

www.macon.com
April 26, 2010
By: Dan Maley

Girl Scouts make over bedroom for mostly homebound teen

The first thing she noticed was the color of the walls; a bright, light teal with the trade name “Lake Breeze.”

Then Tori McCandless noticed all the people standing in her newly redecorated bedroom; family, friends and a few news reporters with cameras and notebooks. She put her hands over her mouth and hugged her mom.

“This is so cool!” McCandless said.

The 18-year-old Kathleen resident always wanted to visit Paris, and now she had a bedroom that could take her there in spirit. There was a mural of the Eiffel Tower on one wall, photos of the Arc de Triomphe and Notre Dame Cathedral on another and Parisian post cards on display. All the furniture in the room was new, with the exception of a table and two chairs.

It was all the work of a group of five Girl Scouts from Macon, who gave McCandless a gift inspired by the TV show “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition.” The room redesign was part of their work toward earning the Gold Award, Girl Scouting’s highest achievement.

The award requires a service project that will benefit the community. The five Senior Girl Scouts — 17-year-old Anna Gainey, 16-year-old Christina Mayfield, 17-year-old Marissa McCranie, 17-year-old Tayler Monroe and 17-year-old Emily Rodenroth — worked with The Children’s Hospital at the Medical Center of Central Georgia to find a patient who could use their help.

They were introduced to McCandless, who has short bowel syndrome. When McCandless was five days old, doctors discovered that her intestines were twisted in knots, preventing the normal digestion of food. She had one-third of her intestines surgically

removed. Since then, her diet has been restricted and she often suffers severe abdominal pain.

Occasionally, she has to go to the hospital so a feeding tube can be inserted through her nose and into her stomach. This allows her to get necessary nutrition from a special formula.

McCandless' medical needs keep her homebound most of the time. She doesn't go to school; instead, the local school system sends a teacher to her house.

The Scouts solicited donations for their project and obtained funding from more than 50 sources. They enlisted the help of interior designer Rebecca Shiver and divided the work among themselves — one did furniture, one did linens, one did organization, one did art and one redecorated the bedroom of Tori's 20-year-old sister, Brittany, so she wouldn't feel left out.

The girls did all their on-site redecorating work on Saturday and Sunday. Tori McCandless stayed with a friend while her bedroom was being transformed. She also attended the Houston County High School prom Saturday night.

McCandless knew her bedroom was being redecorated, but she didn't know what it would look like. She arrived back home for the big "reveal" at about 2:15 Sunday afternoon.

Although McCandless didn't make a lot of noise, she was clearly overwhelmed.

The Girl Scouts were moved as well. "I want to cry," one of them said. They delighted in pointing out a dress form that they had converted into a jewelry display.

"We named her Madge," they told McCandless.

The Girl Scouts have all been friends since their early years in elementary school. Mayfield said the room redesign worked out "even better than we thought at first" and the project taught her the value of "helping people and teamwork."

McCandless lives with her sister, her mother and her father. She has an older brother who is now going through military basic training at Fort Benning.

McCandless' mother, Tosha McCandless, said her family was first contacted by the Scouts in January about the project.

"It's been fun," she said. "They're so generous and their so considerate. They've done a wonderful job. ... I've also been impressed with how the parents have been involved. They've been as involved as the girls."

Tori McCandless said she spends a lot of her time in her bedroom reading and listening to music.

"I'll want to be in here more," she said. "I'm overwhelmed by it. It's crazy. I don't know how to describe it. I can't believe someone would do this for me."