

Norwood Seniors Network
NEW DIRECTOR

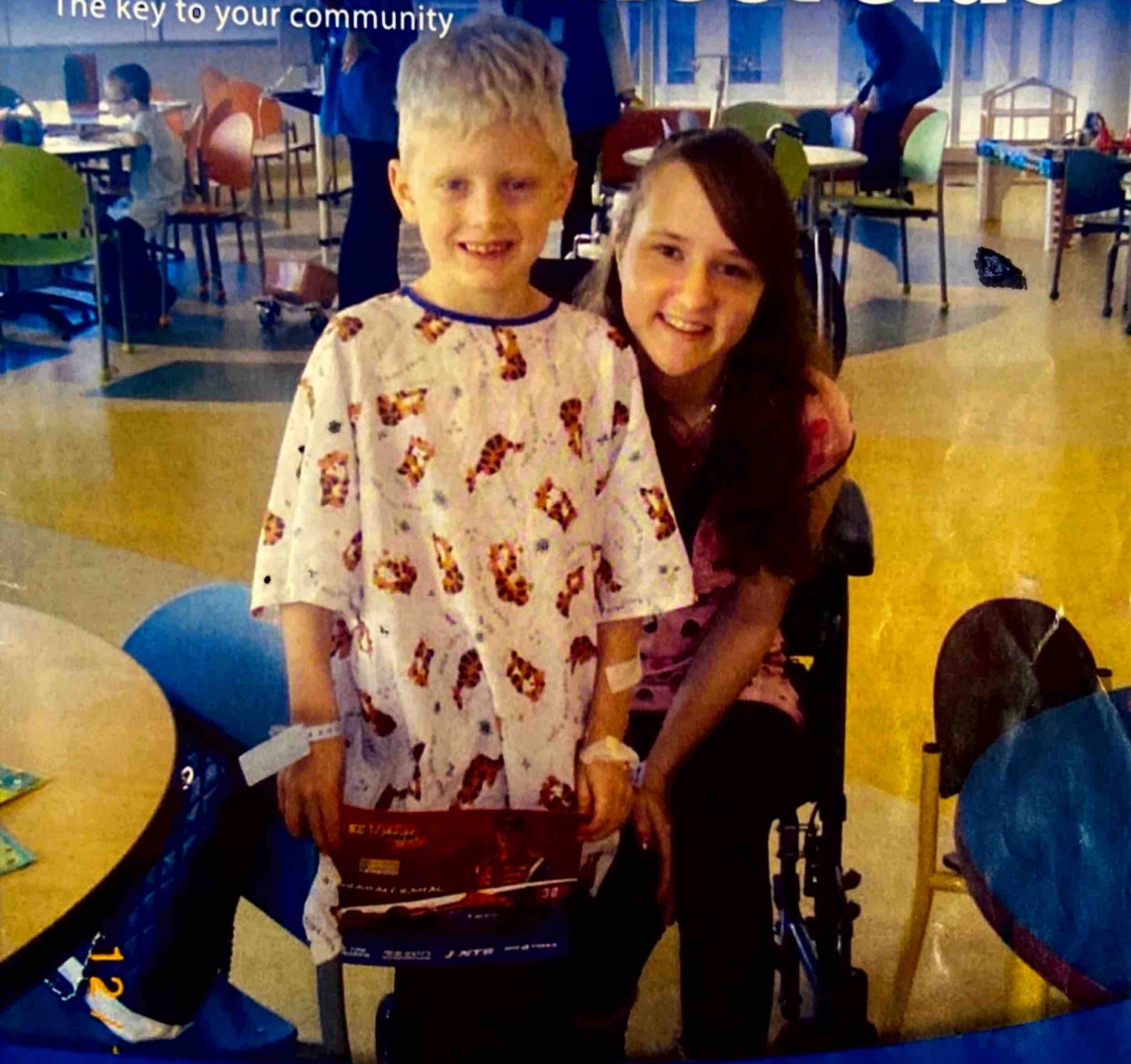
New Hope Food Pantry
HOLIDAY HELP

December 2013

Pre-Christmas Stop
SANTA EXPRESS

Inside The Northwest Side

The key to your community



Season's Greetings

Jen Rubino Sends Smiles to Hospitalized Kids

Sending Smiles to Kids

Jen Rubino's charity aims to brighten lives of hospitalized children.

by Liza Roche Gratama
Editor

She may look like a regular 19-year-old, but Jen Rubino already has created a life built on some extraordinary highs, tough blows and big gestures of compassion.

