SWRMS’ Beta Club provides cheer for cancer patients

By Jane Brasswell
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ASHEBORO — The halls of Southwestern Randolph Middle School (SWRMS) looked like Henry Ford’s assembly line with the feeling of Santa’s workshop as the eighth-grade Beta Club students crafted chemo care bags for patients at Randolph Cancer Center in Asheboro.

A few students lined up rows of bags, while others counted out and sorted the hundreds of items designed to cheer patients during the dark days of chemotherapy. Some students made handwritten notes of caring and encouragement.

Ashley Adams-Iseen, a seventh-grade math teacher at SWRMS, knows too well the uncertainty and discomfort that accompany each treatment. With images of her dad’s chemo fresh in her mind, Adams-Iseen talked to the kids about how a little cheer and caring can go a long way for patients undergoing the infusions.

“There are so many small things (that someone facing chemotherapy goes through) that people don’t think about,” Adams-Iseen said. “And it’s the small things that make a difference — just seeing in a tangible way that someone knows...

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and cares about what you are dealing with.”

Her dad, Olin Adams, lost his battle with lung cancer in May 2016.

Students who were moved by Adams-Ibsen’s story, as well as students who had their own experiences with friends and family facing cancer, were eager to provide small comforts. As a result, the students have filled 80 totes with items including bottles of water, lotions, lip balms, hand sanitizers for compromised immune systems, crossword puzzles and word searches, pencils, lots of candy, chips and other items.

Seventh-grade language arts teacher and Beta Club adviser Ashley Moody, who along with Adams-Ibsen spearheaded the project, told the students that she knew that many of them had friends and relatives who had been touched by cancer — and those who did not would learn of the uncertainties all too soon.

“Initially they were so excited about helping,” Moody said. “But then the donations came in a little slowly. We reminded them that feeling sentimental without action does nothing to help those who are suffering.”

The next day, the items poured in beyond expectations. Adams-Ibsen said that the original idea was to make 20 bags, but student enthusiasm led to the club quadrupling their goal. Beta Club members collected donations of both items and cash, and Kelly Gainey, mom to Beta Club member Kaitlyn, took the donated money and bought the remaining items that were needed, driving to the Randleman Walmart when the Asheboro store did not have enough of some items.

Kaitlyn, who sorted items for bags, said, “Knowing that I am helping cancer patients is such a great feeling. I would do this again in a heartbeat.”

Her Beta buddy Lola Reza said, “Making the bags was fun and in a way very inspirational. I hope we can encourage other schools ... to make a difference.”

“To be honest, it was a cool experience to think about how something so simple — just giving someone a gift bag — can brighten up someone’s week,” fellow Beta Club member Na’dyah Pugh said.

Moody said that students plan to make this an ongoing project, and that the club welcomes donations of cash or items for the bags from the community, churches and businesses.

Principal Mike Crider said he knows that projects like these are important not only for the recipients of the totes, but also to the students.

“We sometimes get attention here at our middle school for our strong academic programs and exceptional teachers,” Crider, whose 7-year-old cousin is undergoing chemo in Ohio, said. “But schools are about more than test scores. Sure, our primary mission is to educate in our core subjects, but we see these children seven hours a day. We want to also demonstrate kindness and empathy.”

The Beta Club’s first delivery of chemo care bags will be made to the Randolph Cancer Center in Asheboro at noon, Friday, Nov. 3.