

Insights

newsletter for employees, medical staff,
and volunteers of Baptist Hospital East

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'Angels' lift children's spirits in Pediatric Unit with balloons

For five days, the Baptist Hospital East Pediatric Unit was home for Gina McQuillen and her daughter Andie. The experience left a lasting impression, and a visit from Andie's dad sparked an idea that's helping make other children's stay a little more pleasant.

"My husband brought our daughter a Mylar balloon one day while she was in the hospital and she was so happy. It really made her feel better, and that's when something clicked with me," she said.

She went out right away and sought donations of balloons and helium to provide Mylar "get well" balloons to all of the children on the unit. Every Monday and Friday, she delivers balloons to children on the unit.

"One of the nurses said, 'Look what the balloon angels brought us' and that's the name we chose," McQuillen said.



Patients on the Pediatric Unit are treated to balloon surprises each week, thanks to a group of volunteers from Balloon Angels. Gina McQuillen, left, started Balloon Angels after her own child was a patient on the unit. She is pictured above with fellow "angel" Lisa Lee and Nurse Manager Vicki Campbell. For more information, visit www.balloonangels.org.

Balloon Angels is a non-profit community fellowship with 11 volunteers. The project, which started at Baptist East, now delivers balloons to other area hospitals, at no charge to patients or the hospitals.

"I was carrying balloons in one day and an orderly stopped me and said, 'Looks like someone gets to go home today.' I told him that I was delivering balloons to the children in the hospital and he stopped, gave me a hug and said, 'We need more people in the world like you.' I didn't know what to say," she said.

Volunteers often take the time during visits to talk with children and their families, or just drop by to make a quick delivery.

"Sometimes people just like to have some company for a while. Any time you make a child smile, it makes the parents smile, too," said Lisa Lee, a volunteer with Balloon Angels.

"When I walk into the room and talk with a parent

and they say 'My child is so sick,' I can say your child is in good hands here, because the staff here at Baptist East is so wonderful. My heart is at this hospital," McQuillen said.

She goes in with a smile, and always leaves with so much more.

"I knew that this would be fun to do, but it's so much more than that. To see the response that you get from the children and their parents, and knowing that at least for a little while they feel better, is priceless. It makes me feel so good." ■