Like many little girls, Rubino fell in love with gymnastics. She took up the sport at the age of 4 and accelerated quickly in her skills, earning her a fast-track position in the world of competitive sports.

High-level competition seemed like it could be her destiny until soreness and injuries sidelined her from six-days-a-week practices. Ultimately, she was diagnosed in 2006 with a connective tissue and bone disease, a genetic condition.

Not only was her gymnastics career over, but Rubino's life changed dramatically. Instead of heading to the gym, she was meeting with doctors.

"It was really difficult," she said, adding that the emotional pain was intense, as well as the physical pain. A turning point for the teen who lives on the Edison Park-Park Ridge line came a few years ago, when she was in the hospital yet again.

"It was my 13th surgery, and it was my biggest surgery yet," said Rubino, remembering that during that visit she was placed in the hospital's intensive care unit. Doctors had to break her hip in five places and then completely reconstruct and reposition it.

A hospital volunteer had made her a simple, handmade card. "It really brightened my day and reminded me that someone was thinking of me," she said.

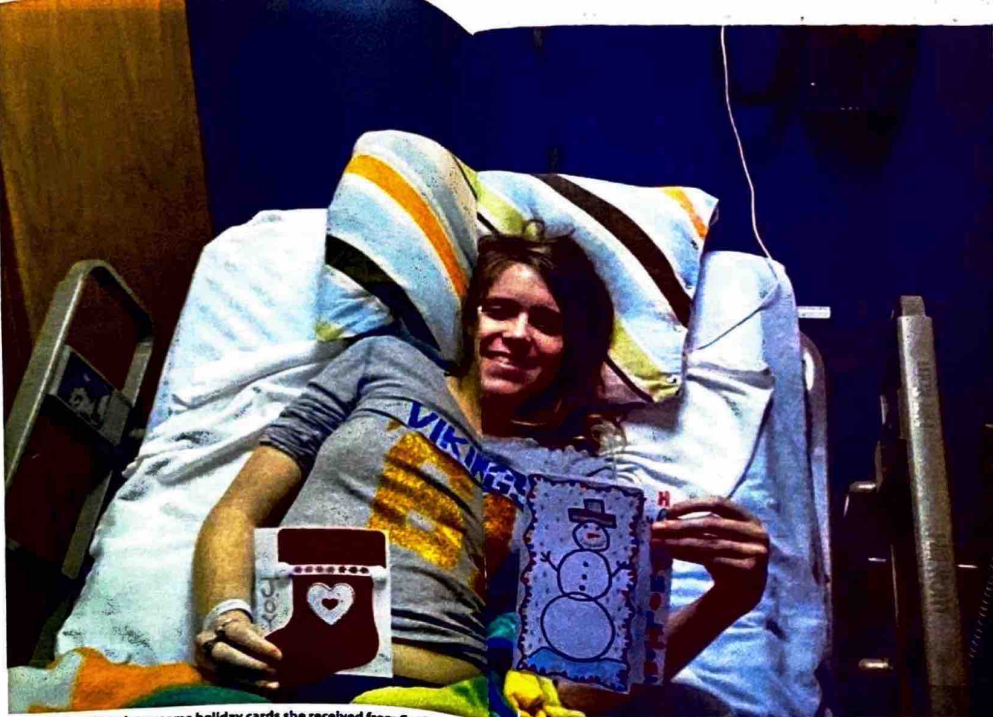
Rubino was so touched by the card that it got her thinking about how she could help other hospitalized children, even as she struggled with her own health.

"I had always wanted to help other kids, but I didn't know how to do it," she said.

From pain to purpose

She thought that maybe a simple act, such as making a card, could make a difference in the lives of kids like her.

