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**A time for wings, wisps and wishes**

**Spirit Day observed at UNC Hospitals**

**JEREMY WATSON, Staff Writer**

CHAPEL HILL - Jackson had known Latoria Hunt for seconds, but he had already won her heart.

"He's a good dog," said Latoria, scratching the golden retriever mix behind the ears.

Latoria, an 11-year-old recovering from scoliosis surgery, wasn't the first patient Jackson had charmed.

His visits made a shy teenage girl one of the hospital's most outgoing children and made fully dressed patients jump back in bed just to curl up with him.

Jackson's handler, Julie Mathews, was one of the people recognized Thursday by Planetree, a Connecticut nonprofit organization, for making UNC Hospitals feel more like home.

To celebrate its first Spirit Day, the group released 100 butterflies and 50 caterpillars in the hospital's butterfly garden. Clyde Jones' glow-in-the-dark butterfly sculptures also were unveiled there, joining his ram and other woodcut "critters" at the hospital.

Jessica and Elizabeth Poirier, 5 and 3, squealed as they nudged monarchs off box lids.

"You can do it!"

"You can fly, butterfly buddy!"

"Fly away!"

Their 4-month-old sister, Charlotte, has RTS, a rare genetic disorder that makes it hard to chew or swallow.

The garden was the idea of John Strader, a physician assistant dubbed the "butterfly guy" for decorating IV poles with paper butterflies to cheer up patients.

Strader suggested that Derek Baker, then 17, plant the garden for his Eagle Scout project. Baker completed the garden with his Chapel Hill troop in September and became an Eagle Scout last month.

On Thursday, the hospital dedicated a lilac bench to Strader's son, Nathan, a butterfly lover who died from muscular dystrophy in January.

"For somebody who was in a wheelchair for most of his life, it represented freedom," said Strader, wearing a mother-of-pearl butterfly pin.

Frake Hunsel, a physical therapist, was honored for enlivening the hospital with his drums.

At a monthly session, Hunsel handed his drum to a listless boy with an IV tube in his arm.

When the boy began drumming, his smile brightened the room.

"He inspired everybody around him," said Hunsel, who uses drums because studies show beating the skins reduces stress.

Androgeena, the green-skinned puppet with feathery pink hair, came by to compliment people's outfits and give plastic amphibians to children.

Puppeteer Becky Lofland said Androgeena holds patients' hands and echoes their moans during operations.

The butterfly release encouraged Susan Albert, a leukemia patient undergoing her second round of chemotherapy. "That just goes to show you that we can soar above anything," she said.

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To the amazement of Frank Worrell and Christina Shaban, several butterflies take flight at the same time. The butterfly release in UNC Hospitals' butterfly garden was part of a celebration Thursday.

**Staff Photo by Harry Lynch**

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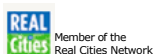


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