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Gladstone teen gets her 'extreme' wish

Two Oregon City women create Oregon Dream Makeover, and first recipient is Gladstone High grad recovering from leukemia

BY ELLEN SPITALERI

The Clackamas Review, Nov 11, 2008, Updated Nov 11, 2008

Marissa Huddleston had a dream – the Gladstone resident wanted an “extreme home makeover.”

When Ragan Corliss and Jocelyn Webber heard about Huddleston's dream, they decided they could make it come true. The two women co-founded Oregon Dream Makeover, a non-profit organization set up to give home makeovers to worthy recipients, and both credit Huddleston as being their “inspiration.”

Huddleston learned she had Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia (CML) last spring, when she was a senior at Gladstone High School. This past summer she received a bone marrow transplant from her 15-year-old sister Molly, and on her 18th birthday found out that she is cancer free, and that her bone marrow is “completely engrafted,” she said.



Ragan Corliss and Jocelyn Webber, co-founders of Oregon Dream Makeover, above, are set to begin re-decorating the bedrooms of Marissa Huddleston.

ELLEN SPITALERI / CLACKAMAS REVIEW

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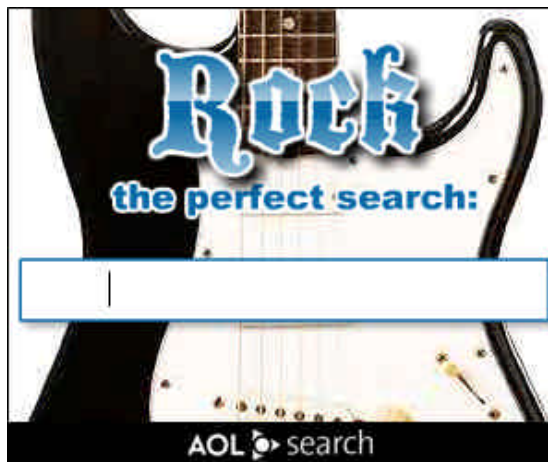
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On Sept. 5, Webber put on a fundraiser at Studio Catwalk, where she works as a hairstylist, and the proceeds went to help defray Huddleston’s medical bills.



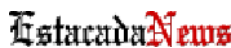
In the middle of the fundraiser, Corliss and Webber announced that Huddleston was the first recipient of a home makeover.



“I started crying; it was incredible – I was so overwhelmed,” Huddleston said.



“I was thrilled that they wanted to do both girls’ rooms over – it is such a sweet thing that they included Molly, since she was vitally important as well. Without Molly, there would be no Marissa,” said Tracy Huddleston, the girls’ mother.



“I was overwhelmed that strangers would want to do such nice things for us – it is a huge blessing,” she added.



The plan now is for Corliss and Webber to redecorate Marissa’s and Molly’s two bedrooms, and if they can put together enough money, they would like to re-do the kitchen and some of the other rooms as well.



Corliss noted that Pastor Tom Hurt in Oregon City heard Webber speak about the project at a statewide chamber of commerce event, and he organized a crew to do landscaping work at the Huddleston home last weekend.



Reasons to reach out



Webber said that a client told her about Marissa Huddleston’s cancer, and she decided to organize a fundraiser to help with medical expenses.



She then met Corliss, an interior decorator and the owner of Interiors by Decorating Den, at a North Clackamas Chamber of Commerce event.



“I asked her if she would be interested in doing the two girls’ rooms. She got really excited and said, ‘Let’s try to do the whole house,’” Webber said.



“I was looking for a good cause and Jocelyn came up with the perfect opportunity – and everything came together really well,” Corliss said.



Webber said she was also looking for a way to honor her father, who died last October at age 43 from an aortic aneurism.



Before he died, he became close to a friend’s daughter who had leukemia, she said, so when she met the Huddlestons, she related to what was happening to the family.



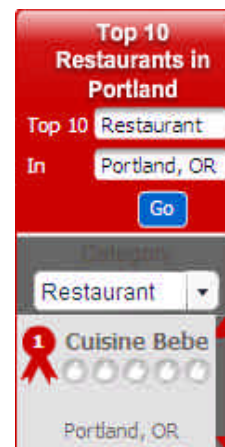
She added, “As a mom, I cannot imagine anything more painful than the thought of losing a child through cancer. After meeting [Marissa] I was so inspired by her – she loves life and lives each day to the fullest.”

“For me, my son has suffered from a stroke and after living through something like that I understand what the [Huddleston] family is going through. I want to reach out and help,” Corliss said.

Oregon Dream Makeover is born

As the two women set out to put together Oregon Dream Makeover, they encountered some supporters along the way.

“We met Wayne Winter and Louis Seals, two gentlemen who founded Tribute to Honor, after 9-11,” Corliss said, noting that Winter is a retired



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Portland firefighter and Seals is an officer in the Portland Police Bureau.

Tribute to Honor is a local charitable organization dedicated to helping those in the community who have been affected by tragedy or abuse.

After Sergeant Damon Coates, a Clackamas County sheriff's deputy, was shot in the face by an out-of-control juvenile on Jan. 9, 2003, Tribute to Honor built his family a totally new house, Corliss said.

"They started talking to us about merging with them," she said, noting that Tribute to Honor has "501.c3 status so they have invited us to work under their wing."

Corliss and Webber also noted that they currently have three sponsors, Double J Construction in Oregon City and Thomas Bly Landscapes of Clackamas, but they want more companies to step up and offer to help.

"We'd like to get sponsorships to do the kitchen, which needs new cabinetry, flooring and countertops," Corliss said.

"The electrical is not up to code and we could do some structural work, based on how people help out and contribute. The more sponsors we have, the more work we can do," Webber said, noting that sponsors will be able to advertise on the Oregon Dream Makeover Web site.

"While we are going through economic woes, [a project like this] helps take away the stress. It feels good to be doing something for someone else. Marissa is our inspiration, and it will be nice to give something back to [her and her family]," Corliss said.

Webber added, "When we do the next project, [Marissa] has come to us and asked how she can help – people can pay it forward."



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