When Rubino got home from the hospital in the spring of 2011, she asked some friends to make cards for kids at Chil-



A hospital patient shows some holiday cards she received from Cards for Hospitalized Kids, organized by local teen Jen Rubino, sends out thousands of similar cards to help brighten the spirits of children facing medical issues.

Photo courtesy of Jen Rubino

dren's Memorial Hospital, now called Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Just like her gymnastics skills, those card-making efforts with friends grew.

A local library offered to set up a card-making event, and an effort at her school, Maine South High School, geared up.

By September, Rubino had made an official website for her new organization, Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

One teacher at her school even dyed her hair purple to help create a buzz for the organization.

"It started getting a little bit bigger and a little bit bigger," she said. "We got to the point that we were getting more cards from all over the country than those made from within the community."

The organization now has cards going out to children admitted to hospitals in all 50 states.

"Every single month, people send us cards, and we send them out to the hospitals," Rubino said.

What's great about the charitable organization is that the

effort runs mainly on volunteer support, with the only real cost being postage, Rubino said. She has gotten some support to help pay for the postage on the cards. A good amount of postage also is handled by Rubino's father's business, Sensible Products Inc. in Edison Park.

Rubino even has found some success getting some celebrity support.

Her first celebrity connection came with Lauren Conrad, best known for the television shows "Laguna Beach" and "The Hills."

Rubino simply contacted Conrad's agent. "From there, it just took off," Rubino said.

Among celebrity supporters are Australian pop singer Cody Simpson, Giuliana and Bill Rancic, and Olympic gymnasts Nastia Liukin and Aly Raisman.

There also is plenty of support from people who know what it is like for a family member to spend a good part of childhood under the roof of a hospital.

"A lot of the families and the kids who do recover, they begin making cards because of the impact that it had on them," Rubino said. It's a lonely existence, spending time in a hospital, she said. Kids are aware that they're missing out on lots of things that many healthy children might take for granted.

"It's kids helping kids," she said.

Holiday season

While the demand for the organization's cards remain strong throughout the year, the holiday season always is the most demanding.

"We send out Christmas cards, but we send out other types of cards, too," she said.

With Cards for Hospitalized Kids still growing since taking off in 2011, it's hard to tell how many cards will be sent out over the holidays this year.

"Last year, during the holiday season, we sent out about 4,000 cards. But during 2013, they've received that many cards in one month," she said. "So I'm really excited to see how many we get this year."

Additionally this year, the organization is sending out something else to help brighten the smiles of kids. It recently got a donation from manufacturer Shopatron of 600 Uglydolls, dolls that look like cartoonish monsters. They can be viewed at uglydolls.com.

"I'm really excited about it," she said. "The kids are going to love them."

Looking ahead

It's not every day that a student creates a nonprofit organization that reaches all 50 states of the country. That promising gymnastics career that Rubino left behind still is paying dividends in her life, the teen notes. As a student-athlete, she needed to juggle a high-level sports schedule and advanced academic classes. She noted that her gymnastics coach demanded A's in school.

"My biggest piece of advice is to remember that no act of kindness is too small. Even if you impact one person, you are making a difference."

—Jen Rubino

Those time-management skills have helped lead to the success of Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

And while gymnastics is over, the spirit it built in her remains, Rubino said. "It taught me how to shoot big and have nothing keep me from accomplishing my goals," she said. "I don't know how I could have done this without gymnastics."

Rubino already is accepted to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She plans to enroll in the School of Foreign Service.

She said she was drawn to the school because of what she describes as its exceptional focus on service. In learning about the school, she's already met students there who also manage nonprofit organizations.

"All of the kids who I have met are sort of similar because they've had some difficult life experience that made them want to give back," she said.

It's easy to imagine that young people may look up to Rubino for her ability to make such a difference while still a

Continued on next page

Sending Smiles to Kids

Jen Rubino's charity aims to brighten lives of hospitalized children.

by Liza Roche Gratama
Editor

She may look like a regular 19-year-old, but Jen Rubino already has created a life built on some extraordinary highs, tough blows and big gestures of compassion.

Like many little girls, Rubino fell in love with gymnastics. She took up the sport at the age of 4 and accelerated quickly in her skills, earning her a fast-track position in the world of competitive sports.

