind-the-scenes stuff."

That was one of about 400 wishes that the Georgia and Alabama Chapter would sponsor in 2009 (since Make-A-Wish was formed in 1980, it has made more than 150,000 wishes come true).

"We weren't planning to sponsor another wish in 2009," Preston continues, "but we had always told Make-A-Wish that if anything really interesting came up, we want to know about it. So the Georgia and Alabama Chapter of Make-A-Wish called to tell us about a young girl named Margaret who has a pretty terrible form of cancer, acute lymphatic leukemia. She wanted a horse for Christmas. That was her wish."

According to Jill Thornton of Make-A-Wish, "We knew we had the opportunity to make this a very special holiday for a very deserving young girl, but we needed funding to make it a reality. ClearBridge answered the call to help without any hesitation."

Preston jokes that his first thought after saying yes was, "How am I going to break it to my kids that I'm going to buy someone else a horse and they don't get one?"



The ClearBridge Wealth Management firm fulfilled 13-year-old Margaret's wish for a horse for Christmas.

He and his team quickly went to work, and he enlisted the Invest in Others matching gift program to help raise money for the wish. His office houses one other rep, including himself, and between the two of them, they secured \$700 from Invest in Others toward the total cost of the horse, which was several thousand dollars. The stable also was instrumental in making the wish happen, along with many volunteers from Make-A-Wish, ClearBridge and the community.

On Dec. 12, 2009, Margaret's wish came true, and Preston says it was an amazing experience to watch her ride and groom the horse. After Margaret spent nearly three years in chemotherapy, the horse proved to be one of the brightest spots in her fight against cancer.

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Principles of Giving

When Preston decided to open up his firm, he, like many advisors, was looking for more freedom and flexibility and the ability to serve his clients with Main Street advice. And among his main motivations for leaving behind his former Wall Street position at Ernst and Young was his desire to spend more time and energy helping others.

“Even though independent firms are really coming along and growing, they still are missing the boat in certain areas. One of those areas is not being more involved in the community,” says Preston.

With this in mind, he was even more focused on making sure that the culture of his independent practice incorporated a philanthropic mission.

“Before I asked some clients and employees to come with me when I made the decision to start my practice, I told them that one of the things we’re going to do different is we’re going to be very involved in the community,” he says.

His clients and employees have embraced this mission by writing checks and supporting various community functions in which ClearBridge participates. The overwhelming majority of ClearBridge clients—most of whom are high-net-worth—gift during their lifetime and put charitable trust plans in place. In addition, the firm has helped several clients set up their own foundations.

The ClearBridge Foundation

Last year, with the experience he had gained setting up foundations for clients, Preston began to build the ClearBridge Foundation.

“I’m embarrassed that we didn’t set up a charitable foundation until 2009, because it’s something I planned on doing a few years ago,” admits Preston.

Preston has been in the financial services industry for 18 years, and for many of those years, he has committed himself to forming relationships with nonprofits that are kid-centric. The foundation is just the next evolution of his philanthropic pursuits.

Currently the foundation supports four nonprofit organizations:

- Make-A-Wish – Grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy



The efforts of Make-A-Wish, ClearBridge Foundation and Invest in Others brought a smile to Margaret’s face.

- Camp Sunshine – Creates recreational programs for children with cancer
- Wounded Warrior Project – Assists men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces who have been severely injured during the conflicts in Iraq and helps provide for their families
- Chestatee Wildlife Preserve – Supports exotic wildlife and rescued animals, and welcomes children to experience the animals firsthand

Preston and his firm hope to partner with more nonprofits in the future and significantly grow the foundation over the next decade or two, because he wants to help a lot more children like Margaret. Days like December 12, 2009, when the fulfillment of Margaret’s wish made her one of the happiest girls in Georgia, validate the importance of ClearBridge’s philanthropic pursuits.

Preston recommends that his fellow advisors adopt a similar giving back philosophy, but only if they’re doing it for the “right reasons.”

“Don’t worry about what’ll drive the most business to your firm,” says Preston. “Try to find a cause or causes that you really care about.”

Do you have a community outreach story to share? We’d love to hear from you. Please visit the [BranchNet Resource Center | Business Development | Marketing | Programs | Invest In Others | Share Your Story](#) to submit your story and upload a photo.