Bikers, Marines rally to make a Christmas wish come true
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By SANDRA WALSH
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Leather-clad Christian bikers lined their hogs along a front lawn with a caravan of vehicles following close behind.

The group killed their engines and stood together in a half-moon formation around a front door in a Laurel Bay neighborhood where 5-year-old Aliceia Frame lingered nervously with her fingers in her mouth.

"Merry Christmas," the entourage yelled as Aliceia rolled out in her wheelchair over the bumpy lawn.

One of the bikers led her to the back of a pickup where her Christmas wish lay: a custom $700 tricycle.

Face-to-face with the therapeutic bike, operated via hand cranks instead of foot pedals, Aliceia seemed shocked.

"Do you want to ride it?" one of the bikers asked her.

"No," she responded coyly.

But after the entourage left, she took it for a spin in her carpeted living room.

She seemed ecstatic.

"Every time she sat on Santa's lap she asked for a bike," Aliceia's single mother, 24-year-old Cynthia Jenkins, said. "I am so grateful."

Thursday evening, members from the Beaufort chapter of the national Christian Motorcyclists Association and a representative from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island chapter of the Marine Corps League donated the bicycle to Aliceia, who suffers from spina bifida, a congenital defect of the spine in which part of the spinal cord is exposed through a gap in the backbone.

In some cases, the birth defect causes paralysis of the lower limbs and mental handicap.

Aliceia doesn't suffer from mental handicap, Jenkins said, and she can walk slowly with help from leg braces and a walker, although she spends most of her time in a wheelchair.

In January, Aliceia will have a series of surgeries that could help her walk more independently.
“This is what Christmas is all about,” Doug Peake, spokesperson for the local chapter of the Christian Motorcyclists Association, said teary-eyed after posing for a picture with Aliceia.

Texas roots

This particular Christmas wish has its roots in Texas.

Jenkins has two children in addition to Aliceia, ages 3 and 2, and while that doesn’t afford her much time to attend classes in a traditional university setting, she’s enrolled in online business management classes through Iowa-based Kaplan University.

The university’s spokeswoman, Caitrin Muldoon, said 74 percent of the university’s 26,000 students are women, many of them single or working mothers.

Two weeks ago, Jenkins e-mailed her professor, George Sparks, who teaches online management classes from his home in Plano, Texas.

In the e-mail, Jenkins explained that she would be out of the loop in January because her daughter had to be hospitalized.

Jenkins also told Sparks that she felt discouraged because of the lack of support she felt she was receiving from the community when it came to help with expenses surrounding Aliceia’s spina bifida.

Sparks said he would pray for her and asked Jenkins what Aliceia wanted for Christmas.

Jenkins told him that she wanted a bike.

“I’m not a rich man, but I thought I could log on to Walmart.com or something and find a reasonably priced one,” Sparks said. “But she said I couldn’t find the kind of bike she needed there; when she told me it cost about $800, I furrowed my eyebrows.”

But Sparks, a member of a Texas chapter of the Christian Motorcyclists Association, didn’t stop there.

He contacted the Beaufort chapter of the Christian Motorcyclists Association and the local chapter, in turn, contacted the local Marine Corps League that happened to have the exact trike Aliceia wanted in their warehouse.

“I am humbled and honored to play a part in this miracle,” Sparks said. “This isn’t just a biker club, it’s a ministry.”

Cpl. Brando Muñoz, representative of the local Marine Corps League that helps Marines and the local community in need, said the league started a Trikes for Tykes program two years ago that donates therapeutic bikes to children who can’t walk.

Last year, Muñoz said, the group handed out two bikes to Beaufort children.

This year, in addition to Aliceia’s bike, the league will also give one to a rehabilitation center.
The bikers collected additional Christmas gifts for Aliceia and her brother and sister, and they collected money for the family.

On Thursday, Jenkins said she had contacted four local organizations to help pay for the tricycle, but that they refused.

"It's not that they don't want to help, it's just that they can't," Jenkins said. "They will help you pay for your light bills and stuff like that, but not diapers and shoes."

Jenkins said medical insurance covers Aliceia's walker, braces and rehabilitation therapy, but that she must pay for items such as Aliceia's therapeutic shoes that cost about $200 a pair, custom insoles, diapers and other extras.

To curb expenses, Jenkins lives with her mother and opted for online university because she can't afford day care, which runs about $175 a child, she said.

"It's been a rough road," Jenkins said. "But we're finally getting there."