High-level competition seemed like it could be her destiny until soreness and injuries sidelined her from six-days-a-week practices. Ultimately, she was diagnosed in 2006 with a connective tissue and bone disease, a genetic condition.

Not only was her gymnastics career over, but Rubino's life changed dramatically. Instead of heading to the gym, she was meeting with doctors.

"It was really difficult," she said, adding that the emotional pain was intense, as well as the physical pain. A turning point for the teen who lives on the Edison Park-Park Ridge line came a few years ago, when she was in the hospital yet again.

"It was my 13th surgery, and it was my biggest surgery yet," said Rubino, remembering that during that visit she was placed in the hospital's intensive care unit. Doctors had to break her hip in five places and then completely reconstruct and reposition it.

A hospital volunteer had made her a simple, handmade card. "It really brightened my day and reminded me that someone was thinking of me," she said.

Rubino was so touched by the card that it got her thinking about how she could help other hospitalized children, even as she struggled with her own health.

"I had always wanted to help other kids, but I didn't know how to do it," she said.

From pain to purpose

She thought that maybe a simple act, such as making a card, could make a difference in the lives of kids like her.

When Rubino got home from the hospital in the spring of 2011, she asked some friends to make cards for kids at Chil-



A hospital patient shows some holiday cards she received from Cards for Hospitalized Kids. Each year, Cards for Hospitalized Kids, organized by local teen Jen Rubino, sends out thousands of similar cards to help brighten the spirits of children facing medical issues.
Photo courtesy of Jen Rubino

dren's Memorial Hospital, now called Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Just like her gymnastics skills, those card-making efforts with friends grew.

A local library offered to set up a card-making event, and an effort at her school, Maine South High School, geared up.

By September, Rubino had made an official website for her new organization, Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

One teacher at her school even dyed her hair purple to help create a buzz for the organization.

"It started getting a little bit bigger and a little bit bigger," she said. "We got to the point that we were getting more cards from all over the country than those made from within the community."

The organization now has cards going out to children admitted to hospitals in all 50 states.

"Every single month, people send us cards, and we send them out to the hospitals," Rubino said.

What's great about the charitable organization is that the



effort runs mainly on volunteer support, with the only real cost being postage, Rubino said. She has gotten some support to help pay for the postage on the cards. A good amount of postage also is handled by Rubino's father's business, Sensible Products Inc. in Edison Park.

Rubino even has found some success getting some celebrity support.

Her first celebrity connection came with Lauren Conrad, best known for the television shows "Laguna Beach" and "The Hills."

Rubino simply contacted Conrad's agent. "From there, it just took off," Rubino said.

Among celebrity supporters are Australian pop singer Cody Simpson, Giuliana and Bill Rancic, and Olympic gymnasts Nastia Liukin and Aly Raisman.

There also is plenty of support from people who know what it is like for a family member to spend a good part of childhood under the roof of a hospital.

"A lot of the families and the kids who do recover, they begin making cards because of the impact that it had on them," Rubino said. It's a lonely existence, spending time in a hospital, she said. Kids are aware that they're missing out on lots of things that many healthy children might take for granted.

"It's kids helping kids," she said.

Holiday season

While the demand for the organization's cards remain strong throughout the year, the holiday season always is the most demanding.

"We send out Christmas cards, but we send out other types of cards, too," she said.

With Cards for Hospitalized Kids still growing since taking off in 2011, it's hard to tell how many cards will be sent out over the holidays this year.

"Last year, during the holiday season, we sent out about 4,000 cards. But during 2013, they've received that many cards in one month," she said. "So I'm really excited to see how many we get this year."

Additionally this year, the organization is sending out something else to help brighten the smiles of kids. It recently got a donation from manufacturer Shopatron of 600 Uglydolls, dolls that look like cartoonish monsters. They can be viewed at uglydolls.com.

"I'm really excited about it," she said. "The kids are going to love them."

Looking ahead

It's not every day that a student creates a nonprofit organization that reaches all 50 states of the country. That promising gymnastics career that Rubino left behind still is paying dividends in her life, the teen notes. As a student-athlete, she needed to juggle a high-level sports schedule and advanced academic classes. She noted that her gymnastics coach demanded A's in school.

