

# Med Monthly

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## LIFE SAVER

Dr. Erik Schobitz compares the battlefield with the ER

### KATIE'S LEGACY

A little girl's favorite movie character helps others

CLINICAL TRIALS CAN BE MORE FUN THAN THEY LOOK

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THE  
*Pediatrics*  
ISSUE

# KATIE'S LEGACY

By Kristy Stevenson

*A long time ago in a hospital far, far away, 6-year-old Katie Johnson was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer. Always eager to get dirty, climb things, scrape her knees, and just run and play, Katie had just finished soccer season when her parents noticed that she was falling down a lot. They chalked it up to clumsiness on the field, but when she began walking strangely, Katie's pediatrician immediately ordered an MRI to take a closer look at her neurological symptoms. A brain tumor was discovered, and the prognosis was devastating.*



Albin Johnson, Katie's father, is the founder of the 501st Legion, a Star Wars costuming fan club that does charity work all over the world. Over four thousand 501st Legion members and countless more Star Wars fans rallied together in support of Katie, a funny, precocious child who loved all things pink. Her treatment immediately took a toll on her little body and she struggled to come to terms with weight gain and hair loss. "Katie loved to look pretty for church," Albin says, "and I noticed a similarity in the design of our sanctuary windows and a Star Wars R2-unit." He began laying the groundwork for one to be built to watch over Katie as she slept (just as R2-D2 had done for Padmé Amidala in the first trilogy). Older sister Allie

after being diagnosed, Katie's courageous battle with cancer ended and she passed peacefully in her sleep.

The following summer, a fully functional pink custom-painted R2-KT was completed and presented to the Johnson family. "It was the realization of a dream we had to commemorate Katie and give her a companion through her illness," Albin says.

Today, Katie's legacy continues through R2-KT's mission to entertain children, raise awareness of pediatric cancer, and elicit funds for such charities as the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Children's Cancer Fund. Her allies include the 501st, Zig the Pig (mascot for Children's Chance), and Richland Children's Hospital where Katie was diagnosed. KT participates in children's hospital visits, appearances/fundraisers, and events promoting awareness of pediatric cancer and

Hasbro was so enamored with R2-KT's story that they manufactured a one-time-only release of the droid as an action figure. Available at the 2008 Comic-Con, a comic book and sci-fi convention held annually in San Diego, it raised \$100,000 for Make-A-Wish. More recently, the 501st sold R2-KT patches to raise \$1675 for Red Cross relief following the Japan tsunami disaster; a second run brought in \$1800 for Red Cross relief to Missouri tornado victims; and a third run is projected to raise \$1800 for the Ronald McDonald House. KT's original parts have also been auctioned off to help raise money to benefit "Princess Leah," an infant suffering from undiagnosed birth problems and garnering media attention for the way the Star Wars community has supported her.

To bring R2-KT to your facil-

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further suggested painting it pink and naming it after Katie—and the concept for R2-KT was born.

In 2005, the R2 Builders Club pulled together to help Albin meet his goal; master droid builder Jerry Greene engineered the project. Knowing that Katie's time was short, however, club member Andy Schwartz outfitted his R2 unit with a pink makeover and shipped it to Katie's home—guaranteeing a droid while she was still able to enjoy it. Katie had no idea that her own personal guardian was on the way. She hugged it on sight and slept with it in her room every night. "She never stopped loving it," Albin says. Less than nine months

other illnesses. "R2-KT brings cheer to little Star Wars fans and reminds them of happier times," says Albin. Acting as their ambassador to the Star Wars universe, KT stands by hospital bedsides and reminds kids they have a friend. "Appearances are the key to spreading hope, and hope is an important tool. We've been to hospitals where children couldn't move or even speak, but when R2-KT rolled up to their bedsides the children would lovingly stroke the droid in an attempt to make contact in whatever way they could manage. Hope is a beautiful and intangible product, but well worth R2-KT's time and energy to try and spread it."

ity, email her pit crew at [r2kt@r2kt.com](mailto:r2kt@r2kt.com). Be advised that the droid stays pretty busy, though, so please plan as far in advance as possible. KT's team is comprised of volunteers in the southeastern US, so if a long distance journey is requested, it may be necessary to sponsor travel expenses so she can arrive safely.

"Katie would be cool with R2-KT helping others," says Albin. "She was grateful for what others did for her and was gracious in accepting their help. I think the idea of others getting help because of her pink robot would thrill her to no end. She'd smile knowing we're sharing her pink droid with the children of the world!"



## THE STORY OF R2-KT

(1)Katie and Albin Johnson. (2) Katie sees R2-KT for the first time. (3) Envisioned rendering of the completed R2-KT(4) R2-KT and friends visit Palmetto Health Children's Hospital.

