



NEWLY-FORMED FAMILY FUND GIVES BACK THROUGH ACTS OF SERVICE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Through their new family foundation, *the Ben Smiles Memorial Foundation*, the Gerlach family of St Charles wants to give back to their communities through service programs this November and December.

They are taking a Ben Smiles volunteer group and preparing dinner for **Ronald McDonald** House families in Chicago on Wednesday November 15. This involves shopping, prepping, cooking and serving a homecooked meal to families with ill children in the hospital staying at the Ronald McDonald House. "We were able to stay at Ronald McDonald House during my son Ben's last stay at Lurie Children. This is truly a great place and we wanted to serve them as they had served my family," says Elizabeth Gerlach, Ben Smiles founder.

Ben Smiles is also delivering Thanksgiving Gift Bags to patients staying in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at **Central Dupage Hospital** and their families this Thanksgiving. "We know all too well that being in the hospital is a rough thing for a child, especially over the holidays," Gerlach says. "We hope that these activity bags can help them pass the time, cheer them up and remind them that we are thinking about them."

Ben Smiles is also participating in two **Adapt A Toy** events in November, one at Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital in Winfield on November 18 and the other with Kmart, Easter Seals and School Health on November 25. Many children with delayed or limited motor function benefit from toys that are accessible by touch activation switches. These toys called 'switch toys' are expensive and many times not covered by insurance. Ben Smiles, along with their partners, are adapting these toys for kids and providing activation switches.

Ben Smiles Memorial Foundation was founded in partner with the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley spring 2017 by Rob & Elizabeth Gerlach close to a year after they lost their son Benjamin Robert. Ben Smiles is dedicated to enhancing the playing, learning and living of special needs kids and their families by gifting toys and other important devices to kids like their son Ben. It's important that all children have access to their environment. Many kids with fine & gross motor development, cognitive or sensory issues have a difficult time playing, moving, communicating, eating, talking, learning ... doing the basic things that a child should be able to do. Special equipment, adapted toys, other tools are out there but they can be expensive, hard to find, and many times, are not covered by insurance or will come with large copays. Our hope is that we can promote smiles within this group of special kids and their families by providing switch-adapted toys, switches, communication tools, learning devices and positioning equipment. Ben smiled...and we hope that our gifts will create more smiles from these special families,