Her Wish Came True

BY DEBBIE NIGHTOWER

TRINITY — Most Braxton Craven students were excited on the last day of school but Sarah Rickert was super-excited after learning that her wish had been granted. On June 9, Sarah was awestruck when she caught sight of a giant Disney-esque banner bearing her name on display in the Braxton Craven gym.

“She’s going to Disney in July,” said her mom, Terri. “Other than a youth trip to Georgia she’s never been out of the state. She’s never been to Disney or rode on a roller coaster.”

Sarah’s parents, Chris and Terri Rickert, knew little about congenital heart defects when their daughter was born 12 years ago. Among infants and young children, congenital heart disease is responsible for 30 to 50 percent of mortality caused by birth defects.

Sarah Rickert, left, reacts with surprise to learn that her wish of a Disney dream vacation will be granted by Make-A-Wish America. Sarah was born with a congenital heart defect which has required her to undergo open-heart surgery several times.

Sarah Rickert, center, proudly wears a set of Minnie Mouse ears in anticipation of a trip to the Magic Kingdom next month. Members of the Make-A-Wish America foundation joined Sarah’s family members in the Braxton Craven gymnasium for the surprise announcement.

“Had she not had open-heart surgery at 3 days old she would have never made it,” said Terri, who explained that Sarah was born with the two lower chambers of her heart open.

Over the course of her lifetime, Sarah has had open-heart surgery three times, which has meant a lot of down time and a lot of extra precautions.

Sarah had her final open-heart surgery March 27 and she bounced back during a mere six weeks.

“As of right now, she is fully functional,” said Terri. “When the doctors told me she would be fully healed in six weeks I thought they were crazy. She was back at school in six weeks. She has two valves which will eventually have to be replaced.”

According to her parents, Sarah has a sunny personality and loves to sing and dance. She loves attending Center Point Community Church which meets at Trinity High School, where she is in the youth group.

During the past months, the Rickert family has been grateful for support from their church, who did fundraisers, and from students at Braxton Craven, who sent Sarah a stack of handmade cards during her recovery period.

When her doctor at Levine Children’s Hospital in Charlotte nominated her for Make-A-Wish, Sarah deliberated for three hours before finally choosing a Disney encounter.

Sarah, her parents and her sister Abby will celebrate Sarah’s birthday at the Magic Kingdom. Maybe they will meet Mickey Mouse or a Disney princess or two. The trip will commemorate the twelfth birthday for the little girl who almost didn’t make it, said Terri, who believes in miracles and the power of prayer.

“On paper this child should not be functioning at this level. So she’s really overcome a lot of things that most people did not expect her to overcome,” she said.