"My biggest piece of advice is to remember that no act of kindness is too small. Even if you impact one person, you are making a difference."

—Jen Rubino

Those time-management skills have helped lead to the success of Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

And while gymnastics is over, the spirit it built in her remains, Rubino said. "It taught me how to shoot big and have nothing keep me from accomplishing my goals," she said. "I don't know how I could have done this without gymnastics."

Rubino already is accepted to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She plans to enroll in the School of Foreign Service.

She said she was drawn to the school because of what she describes as its exceptional focus on service. In learning about the school, she's already met students there who also manage nonprofit organizations.

"All of the kids who I have met are sort of similar because they've had some difficult life experience that made them want to give back," she said.

It's easy to imagine that young people may look up to Rubino for her ability to make such a difference while still a

Continued on next page

Hospitalized kids from around the country get cheerful notes urging them to stay strong and to remember they're not alone through the organization, Cards for Hospitalized Kids. Local resident Jen Rubino, now 19, started the effort after she received a note of encouragement while she was in the hospital in 2011. A hospital can be a lonely place, and the note brightened her day, she said. Middle left, Rubino visits with a hospitalized child.

Photos courtesy of Jen Rubino

Continued from previous page

student

"Will she continue the organization once in college?" "Definitely," said Rubino, who has gone on to have more than 20 surgeries.

In fact, Rubino said she hopes to expand the organization. She would like to start providing other support, such as sending journals or fun decorations for brightening a hospital room. She also is thinking about sending letters from fellow kids, and expanding involvement from celebrities.

"My biggest piece of advice is to remember that no act of kindness is too small," she said. "Even if you impact one person, you are making a difference."

"Want to make some cards for the effort?"

