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Horse a Forsyth girl's wish come true

by Bob Pepalis

FORSYTH COUNTY – Margaret Hurt's passion is horses, making the long months when chemotherapy made her too sick to ride even more difficult.

But an early Christmas present came to her from the Make-A-Wish Foundation in the form of "Hoochie," a registered American Quarter Horse.

"It's my first horse. It's definitely a big thing to me since I love horses so much," she said.

Margaret was diagnosed with acute lymphatic center in 2007, said her mother, Mary Hurt. She has lived with the disease and its treatment for 2½ years, and chemotherapy made her extremely ill for eight months.

"During that time her sister would have to come and lead her on a horse, and it just about killed her," said Mary.

Margaret has been riding for about six years, including time on The Equestrian Reserve's show team. When she first came to the barn, she was a vibrant, vivacious girl, said Donna Romeu of The Equestrian Reserve. When she was diagnosed with leukemia, "it was heartbreaking to see it happen," Romeu said.

Even when she was sick, Margaret spent hours at the barn at the Equestrian Reserve. However, during that time, she shut out most of her friends because she didn't feel like doing anything, her mother said.

"She wasn't even strong enough to watch a whole movie with somebody," said Mary.

Being at the barn was huge for her daughter.

"You know, the horse doesn't care if you are bald or you feel bad," she said.

Things are much different now that Margaret isn't so ill from chemotherapy, and it showed with all the hugs and smiles she gave her friends at the Make-A-Wish donation party. She even rode Hoochie bareback around the show ring in front of her friends and family on a blustery December afternoon.

"It's a lot of fun to get over here and have this party with all of my friends," Margaret said.

She rides Western and English styles, "just for fun, too."

Asked what do horses mean to her, Margaret said, "They are pretty much my passion right now, as much as it can be for a kid. Basically I spend half of my life here, so it means a lot to me."



Margaret Hurt had her wish come true with the gift of Hoochie, an American quarter horse, which she rides for the first time at The Equestrian Reserve. Bob Pepalis.

Preston Byers II, president of ClearBridge Wealth Management of Atlanta, who funded the gift, had to go home and explain to his children why they didn't get a horse, but he wasn't worried about it.

Preston's firm annually helps make one Wish come true for someone through the Make-A-Wish Georgia and Alabama Chapter. But this year, the chapter approached him about a second wish shortly before Christmas. Having met Margaret when she was at Camp Sunshine, Byers said he was happy to help out a second time in 2009 to make her wish true.

The Equestrian Reserve also is helping the Hurt family to keep the wish alive for all of 2010. And that's the best medicine the family could ask for.

"For a 13-year-old to have a horse of her own is huge," said Mary.