

Ben's Wish For A Tractor Comes True

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HAVRE de GRACE, Md. —

Like many young farmers, Ben Keyes had often dreamed of having his very own tractor.

"Anything that has wheels, I like," says Ben, with a wide grin.

Ben's parents, David and Kelly Keyes, operate Mt. Felix dairy farm, high on a hill above the town of Havre de Grace, where the Susquehanna River flows into the Chesapeake Bay. Working around the farm and the equipment has always been a favorite way for 12-year-old Ben to spend his time.

Nearly two years ago, Ben was diagnosed with cancer in his left leg. Chemotherapy and surgery

did not stop the cancer's spread and in July 1996, Ben's leg was amputated above his knee. He quickly adapted to crutches and a prosthetic, more commonly known as an artificial leg. But his favorite method of transportation to the barn, which is rather a long distance from the house, became the family's six-wheeled, John Deere Gator, a sort of cross between a golf cart and a mini-pick-up truck.

Even more than the Gator, though, Ben enjoyed the occasional chance his dad gave him to drive one of the farm tractors. It became Ben's dream to have his own tractor.

Ben had some extra time to think about that dream in the last



Ben Keyes on his Make-A-Wish dream come true: a Model 1925 Ford New Holland Boomer tractor.



Megan Keyes' 4-H helper, Sue, which she recently exhibited at the Harford County Fair, was a birthday-Easter gift from her brother Ben. He bought the calf with money earned from his last year's 4-H project pigs.

year, while recuperating from several more surgeries at Johns Hopkins Children's Center for cancer nodules in his lungs. So, when the Make-A-Wish foundation asked him early in January of this year if he had a special wish, Ben knew exactly what it would be.

"I'd like to have a tractor," Ben told Grace Ann Moore of the Make-A-Wish organization.

That was a wish that took a while to accomplish. But in early June, the Keyes family received a letter telling them that Make-A-Wish had found Ben his tractor. He even visited the New Holland plant in Lancaster County, for a hands-on introduction to the kind of tractor he had in mind. He had no idea, though, when his wish would come true.

Meanwhile, Ben was busy helping other kids with health problems. He was invited to be one of three area ambassadors for the Children's Miracle Network and take part in its annual telethon to raise funds for the Hopkins Children's Center. Part of that job was to attend public events, like sporting activities, and tell the audiences and spectators about the Children's Miracle Network.

Another part of the ambassador responsibility was to appear on television during the telethon,



Ben shows his mother, Kelly, some of the features of his safety-emphasized tractor, including a built-in, 15-mile-per-hour speed limitation.

held the first weekend of June, and help to accept the contributions sent in by supporters. When the 21-hour telethon was over, the group had raised more than \$2 million for the Center.

In April Ben attended the Eastern Shore Showcase Sale of Holstein cattle. One October-born heifer calf came through the sale that he particularly liked, so he bid on and purchased her, using some of the money he had earned from the sale of his 4-H pigs last summer. After the sale, Ben decided that the heifer would make a good combined birthday and Easter gift for his 10-year-old sister, Megan, so he transferred "Sue" to Megan's name for her to show in her third year of 4-H.

On July 4, Ben got a preview of driving the tractor he dreamed about when the 4-H Dairy Club put a float in the Havre de Grace Independence Day parade. Ben got to drive the tractor pulling the wagon through the streets of town. He figured the blue tractor pulling a red wagon was appropriate for a parade's salute to the nation's birthday. On the tractor were posters from the Keyes family, thanking the community for its support for Ben and for fundraising efforts toward his medical needs. The float won first place.

Megan showed her Sue, at the Harford County Fair's dairy show in early August, while Ben had

raised two pigs for projects. He had named his pigs Ron and Linda, after two of the staff members at Johns Hopkins Children's Center. But at the weigh in, Ron was a few pounds over the pig class limit and did not qualify to show.

One of the classes Ben showed Linda in was for swine showmanship. When the judge had him switch pigs with another 4-H member, the other pig accidentally ran into Ben and knocked him down. Despite the accident, Ben still won a fourth place ribbon in a large class of showman.

The day of the fair's livestock sale, Ben was puzzled when he was called into the ring before the start of the sale. Then he spied a bright, shiny blue tractor — his Make-A-Wish dream. Ben was so surprised and touched that he broke into tears. So did everyone else around the auction arena who watched as Ben climbed up onto the seat of his wish-come-true. In addition to many friends, neighbors, and relatives of the Keyes family, several of the Johns Hopkins Children's Center doctors and nurses came to help surprise Ben.

During the 4-H sale which followed, Ben sold his pig, Linda. She weighed 244 pounds and brought a final bid of \$7.75 per pound. The buyer was Richard Crouse, Crouse Construction.

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Ben Keyes, left, was one of three Baltimore-area ambassadors for the annual Children's Miracle Network telethon, which raised over \$2 million for Johns Hopkins Children's Center. With Ben are ambassadors Vinnie Iullano, center, LaKeisha Ojo, and Baltimore-area television newscasters Mary Beth Marsden and Stan Stevall.

HOMESTEAD NOTES