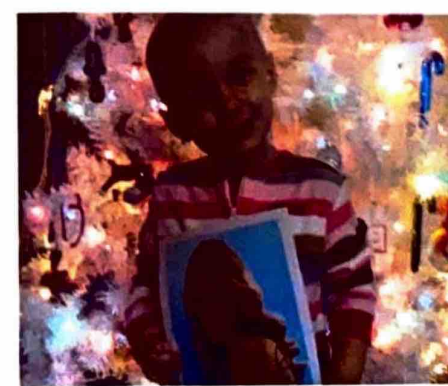
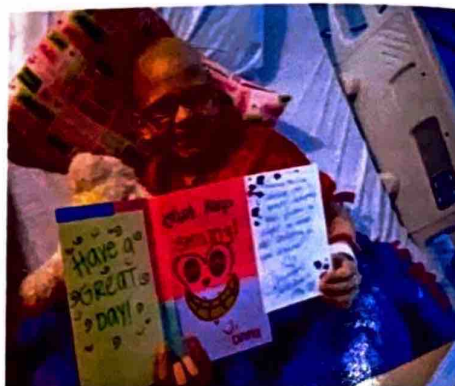
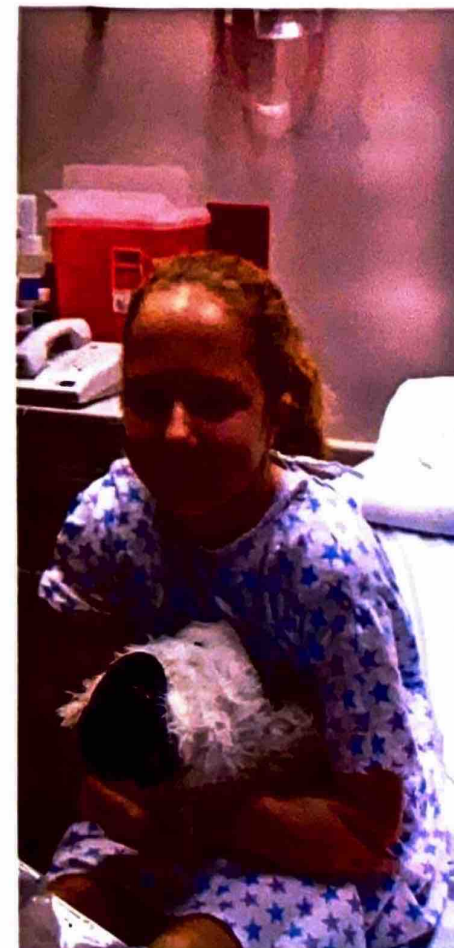
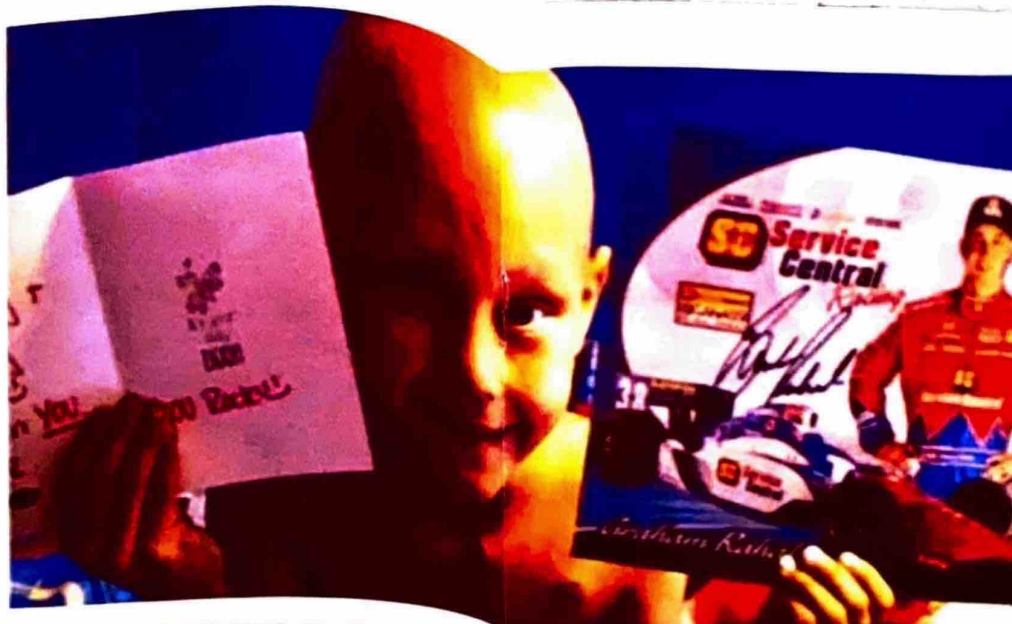
Send cards — multiple cards can be delivered in a single, large envelope — to Cards for Hospitalized Kids, 656 N. Olmsted Ave., Chicago.

Cards shouldn't be addressed to a particular person. Additionally, don't include any personal information in the card such as the sender's phone number, address or email address. Hospitals will not allow distribution of cards with this information.

Rubino recommends that writers give uplifting messages such as:

- Stay strong.
- You're awesome.
- Never forget how amazing you are.
- You rock.
- I hope you have a great day today.
- You shine brighter than the sun.
- You're the best.
- Be brave.
- You're beautiful.
- I believe in you.

For more information about how to help Rubino in her effort, visit cardsforhospitalizedkids.com.



