

WISH LIST

## Car dealer donates minivan so mom can get daughter to doctors



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It was too cold for crying, but there was no helping the tears.

Eiroctonya “Tonya” Smith no longer will be awash in worry over how she will get her 10-year-old daughter and her wheelchair to monthly doctors’ appointments in Peoria.

Thanks to the kindness of a Davenport car dealer and the generosity of Wish List Quad-Cities donors, the 35-year-old Moline mom is a vehicle owner for the first time in her life. No more buses. No more pleading for rides.

Most importantly, Smith’s beloved daughter, Tatyanna Mann, who was born with cerebral palsy, can count on her mom getting her where she needs to be with much less struggle.

Smith was nominated for Wish List Quad-Cities by Kit Speirs, of Bethany for Children & Families, to be considered for a much-needed vehicle. Jeff West, owner of Jeff’s Car Corner, stepped up with the gift of a 2002 Ford Windstar.

Donations to Wish List paid for several months’ worth of insurance, title fees and a gift card for gas. No longer dependent on time-sensitive public transportation to get to work, Smith has a new job and plans to budget for her future insurance needs.

As several workers from Bethany waited Friday for Speirs to deliver Smith to pick up her new van, West hustled across Division Street to fill the tank.

When Smith arrived, she began to cry even before spotting her new wheels, which shone brightly in the solstice sun.

“Thank you so much!” she cried, hugging West and salesman Alex Shoulders.

West pointed out the van’s options, including a power-driven side door that will simplify the loading and unloading of Tatyanna’s wheelchair.

“I love it so much!” Smith said of her new van. “I’ve just got to sit down and figure out how to work it. There’s even a TV in the back.

“I want to say to Jeff and the other donors, ‘Thank you so much for having a big heart and looking out for my family.’

“They will always be in our prayers.”

The van already is being put to use for a family holiday trip this weekend.

As Smith was introduced to her new vehicle, Tatyanna waited in a heated, Bethany-owned van with a nurse. Smith escorted West to the door to meet her daughter.

In the Wish List nomination, Speirs pointed out that Smith's devotion to her daughter does not wane, despite the complications and demands of satisfying serious daily medical needs.

"The daily life of this family is difficult, emotional and involves challenges that many don't face in a lifetime, let alone every day, all day," Speirs wrote. "Tatyanna's eyes light up in recognition, and she struggles to turn her head when she hears her mother's voice and when she feels her presence nearby."

She also asked that Smith be considered for a night away from home, because she rarely uses her available respite nursing care, preferring instead to care for Tatyanna herself with the help of her partner, JD Rogers.

The Hotel Blackhawk donated an overnight stay, including dinner and breakfast. The hotel-attached Salon Luce donated pedicures and manicures.

"When I made the request for a vehicle, I figured it was a dream," Speirs said Friday. "I thought maybe a night away would be good for her and maybe Wish List could help with that. This is just amazing.

"Tonya must have cried 10 times today, and I've only ever seen her cry once. She's so strong. But she was so touched and so grateful. She and JD were talking about something I've never even thought of: Now they can go to the laundromat without having to take everything on the bus."