

Young hospice volunteer earns national recognition

Monday, November 2, 2015 12:00 am - By Sarah Lundgren - The Brunswick News



Chris Carswell, second from right, and his service dog Bronx received the Young Leader Award at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Conference in Texas for his volunteer efforts with Hospice of the Golden Isles.

Chris was nominated by Amy Broderick, left, community relations representative with hospice, and Sharon Craw, right, volunteer coordinator.

It seems there's just about nothing that can stand in the way of Chris Carswell and giving back to the community, not even his own medical condition.

Between his volunteer work with different organizations and his own foundation, 1Boy4Change, he doesn't let health issues which include seizures, multiple brain surgeries and a rare genetic condition called Loreys-Dietz

Syndrome stop him from making a difference.

And whenever he steps into the Hospice of the Golden Isles facility in Brunswick with his service dog, Bronx, he brightens the day of everyone.

The difference he makes in the lives of patients and staff was recently recognized on a national level. Chris and Bronx received the Young Leader Award at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization Conference in Texas after being nominated by hospice staff.

"Chris, along with his service dog, Bronx, who can detect when Chris is about to have a seizure, brings comfort and friendship to our hospice patients. He and his dog visit patients at our Hospice House and especially touched the life of one patient in particular," said Amy Broderick, community relations representative for Hospice of the Golden Isles. "She had to leave her beloved dog, who looked just like Bronx, in the care of friends so she bonded immediately with Bronx when he visited her at our facility. She and Chris also shared a special connection. The dog comforted her — (sitting next to her in her bed) through her final days."

Chris, completely surprised by the award, said being able to bond over animals with patients is one of his favorite parts of visiting hospice.

"I think one of my favorite parts is hearing the stories about how they had a dog and how much they loved their dog, how much Bronx reminds them of their dog ... hearing the stories of all the different people, that was my favorite," Chris said.

Broderick and Sharon Craw, hospice volunteer coordinator, not only nominated Chris and Bronx for the award but traveled with the duo and Chris' mother, Janet, to Texas when they found out he'd earned the honor.

It was a surprise to his family.

“We didn’t even know we were nominated, and we got the email that said ‘Oh hey, can you fly out to Texas to receive this award?’ That was pretty exciting,” Chris said. “All of it was really exciting.

The hotel was pretty awesome and Bronx was just Bronx. He was half the reason I got the award.”

Broderick said it was a whirlwind trip but a touching opportunity for her and Craw to see such a dedicated young man earn something special.

“We flew out to Dallas on a Thursday, Chris and Bronx were honored on Friday morning, then Sharon and I returned that afternoon. It was so special to witness Chris accept this national award at NHPCO’s clinical conference before an audience of thousands of attendees and receive this much-deserved recognition for his tireless dedication to our hospice as well as our entire community,” she said.

“We were so excited to be able to arrange for Chris, his mom, and Bronx to accept his award in person.”

Chris recalled when he Bronx first became involved with Hospice of the Golden Isles.

“What got me started going out was the original therapy dogs out there had died and they had called me after seeing my story with Bronx and my other dogs, so I started going out there and volunteering with my dog and visiting the people who were staying there and their families,” he said. “It was really nice to see them smile.”

Chris said that through his continued volunteer efforts, he hopes more people will look beyond their own lives and help others.

“I hope they see and get that it’s not all about you. There’s more than just what you do,” he said.

“There’s a bigger picture.”