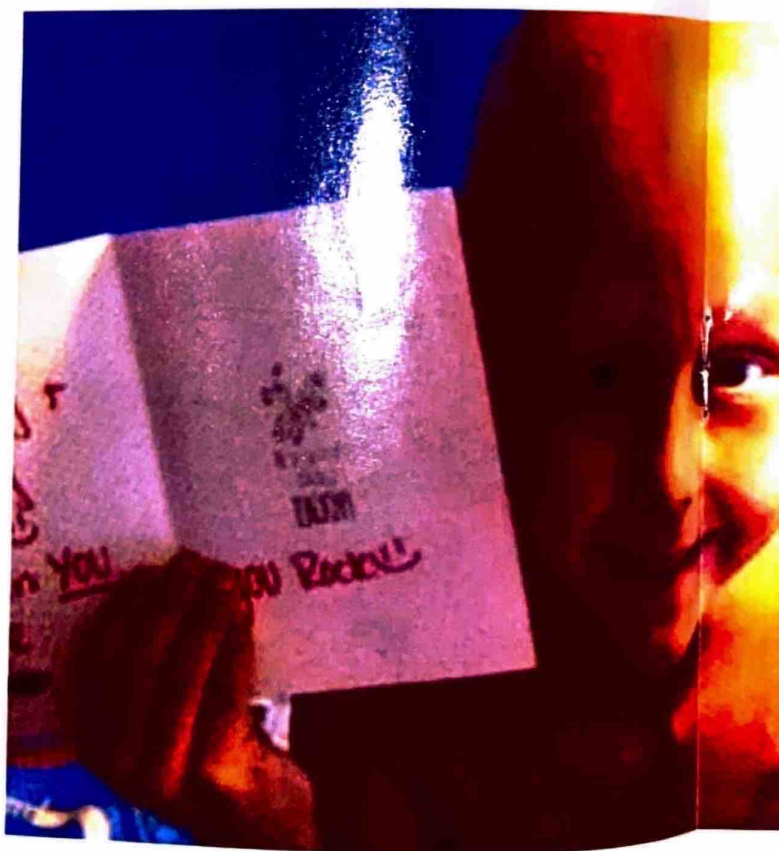
Tell us
what you

THINK

hibumagazine.com/survey

Hospitalized kids from around the country get cheerful notes urging them to stay strong and to remember they're not alone through the organization, Cards for Hospitalized Kids. Local resident Jen Rubino, now 19, started the effort after she received a note of encouragement while she was in the hospital in 2011. A hospital can be a lonely place, and the note brightened her day, she said. Middle left, Rubino visits with a hospitalized child.

Photos courtesy of Jen Rubino



Continued from previous page

student.

Will she continue the organization once in college? "Definitely," said Rubino, who has gone on to have more than 20 surgeries.

In fact, Rubino said she hopes to expand the organization. She would like to start providing other support, such as sending journals or fun decorations for brightening a hospital room. She also is thinking about sending letters from fellow kids, and expanding involvement from celebrities.

"My biggest piece of advice is to remember that no act of kindness is too small," she said. "Even if you impact one person, you are making a difference."

Want to make some cards for the effort?

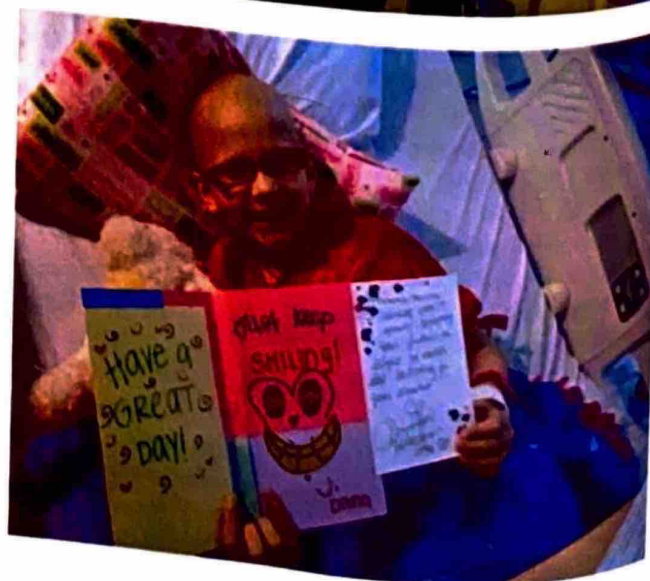
Send cards — multiple cards can be delivered in a single, large envelope — to Cards for Hospitalized Kids, 6567 N. Olmsted Ave., Chicago.

Cards shouldn't be addressed to a particular person. Additionally, don't include any personal information in the card such as the sender's phone number, address or email address. Hospitals will not allow distribution of cards with this information.

Rubino recommends that writers give uplifting messages such as:

- Stay strong.
- You're awesome.
- Never forget how amazing you are.
- You rock.
- I hope you have a great day today.
- You shine brighter than the sun.
- You're the best.
- Be brave.
- You're beautiful.
- I believe in you.

For more information about how to help Rubino in her effort, visit cardsforhospitalizedkids.com.



Tell us
what you

THINK

hibumagazine.com/survey