



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LAUREL HIGHLANDS SOPHOMORE NAMED TOYS FOR TOTS YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Uniontown, PA - When Laurel Highlands High School sophomore Kobe Keffer was 8 years old, his mom, Katie Wilson, brought him along to volunteer with her in the Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots program. Keffer stuck with the program, and now, eight years later, has been selected as one of its youth ambassadors.

"I got involved because I worked for Head Start of Fayette County," Wilson said. "They had sent out an email (asking for Toys for Tots volunteers)."

Wilson signed up, and when selected, asked if she could bring along her young son. "I just thought it was a great thing to get him involved in," Wilson said. "It helps the community and others."

Wilson noted when Keffer first began volunteering with her, the donation boxes were as big as he was.

"This year, he was able to drive me to drop off the boxes," she laughed.

Fayette County Toys for Tots Coordinator Dan Martin said Keffer started out helping to pack up leftover items following toy distribution. As one of the child volunteers, he was also asked to help test out any battery-operated toys to be sure they were in working order. From there, Keffer graduated to sorting and distributing toys.

Over the years, Martin has been able to watch Keffer grow up in the program.

"He's almost as tall as me now," Martin said.

Only new, unwrapped toys are accepted, leading Martin to give Keffer a very special gift one year. Wilson said Keffer was an avid Pittsburgh Penguins fan, and upon seeing a donated hockey stick had a scratch and could not be distributed, Martin instead offered it to Keffer, whom Wilson said he still affectionately calls "Mario" after Keffer's favorite player, Mario Lemieux.

Martin nominated Keffer for the youth ambassador program, which according to the Toys for Tots website, aims to "honor and recognize young people across the country who support the Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program in an extraordinary manner. The Ambassador is a member of a select group of our Nation's youth that serve as representatives, agents and stewards of Toys for Tots helping to create more targeted messaging and interactions within their community."

The youth ambassador program began in 2021, and Martin said Keffer already is the second selection from Fayette County. The county also saw a youth volunteer selected to the program in its first year.

Martin noted only eight youth volunteers were chosen that year, and while it has expanded, the program still is selective in its choices. Just 53 youth ambassadors were named nationwide.

Martin said there are 835 Toys for Tots coordinators throughout the U.S., all of whom may nominate a youth for the ambassador program. Candidates must be nominated no later than Aug. 1 each year, and the foundation makes its selections in September. Youth ambassadors serve a 1-year term, from Oct. 1 to the following Sept. 30.

“His mother brought him up right, teaching him to do this as a young boy, and here he is now,” Martin said of Keffer.

Wilson said she is very proud of her son and was “so excited” when he was chosen as a youth ambassador. “He 100% deserved it. He’s been doing a lot,” she said. “He likes to help out. Every year, he kind of looks forward to it.”

Fayette County Toys for Tots still has a few events scheduled for this holiday season, including a “Stuff-A-Bus” sponsored by Morrell Volunteer Fire Department and the Pennsylvania State Police slated for Sunday, Dec. 10 at Connellsville Walmart.

The program will hold its final signups from 1-6 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 6, at Uniontown Mall. Parents or guardians must present a photo ID, Access or SNAP card and proof of county residency. For each child, infant through age 12, a medical card and proof of birthdate must be submitted.

To learn more about the Toys for Tots program in Fayette county, visit <https://perryopolis-pa.toysfortots.org> or follow them on Facebook at “Toys for Tots – Fayette County, PA”.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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