

Make-A-Wish lights up the Gates

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Annual Trees of Joy event creates holiday cheer for sick kids



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The Gates on Roblin glowed with lights, sparkles and joy on Nov. 25 as several Wish Kids, accompanied by their families, piled into a banquet space to view their special Trees of Joy Christmas trees, created by Make-A-Wish Canada.

The trees had been decorated down to the finest detail with goodies and decorations pertaining to each child's individual interests by several of Make-A-Wish Canada's Trees of Joy partners, including the Winnipeg Police Service and the Winnipeg Jets. The specifications of each tree had been requested months in advance.

Once the children found their trees — which was easily done, considering how individual they were — they were given a 'magic wand' and watched the creations come to life in front of their eyes, all while applause and encouragement echoed throughout the room.





Trees of Joy events are held across Canada during the holiday season. Make-A-Wish paired Wish Kids with corporate donors to create holiday magic for families facing hard situations at a joyful time. The Gates on Roblin (6945 Roblin Blvd.) hosted the event free of charge.

This was the first Trees of Joy experience for Monique Bazin and her five-year-old daughter, Maize Morin, currently in remission after a battle with a Wilms tumour (a kind of kidney cancer).

Speaking before Maize's tree was revealed, Bazin said she felt "completely elated."

"(I) couldn't see past her last treatment day," she recalled. "We have a road map that was written out for us with the oncologist, and Dec. 27 (2024) was the last treatment date... I couldn't see past that."

Maize celebrated her birthday on Nov. 22 — just a few days ahead of the Trees of Joy event — and Bazin said that milestone enable her to realize that the experience was behind them and that her daughter is in recovery.

"Like, it's behind us now," she said. "Actually behind us now, and I wasn't able to see that before, and it was just like, 'Wow.'"

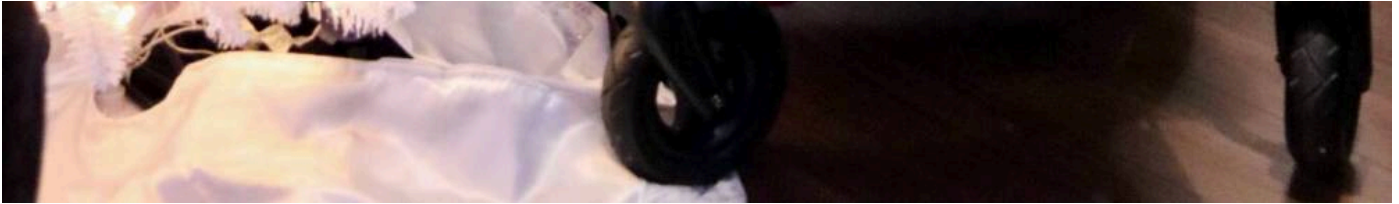
Wilms tumours are the most common form of kidney cancer in children, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. They are typically found in kids aged two to four years old.

"Last Christmas was our first with the diagnosis, and this will be our first Christmas with remission," Bazin said.

"There's (being) grateful for something, but then you have no idea how much gratitude you can have for the simple things."

"So much of their life is their illness, so much is defined by that," said Meaghan Stovel McKnight, CEO of Make-A-Wish Canada, who added that the event helps kids feel seen through the emphasis on their own interests.





Stovel McKnight's favourite part of Trees of Joy is the parade of kids heading into see the trees revealed, she said. She emphasized that the goal of the program is helping families feel less alone as they navigate child illness.

"We saw them," she said. "We saw you, and we reflected you."

Maize became a Wish Kid in September 2024, and her wish for a high-end, interactive play set was granted last summer.

"Just seeing her have complete enjoyment and not worrying about the doctors ... It was just an escape from reality, you know what I mean? Such a simple yet huge relief from the reality of what was going on," Bazin said.

"They affected our lives in a very profound way."

Bazin described Maize as a very energetic child, a drive which she plans to channel into ringette and curling in the near future. Her tree was themed after the Winnipeg Jets (and fishing).

Make-A-Wish Canada is a non-profit organization. For more information or to donate, visit makeawish.ca



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